

**Homily for 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A (2017): Mt 21:33-43**

When we think of the Holy Martyrs of our Church, there can be a tendency to think of them as having given their lives for Christ a very long time ago and that such is no longer the lot of Christians in modern times. Yet the time of the martyrs is far from over as Christian men and women at this present time are continually being put to death for their faith in Christ and His Holy Church.

This is why it is important that our Holy Father and the Congregation for the Causes of Saints permit the beatification and canonization of heroic Catholic men and women who die for our faith and allow them to be publically venerated by God's Holy People.

This past September, an American priest by the name of Fr. Stanley Rother was declared a Blessed of the Church and added to the names of the venerable martyrs of Jesus Christ.

Born on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 1935, Blessed Stanley Rother would eventually be ordained a priest for the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. He asked to become a missionary and began to serve as the pastor in a

poor rural village of Santiago Atitlan, Guatemala in 1963. He served both the spiritual and physical needs of his village, at times working as a farmer or fixing broken down vehicles.

During the late 1970's, the new military dictatorship began to persecute both priests and lay catechists for their support of the poor and marginalized. Whenever the poor of his and other villages would ask their government for more money and assistance, paramilitary death squads were sent to execute those who sought assistance. It became known that Fr Rother was the 8<sup>th</sup> most wanted man by the death squads. For this reason, he was eventually forced to return to the USA but always with the desire to return.

After a week of retreat at Mount St Mary's seminary, a retreat where he spent much of his time praying before a grotto dedicated to Holy Mary, he knew he must return and care for his people. To speak out against the crimes of the military regime was certain death, but he knew he had to speak and be the shepherd God called him to be.

He was executed by a death squad in his own home as he said that refused to die out in the fields and his body be left in an

abandoned well. When the death squad entered his home, he offered his final bout of resistance but refused to cry out for help lest anyone come to his aid and be killed as well. He was martyred on July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1981.

On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017, in the presence of Cardinal Angelo Amato, prefect of the Congregation for the Cause of the Saints, members of his family and 20,000 members of the lay faithful, Blessed Stanley Rother was added to blessed ranks of the holy martyrs of God and can now be publically venerated as a saint of the Catholic Church.

As I read the story of the life and martyrdom of Bl Stanley Rother and watched short movie clips of him celebrating Mass, working in fields, caring for the poor and declaring his willingness to face death for the good of his flock, I thought of him as one of the faithful tenants who care the Lord's Vineyard.

When Our Lord offered this parable of the Vineyard of God, he was reminding the chief priests and elders of His people that God had sent many tenants to care for the Lord's Vineyard, that is, the People of Israel. God had forged His people as a holy nation, giving them the

Holy City of Jerusalem and its glorious temple as a place of peace, sacrificial worship, and the duty to reveal to all nations the love of the God of Israel.

But Jesus reminded His opponents how God had sent many righteous men to care for the Lord's Vineyard, at times admonishing the People for their sins, mostly especially for turning their hearts to false gods and neglecting to care for the widow, orphan and poor among them. These men were the various prophets like Jeremiah, who they threw in a deep well and publically humiliated and the prophet Zechariah who was killed in the courtyard of the Jerusalem Temple.

Bl Stanley Rother embodied the same spirit and witness of these prophets of old, being obedient to the Will of God to care for his people, willingly accepting persecution and even death for caring for that portion of the Lord's Vineyard which was assigned to him.

Our Lord also revealed in this parable that He too would die like the prophets who came before him, but that His death would assure that He would forever be the chief cornerstone of the New People of God, His Holy Church who is founded upon the blood of the Lamb to

forge an everlasting Kingdom for God. Though He seemed defeated upon the Cross, through death our Lord brought forth the gift of eternal life and proved that the hate of his enemies could not vanquish the love that poured forth from His pierced Sacred Heart.

So too did Bl Stanley Rother show that by laying down his life for his friends, he was testifying that his enemies could not prevail in destroying that portion of the Lord's Vineyard that was assigned to him. Gone are the paramilitary death squads that terrorized the people of Guatemala and so too has been vanquished its oppressive government. Through the people of that nation continued to struggle with the effects of poverty and violence, the witness and prayers of Bl Stanley Rother to offer a non-violent and Christ centred resistance to hateful violence showed that the love of Christ truly does conquer all evil and brings respite to those who dwell in the Vineyard of the Lord.

We too should believe that Christ assigned to each of us a portion of His Vineyard. As members of the Body of Christ, each of us should consider where we have been called to care for the Household of God. It maybe as a father or mother who has been given charge to raise

your children in the Catholic Faith. Or as a teacher to form your students into disciples of Christ. Or as grandparents to pass on your years of wisdom and experience to a younger generation. Or as a student in an academic setting that is hostile to the splendour of truth and faith that comes from Christ and His Holy Church. These are but a few examples of where we are called to care for and labour in the Vineyard of the Lord.

Let us ask Bl Stanley Rother to intercede for us in our labours and be willing to give of ourselves generously for the glory of God and the good of His Holy People.