



[Image:](#) Blessed Stanley Rother |
CNS photo/Charlene Scott

Blessed Stanley Rother
(March 27, 1935 – July 28, 1981)

On May 25, 1963, Stanley Francis Rother, a farmer's son from Okarche, Oklahoma, was ordained for his home diocese of Oklahoma City-Tulsa. Having flunked out of the area seminary due to his difficulty with Latin, Fr. Rother finally accepted an invitation to attend Mount St. Mary Seminary in Maryland, where he finished his studies and was approved for ordination.

After serving in his local diocese for five years, Fr. Rother joined five priests, three religious sisters, and three laypersons to staff a Guatemalan mission in Santiago Atitlán serving the Tz'utujil people. The Oklahoma City diocese heard the call of Pope John XXIII to send missionaries to foreign lands, especially Central America. These twelve individuals felt the call, and with their bishop's approval, left the comforts of the United States to live and work in Guatemala.

By 1975, Fr. Rother was alone at his parish in Santiago Atitlán, the others having returned home for various reasons. He served the Tz'utujil people for 13 years and won their hearts and souls. Ever the farmer, and always unpretentious and mild mannered, Fr. Rother experimented with various crops as well as fulfilling his heavy pastoral duties which included as many as five Masses in four different locations on a given Sunday and as many as 1,000 baptisms a year. Guatemala's civil war reached the highlands and Lake Atitlán by 1980. Government troops camped on the parish farm and Fr. Rother witnessed the assassination of a number of his parishioners, including the parish deacon.

Warned of imminent danger, Fr. Rother returned to the United States for three months early in 1981, to visit with his family and friends. Against the advice of his family and the local bishop, Fr. Rother returned to Atitlán to be with his people. He remembered a Sisters' community who had fled the country and later tried to return but the people asked, "Where were you when we needed you?"

On the evening of July 28, three masked men entered the rectory and shot Fr. Rother to death. His beloved parishioners mourned him repeatedly crying, "They have killed our priest." Pope Francis declared Stanley Rother a martyr on December 2, 2016. He was beatified in Oklahoma City on September 23, 2017.

Reflection

The declaration of a blessed or saint is always a celebration of the Church as the people of God. To single out an individual for his or her holiness and service builds up the entire community of faith. But this is doubly true for the Church in the United States and in Oklahoma, as one of our own is both declared a martyr for the faith and enrolled in the ranks of those declared Blessed by the Church. May the dedication, faith, and service of Blessed Stanley Rother be a source of strength for all in this country.