

to be served, rather than to serve. That is one accusation I don't want... Pray for me."

It was after midnight when three armed men forced their way into the presbytery and his bedroom, now preserved as a shrine. Father Stan did not go gently into martyrdom. He fought for his life. The bloodstains are still there, faded now but in plain view, on the wall above the low-slung, simple bed, next to the holes made by the bullets that killed him. One is in the floor under the tabernacle.

From that day on, the people of Santiago Atitlán have honoured the memory of the man they remember as Padre Apla's – "Father Francis" in their language, his middle name – since they could find no equivalent for Stanley. In September 2017, he was beatified as the Catholic Church's first-ever US-born martyr.

TRUST IN GOD

There remains a presence in the room where he died. For many locals it is something spiritual – as if he is still there, protecting them from beyond the grave. For me, what was so powerful at this ad hoc shrine was the challenge it poses in the starkest of terms – how to live out the Gospel without fear and with absolute trust in God.

Peter Stanford is a Catholic writer and broadcaster (peterstanford.org). His latest book, *Pilgrimage*, is published by Thames & Hudson.

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all the day long.
O Lord, you are good and forgiving,
full of mercy to all who call to you.**

FIRST READING Deuteronomy 4:1-2. 6-8

PSALM Psalm 14

RESPONSE **The just will live in the presence of the Lord.**

1. Lord, who shall dwell on your holy mountain?
He who walks without fault;
he who acts with justice
and speaks the truth from his heart. **R.**
2. He who does no wrong to his brother,
who casts no slur on his neighbour,
who holds the godless in disdain,
but honours those who fear the Lord. **R.**
3. He who keeps his pledge, come what may;
who takes no interest on a loan
and accepts no bribes against the innocent.
Such a man will stand firm for ever. **R.**

SECOND READING James 1:17-18. 21-22. 27

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!
By his own choice the Father made us his children
by the message of the truth,
so that we should be a sort of first-fruits
of all that he created.
Alleluia!**

GOSPEL Mark 7:1-8. 14-15. 21-23

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.
Blessed are they who are persecuted for the
sake of righteousness,
for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.**

Next Sunday's Readings:

Isaiah 35:4-7
James 2:1-5
Mark 7:31-37



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SUNDAY BULLETIN



BLESSED STANLEY ROTHER

On a trip to Central America in 2015, I made a pilgrimage to the lakeside town of Santiago Atitlán in Guatemala, the spot where, on 28 July 1981, the American missionary Stanley Rother was martyred. The backdrop to his death had been the country's civil war, between a US-backed military dictatorship and leftist rebels. It cost 200,000 lives before it was formally ended by a peace accord in 1996.

Caught in the middle were the country's indigenous Mayan Indian population, especially in the mountainous region around Lake Atitlán. The government regarded them as second-class citizens and natural subversives. The rebels claimed to be fighting their corner. Father Stan, as everyone had called him since he arrived there in 1968, at the age of thirty-three, knew better and refused to take sides. Instead, he and the seven indigenous Carmelite sisters who worked alongside him to set up a hospital, clinics and schools in Santiago Atitlán chose to stand shoulder to shoulder with the Mayan parishioners against all comers in this brutal and dirty war. A tall, pipe-smoking Oklahoman with a gentle face, he had taken the trouble to learn the local Tz'utujil dialect – a big ask since it is not written down – so he could translate the New Testament for the 3,500-strong congregation who would come to Mass each Sunday.

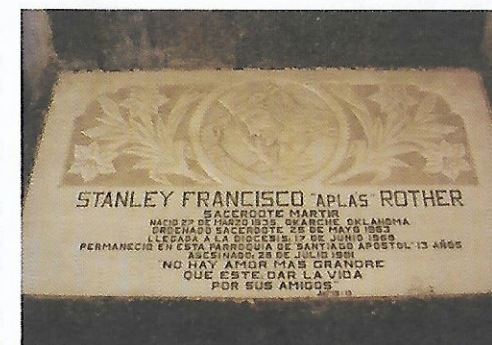
In the late 1970s soldiers began to arrive by night in Santiago Atitlán to take away "subversive" community leaders and catechists, who were never seen alive again. Father Stan offered sanctuary to their wives and children in the precincts of his colonial-era church, its twin white towers standing out against a backdrop of volcanoes. For the army, that offer of sanctuary signalled he was taking sides. Death threats were made against him and, at the start of 1981, he was persuaded to return home to the United States for his own safety, but he could not reconcile himself to it. "The shepherd can't run and leave the sheep to fend for themselves at the first signs of danger," he wrote in a letter at the time. "Service has to be our motto." And so, three months later, in time for Easter, he headed back to Santiago Atitlán.

He knew that this could mean for him, like Christ, service even unto death, but he did not flinch. In one of his last letters home to his cousin Don on the occasion of the latter's ordination, this exceptional man wrote: "Take care of your priesthood. I have heard that a certain group of priests in Oklahoma are expecting

Martyrs of our times



Peter Stanford concludes this series by looking at an American missionary priest who gave his life in serving the people of his parish in Guatemala.



29 AUGUST 2021

22ND SUNDAY IN
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II