

This past September 23, Fr. Stanley Rother, a priest from the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, was beatified, the last step on the way to being a canonized saint. He is the first-US born martyr to be beatified.

Fr. Stanley was born in the unassuming town of Okarche, Oklahoma, where the parish, school, and farm were pillars of his life.

He struggled throughout seminary but was eventually ordained – and soon after asked to be sent to the Archdiocese’s mission in Santiago Atitlan, in Guatemala.

Over the years, the violence of the Guatemalan civil war inched closer to the once-peaceful village he served.

Disappearances, killings and danger soon became a part of daily life, but Fr. Stanley remained steadfast and supportive of his people.

In 1980 and 81, the violence escalated to an almost unbearable point. Fr. Stanley was constantly seeing friends and parishioners abducted or killed. In a letter to Oklahoma Catholics during what would be his last Christmas, the priest relayed to the people back home the dangers his mission parish faced daily.

Fr. Stanley wrote: “The reality is that we are in danger. But we don’t know when or what form the government will use to further repress the Church. . . given the situation, I am not ready to leave here just yet. . . But if it is my destiny that I should give my life here, then so be it. . . I don’t want to desert my people. . .

“The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger. Pray for us that we may be a sign of love of Christ for our people, that our presence among them will fortify them to endure these sufferings in preparation for the coming of the kingdom.”

On the morning of July 28, 1981, three armed men broke into Fr. Stanley’s rectory. After beating him and then threatening him with the possibility of death -- they asked him to just disappear – to just leave the country ---- but he refused.

Not wanting to endanger the others at the parish mission, he struggled, but did not call out for help. 15 minutes and two gun shots later, Fr. Stanley was dead and the men fled the mission grounds.

In calling for his canonization, it was said of Fr. Stanley: “He fed the hungry, sheltered the homeless, visited the sick, comforted the afflicted, bore wrongs patiently, and buried the dead.”

Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City stated quiet simply: “We need the witness of holy men and women who remind us that we are all called to holiness – and that holy men and women come from ordinary places like Okarche, Oklahoma.”

Yes, the documents of the Second Vatican Council remind us many times – we are all called to holiness – we are all called to be Saints. Although the details are different – the call is the same – and the challenge is also the same: to do the will of God in our lives --- not whatever we want.

Like Fr. Stanley Rother, and all the holy men and women we honor today – each of us is called to say “yes” to God with our whole heart. We are all asked to see the face of Christ in each and every person who stands before us – to treat them with respect and a generous heart.

We are all called to holiness --- whether we live in Guatemala, Oklahoma, or Odessa/Oak Grove Missouri.

We are all called to holiness – we are all called to be saints.