

**April 29, 2012 – Fourth Sunday of Easter, Good Shepherd Sunday**  
***Prepared by Brother Martin Shea, MM, Petén, Guatemala***

Acts 4:8-12; Psalms 118:1, 8-9, 21-23, 26, 21, 29; First John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

*The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Today's Gospel reminds me of Father Stan Rother of Oklahoma who was killed nearly 30 years ago in Santiago Atitlán here in Guatemala, where he had lived and worked for 13 years. While he served as a pastor, he celebrated Mass in the local Tzutuhil language and eventually translated the New Testament into Tzutuhil. He also founded a small hospital in a local community.

In the early 1980s, he had been denounced and was warned that his name was on a death list. In January 1981, under threat of death, he left Guatemala along with Padre Pedro, a Guatemalan colleague whom the death squads had also threatened. Stan and Pedro hid in Guatemala City for over two weeks until Pedro was given special clearance to enter the United States. For three months Rother stayed with his family in Okarche, Oklahoma. During this time he asked Archbishop Charles Salatka of the Oklahoma City and Tulsa diocese if he could return to Guatemala. "My people need me," he said, "I can't stay away from them any longer."

He was determined to return, believing that the shepherd does not run from danger. So Rother returned in April 1981, taking several precautions. He no longer slept in his bedroom because it was on the second floor and had two windows opening to a balcony. He preferred a room with a heavy door for sleeping at night, but he always wore his boots, ready to flee if needed. Archbishop Salatka said, "[He] did not go back to Guatemala to die. He went back to help his people." Rother had told one of his friends that if death came, "[I will] face it."

On the morning of July 28, 1981, he was shot to death in his rectory by members of the Guatemalan military. The small room where he was killed has been made into a chapel where bloodstains remain on the wall and a bullet hole gapes in the tile floor.

From childhood I associated pain and suffering with sin and punishment. In visiting the little chapel where he was killed I was given an insight that to suffer, and yes, even to die, come with discipleship because we are baptized in the water and the blood of Christ. To suffer, to die is not a punishment or a condemnation; it is to share in the cross, to share in salvation. At that time I felt it was a form of the stigmata by which we share in the suffering of He who was determined to go up to Jerusalem and he (Father Stan) who was determined not to abandon his people in a remote mountain village in Guatemala.

Visiting the chapel of the good shepherd who gave his life there in Santiago Atitlán was a freeing experience and has transformed my feelings of punishment and suffering into a graced privilege that we share through Baptism.

Questions:

- What does it mean to be baptized in the water and blood of Christ?
- How have you shared in the suffering of the Shepherd who gave His life for you?