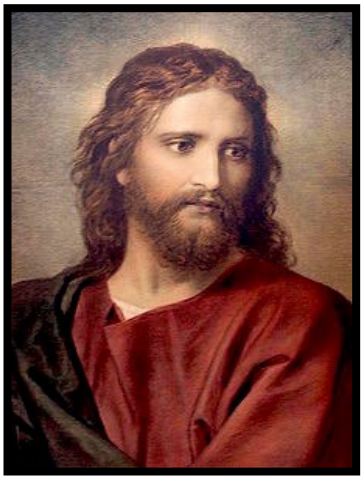
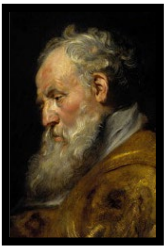


The more you strive toward Him,
the more you exalt Him.
He is present to Me who goes out from the world;
he is present to Me who thinks of Me, looks on Me,
has hope of Me, he whose portion I am.
He is present to Me who has been absent to himself,
he is present to Me who has denied himself.
He is with Me who is not within himself,
because he who is in the flesh is not in the spirit.
He is with Me who goes out from his own self,
he is near Me who has been outside of himself,
he is whole to Me who has lost his life
on account of Me.



-St. Ambrose (c.339-397)

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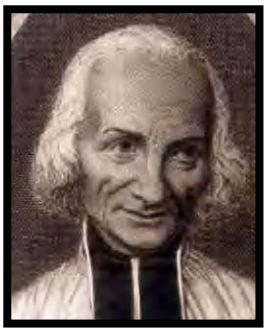
IMPORTANT NOTICE

The main presentation of the Spiritual Formation program is found in the **Rule of Life**, Section I. The "Personal and Communal Dimensions" as well as the "Celibacy Statement" should be read with care. Additionally, the **Seminarian Handbook** contains spiritual formation goals in the Formation Advising section. This booklet is intended to provide more practical information and useful aids for carrying out the goals and guidelines found in these other documents.

Introductory messages



St. John-Baptiste Marie Vianney
May 8, 1786—August 4, 1859
Patron Saint of Priests

Sacerdotii Nostri Primordia
"From the Beginning of Our Priesthood"
Pope John XXIII

To the venerable Brothers, Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and to the other Ordinaries in peace and communion with the Apostolic See.

Conclusion

. . . At the end of this letter, venerable brothers, We wish to tell you of Our entire sweet hope that, with the grace of God, this centenary of the death of the holy Curé of Ars may reawaken in every priest the desire to perform his ministry more generously and, above all, his "first duty as a priest, this is to say the duty to achieve one's own sanctification."

When from the heights of this supreme pontificate, where Providence has placed Us, We consider the immense expanse of souls, the serious problems of evangelization in so many countries and the religious needs of the Christian peoples always and everywhere, there is present in Our sight the figure of the priest. Without him, without his daily work, what would become of the undertakings, even those most suited for the present hour? It is precisely because of these beloved priests on whom rest so many hopes for the progress of the Church, that We venture to request, in the name of Jesus Christ, complete faithfulness to the spiritual demands of their priestly vocation.

May these words, full of wisdom, of St. Pius X give weight to Our

appeal: *"So as to make Jesus Christ reign in the world there is nothing as necessary as the sanctity of the clergy, because with example, with the word and with the knowledge they guide the faithful."* St. Jean Marie Vianney said almost the same thing to his bishop: *"If you wish to convert your diocese you must make all your parish priests saints. . . ."*

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, August 1, 1959, the first year of Our Pontificate.

IOANNES PP. XXIII

As part of the Jubilee of Seminarians, Pope Leo XIV leads a meditation for seminarians from around the world in St. Peter's Basilica, June 24, 2025.

Meditation offered by Pope Leo XIV
Altar of the Confessio in Saint Peter's Basilica
Tuesday, 24 June 2025

Dear Seminarians,

Peace be with you!

Today, you are not only *pilgrims*, but also *witnesses of hope*. You are witnesses to me and to everyone, because you wish to share in the exciting adventure of priesthood in these challenging times. You have accepted the Lord's call to become gentle and strong preachers of his saving word and servants of a Church that is open and pressing ahead with missionary zeal…

Jesus, as you know, calls you, before all else, to have an experience of friendship with him and with your other companions on the journey (cf. *Mk* 3:13). An experience that will continue to grow, also after ordination, and affect every part of your life. Indeed, nothing of your personal uniqueness should be put aside; rather, everything should be taken up and transformed, like the grain of wheat in the Gospel. The goal is to become a joyful man and a joyful priest, a "bridge", not an obstacle for those who come to you in order to come to Christ. He must increase and we must decrease. In that way, we can be shepherds after his own Heart...

Just as Jesus loved with a human heart, so you are called to love with the Heart of Christ! To learn this art, however, you need to work on your interior life. That is the place where God makes his voice heard, and where the deepest decisions of our lives take shape. It is also the place where you will encounter the tensions and struggles (*Mk* 7:14-23) that summon you to conversion, so that your entire life can breathe the fragrance of the Gospel. Your first job, then, is to work on your interior life. Keep in mind Saint Augustine's constant invitation to return to the heart, because it is there that we will find God. Sometimes

descending to the depths of our heart can be intimidating, since we also have to confront our hurts, our wounds. Yet do not be afraid to face them, also with the help of others, because those wounds will make you sympathetic and compassionate towards others who suffer. Without an interior life, no real spiritual life is possible, because it is in the heart that God speaks to us. God speaks in the heart, and we have to learn how to hear his voice. Part of this process is learning how to read the movements of the heart: not only the instant and fleeting emotions typical of youth, but also and above all the feelings that will help you discover the right direction in life. If you learn to know your heart, you will be more genuine and not feel the need to hide behind masks. The royal road that leads to a rich interior life is prayer. In an age of "hyper-connectivity," it is harder and harder to experience silence and solitude. Yet unless we encounter God, we will never really be able to know ourselves.

I would ask you to pray often to the Holy Spirit, so that he can mold within you a docile heart, capable of embracing the presence of God, also by listening to the voice of nature, of art, poetry, literature, music, as well the human sciences. In your disciplined study of theology, listen with an open mind and heart to the voices rising up from our culture, as, for example, the recent challenges posed by artificial intelligence and social media. Above all, do as Jesus did. Learn to hear the often silent cry of the little ones, of the poor and the oppressed, and so many others, especially the young, who are searching for meaning in their life…

Dear friends, have a meek and humble heart like that of Jesus (cf. *Mt* 11:29). As the apostle Paul urges (*Phil* 2:5ff), put on the mind of Christ and grow in human maturity, especially emotional and interpersonal maturity. It is important, and indeed necessary, that beginning with your time in the seminary, you strive for growth in human maturity, eliminating all forms of dissimulation and hypocrisy. Keep your gaze fixed

on Jesus. You need to learn, too, how to acknowledge and express your emotions of sadness, fear, anxiety and indignation, and to bring these to your relationship with the Lord. Crises, limitations and weakness are not something to be concealed; they are in fact occasions of grace, which can lead you to a deeper share in the paschal mystery…

The Heart of Christ is compelled by immense compassion. He is the Good Samaritan of all humanity, who tells us: "Go and do likewise" (*Lk* 10:37). This compassion drove him to break the bread of the word for the crowds and to teach them the meaning of sharing (cf. *Mk* 6:30-44). In this way, he gave us a glimpse of what he was later to do in the Upper Room and on the Cross, as he gave us his very self as food. To us, as to the disciples, he says: "Give them something to eat" (*Mk* 6:37). In a word, make your entire life a gift of love.

Dear seminarians, in her wisdom, Mother Church, with the help of the Holy Spirit, has always sought the most fitting ways to train her ordained ministers, keeping in mind the needs of different places. What is your own responsibility in this? Certainly, not to be content with the minimum, or to settle for being passive recipients of formation. Instead, you are called to be passionate about your preparation for priestly life, living fully in the present and looking to the future with a prophetic heart. I hope that this meeting will help each of you to deepen your personal dialogue with the Lord and to ask him to help you put on ever more fully the mind of Christ and the sentiments of his Heart. That Heart beats with love for you and all humanity. Keep pressing forward! I accompany you on your journey and I now give you my blessing.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Seminarian is to enjoy freedom of choice in regard to a confessor. The Program of Priestly formation indicates that a man's spiritual director serves "fittingly" (n. 251) also as his confessor. Additionally, a seminarian may choose to confess to any of the spiritual directors. However, to guard the internal forum, he may not confess to any of the priests engaged in the external forum. The Coordinator of Spiritual Formation, Msgr. Cummings is always available for confession upon request and also every day in the morning:

- Monday-Friday **5:50-6:40** a.m. in I.C. Chapel (confessional by entrance. Note, use only the right side. A light will go on above the penitent when in use, but no light signifies that it is available)
- Saturday from **6:30-7:15** a.m. in St. Michael's Hall (please leave the door open after your confession as a sign to others that they may come in)
- Sunday **7:15-8:00** a.m. also in St. Michael's Hall

Additionally, Fr. Mark Mannion comes on many Wednesday evenings (4:00-5:00 pm), and other resident priests will have posted times. There are also confessions at the Seton Shrine from Monday to Friday and on Sunday (12:15-1:15 pm) and at the Grotto on Saturday and Sunday (10:45 am).

Finally, there are Penance Services with multiple outside confessors twice a year – at the seminary during Advent and Lent.

Spiritual Direction

Meetings with your Spiritual Director

The time you spend with your spiritual director is sacred time. Meetings with your spiritual director should assist you "in ongoing vocational discernment, proximate preparation for the reception of ministries and Holy Orders, and formation for celibacy" (PPF #110, Spiritual Direction).

Seeking moral guidance, disclosing one's problems in confidence, and relating life experiences is the responsibility of the seminarian who is seeking God's will. In his sincere desire for holiness the seminarian will benefit most from spiritual direction when he brings his authentic self to each meeting.

"Besides the art of spiritual direction… there is another art, less striking, no doubt, but nevertheless of great importance, and that is the art of submitting to direction."
Abbé Henri Chaumont (1838-1896)

Preparation

Spiritual direction involves more than the actual time you are with your spiritual director. Spend at least 10 minutes in quiet preparation before each appointment. Since your last meeting: what is uppermost on your mind or in your heart? Did something strike you in prayer, at Mass, from your spiritual reading, during *lectio divina*, while listening to a conference, or perhaps something from one of your classes? Is there an issue regarding your relationship with your family or with other relationships? Are there issues related to vocation or sexuality? Pray for yourself and for your spiritual director that God will open minds and hearts to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Regarding these and any other issues, you might consider keeping a daily spiritual journal. Perhaps keep a note card in your breviary to jot down ideas and subjects you wish to talk about later.

The Meetings

Seminarians are required to meet with their spiritual directors

generally every two weeks, if possible. Vacations may lead to less frequent meetings. Meetings are usually 30 minutes to an hour. Remember to keep your appointment and to be on time. Call your director if you're going to be late or need to reschedule the appointment. Also, do not assume the director is ready to see you if you are a few minutes *early* for your scheduled appointment.

At the end of each session be sure to set the date and time for your next meeting. If something important comes up between meetings, do not hesitate to contact your director for an impromptu meeting.

Sometimes during spiritual direction there are moments of prolonged silence. There is no need to feel embarrassed or uneasy. Such moments allow for reflection and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit within spiritual direction.

To allow for the appropriate amount of time, it is helpful to inform your director at the start of your appointment if you wish to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance.

Changing Spiritual Directors

A seminarian who maintains a consistent relationship with his spiritual director is the ideal. However, if a seminarian thinks that the relationship is not working, he should be open about it with his director and discern together what would be best. A seminarian is always free to choose a new director for a "serious reason" (PPF 105). [N.B. the list of available spiritual directors is posted in the seminarian mail room]. Before contacting a new spiritual director, however, he should first speak with the Coordinator of Spiritual Formation. After a new director has been found, courtesy demands that the seminarian thank his previous director personally for his service. Ordinarily, changes will be permitted only at the start of a semester.

The External and Internal Forum

Since trust and openness are essential for effective spiritual direction, a seminarian must be confident that he can speak freely with his spiritual director. To help a seminarian to enter more fully into this

vital relationship, the Church makes a distinction between the "external forum" and the "internal forum."

The **external forum** includes matters revealed outside of spiritual direction by the seminarian through observable behavior or which are freely disclosed by the seminarian outside of confession and spiritual direction.

The **internal forum** includes matters revealed within spiritual direction by the seminarian to his spiritual director. These matters include his "personal history, personal relationships, prayer experiences, cultivation of virtues, temptations, and other significant topics..." (PPF, 260).

"Disclosures that a seminarian makes in the course of spiritual direction belong to the internal forum. Consequently, the spiritual director is held to the strictest confidentiality concerning information received in spiritual direction. He may neither reveal it nor use it (CIC, 240,2)… the only possible exception to this standard of confidentiality would be the case of grave, immediate, or mortal danger involving the directee or another person.[1] If what is revealed in spiritual direction coincides with the celebration of the **Sacrament of Penance** (in other words, what is revealed is revealed *ad ordinem absolutionis*) - that is, the exchange takes place not only in the nonsacramental internal forum but also in the sacramental forum - then the absolute canonical strictures of the seal of confession hold, and no information may be revealed or used" (PPF, 111).

Self-Questionnaire for the Directee

a. What is my understanding and experience of spiritual direction?

b. What is the practice of my personal prayer life and how would I describe it to my spiritual director?

---

[1] This includes mandatory reporting of potential abuse of minors (cf. footnote 166).

c. How would I describe my relationship with God?

d. More than anything else, what is my greatest desire?

e. What have been "good" moments in prayer for me, including any significant experiences in prayer or outside of prayer?

f. What do I see as personal obstacles to my growth in the spiritual life?

g. What are the Christ-like characteristics of the priest which attract me to the priesthood?

h. What is my understanding of the ministry of the priest?

i. What is my devotion to our Blessed Mother?

j. What are my priorities regarding my spiritual life as a seminarian?

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Potential Subject Matter for Spiritual Direction

I. LIFE HISTORY

- Family relationships and history of significant events
- Experiences of prayer, sacraments, parish life
- Sense of vocation
- Social relationships, past and current
- Sexuality issues, sexual orientation, any struggles with sexuality
- Personal faith, relationship with Jesus, with our Blessed Mother
- Conversion experiences
- Sense of self-identity; confidence, insecurities
- Academic issues

II. PRAYER

- Personal habit of prayer: what priority is given to my

prayer?

- Frustration with prayer, distractions in prayer
- Spiritual reading
- The Rosary
- Eucharistic devotion
- Marian devotion
- The Saints, devotions in general
- The Mass: my preparation and participation
- Praying the Divine Office; praying with the Scriptures (*lectio divina)*
- The Sacrament of Penance: frequency and preparation
- Formation of conscience: laxity, scrupulosity

III. BASIC HUMAN LIVING ISSUES

- Sleep, diet, use of stimulants
- Recreation, exercise
- Time management, organizational skills, work habits
- Living a balanced life
- Knowing oneself and being comfortable with one's own personality
- A sense of humor and the ability to keep things in perspective
- Financial responsibility
- Dealing with anger
- Relating to authority
- Knowing one's strengths and weaknesses
- Being able to trust others
- Ability to maintain the confidence of others
- Friendship: one or two close friends or only many acquaintances?
- Ability to relate to people in different age groups, of different races and cultures
- Relating with women
- Negative patterns of thinking/feeling/behaving (clericalism, narcissism, sense of entitlement)

IV. LEADERSHIP

- Taking initiative
- Working with others
- Working alone
- Need for affirmation and the ability to function well with or without it
- Self-acceptance: being secure enough not to need

always to be in control
- Setting priorities
- Decisiveness
- Honesty; integrity
- Open to the point of view of others
- Motivating others
- The problem of perfectionism
- Shyness

V. COMMUNITY LIFE

- Getting along with others, social skills
- Thoughtfulness, common courtesy
- Patience
- Charity in conversation
- Gossip
- Reconciliation and forgiveness

VI. DISCIPLINE

- Ability to work steadily
- Procrastination
- Commitment to daily prayer
- Ability to practice self-denial, asceticism
- Perseverance
- Misuse of electronic media/devices

VII. SIN

- Avoiding the near occasions of sin
- Addictive/compulsive patterns of behavior
- Complacency
- Selfishness
- Rationalization, inability to be honest with oneself
- Dealing with discouragement regarding habitual sins
- Examination of conscience

VIII. GROWTH IN VIRTUE

- Faith, hope, love
- Prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude
- Humility
- Love of God and neighbor

- Poverty, chastity, obedience
- Purity of heart
- Simplicity of life

IX. PRIESTHOOD

- Pastoral charity
- Apostolic zeal and priestly service
- Compassion
- Priestly fraternity
- Spiritual leadership: avoiding clericalism
- Obedience
- Personal understanding of the priestly life
- Expectations/obstacles concerning the priestly vocation
- A joyful commitment to celibacy
- Issues regarding loneliness and solitude
- A simple lifestyle
- Reverence for the sacred
- Ability to listen to others
- Models of priesthood in your life (Ss. John Vianney, Philip Neri, Don Bosco, Charles Borromeo, Francis de Sales, et al)

The Importance of a Spiritual Director

"Nothing is more important for souls who sincerely wish to give themselves entirely to God than, first, to be thoroughly convinced of the need of a director; second, to make a good choice of one; and third, to make use of him according to the designs of God when they have once chosen him."

-Jean Nicholas Grou, S.J., *Manual for the Interior Life*

Some ideas on purity and chastity

"Blessed are the pure in heart,

for they shall see God." (Mt 5:8)

Spiritual directors are well aware that when dealing with issues of pornography and masturbation, addictive cycles of shame and fear can reinforce a sense of frustration and helplessness in the face of temptation, stress, and boredom. However, the seminarian can be confident that through the Holy Spirit he will receive the graces and the formation he needs in order to lead a life of chaste celibacy.

Rightly, the seminarian places his hope in God's call, for chastity is the possible and expected norm for seminarians and priests.

If you are struggling in this area, your spiritual director may suggest:

- the particular *examen* of St. Ignatius of Loyola
- focused prayer and fasting to support chastity
- an accountability partner whom you can call when tempted
- *The Friends of St. Joseph* or similar support group
- the daily rosary and other devotions to Mary and the Saints
- healthy recreational activities and hobbies/interests
- perseverance with projects to build a sense of self-worth
- regular physical exercise
- H.A.L.T. (never going online when hungry, angry, lonely, tired)
- psychological counseling and healing prayer

"I will not set before my eyes anything that is base.... Perverseness of heart shall be far from me; I will know nothing of evil" (Ps 101:3.4).

In addition to regular confession and spiritual direction, other measures to consider include:

- Install filters on personal devices or disabling access/changing devices
- Computer/phone monitoring programs (e.g., covenanteyes.com
  or k9webprotection.com or netnanny.com)
- Peer support (laptop/tablet/phone held overnight in a friend's room)

If you find yourself spending too much time on the Internet,

consider the following:

1. Take a personal inventory:
   a. How much time—how many *hours*—am I spending online and what *exactly* am I looking at?
   b. How much time am I devoting to personal prayer?
   c. How much time am I devoting to study and spiritual reading?
   d. How much time am I giving to socialize with others or to exercise?

2. Cultivate healthy offline activities that are fulfilling and personally productive to fill the void that can otherwise lead to excessive and/or sinful use of the Internet.

3. Speak openly with your spiritual director. Feelings of shame that reinforce sexual addiction can cause a seminarian to run to different confessors for the Sacrament of Penance. However it is best—as far as it is possible—for the seminarian to receive the Sacrament consistently from a particular confessor and ideally one who is also his spiritual director.

4. Consider joining one of the established seminarian fraternities such as **Legion of Mary, Militia Immaculata, Jesu Caritas**, **New Evangelization Club, Blessed Frassati Group, Communion and Liberation,** or **The Friends of St. Joseph** (a support group for those who struggle with pornography / masturbation).

5. Recommit yourself to honest, personal prayer with the Lord.

6. Establish sound habits of rest, nutrition, and a daily exercise program.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us . . ." (Heb. 12:1).

~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~

Spiritual Reading

" The will is a blind faculty that needs direction and enlightenment before it can love and desire the good. For that reason meditation and spiritual reading play an important part in the practice of affective prayer; they supply the material that stimulates the activity of the will."

-Jordan Aumann, O.P., *Spiritual Theology*

"Love inevitably brings with it an irresistible need to know."

-Archbishop Mariano Magrassi

Among the purposes of spiritual reading are:

1) to inform ourselves about God and about the spiritual life;
2) to keep our ideas about God and *eternal truths* fresh in our minds so that they may influence our actions.

To profit most from spiritual reading, choose a time and a place most conducive to a sense of *being alone with God*.

Suggestions for Spiritual Reading

N.B. We have an internal lending library of Spiritual Reading books. You will find them in the St. John Paul II room in Keating, Ground floor. Take for as long as you like, but return it!
Tolle, Lege, Redde!

The Bible

JESUS CHRIST

Emmanuel – Reflections on the God Who is with us, Rev. Donald X. Burt, O.S.A.

Fully Human – Fully Divine, Michael Casey, C.SS.R.

Jesus A Portrait, Gerald O'Collins, S.J.

Jesus of Israel: Finding Christ in the Old Testament, Fr. Richard Veras

Jesus of Nazareth, Pope Benedict XVI

Jesus of Nazareth – Holy Week: Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, Pope Benedict XVI

Knowing the Love of Christ, Michael Dauphinais and Matthew Levering

The Cry of Jesus on the Cross – A Biblical and Theological Study, Gerard Rossé

The Inner Life of Jesus – Pattern of All Holiness, Romano Guardini

The Life of Christ, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

The Priority of Christ – Toward a Post-liberal Catholicism, Rev. Robert Barron

The Sacred Passion, Luis de la Palma

The Sadness of Christ, St. Thomas More

The Way to Christ – Spiritual Exercises, Karol Wojtyla (John Paul II)

The Word Made Flesh -- The Meaning of the Christmas Season, Pope John Paul II

To Know Christ Jesus, Frank Sheed

BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Following Mary to Jesus: Our Lady as Mother, Teacher and Advocate,

Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R.

Mary in the Redemption, Adrienne von Speyr

Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Cardinal Newman, Philip Boyce, ed.

Meet Mary: Getting to Know the Mother of God, John-Mark Miravalle

My Ideal: Jesus Son of Mary, Fr. Emil Neubert, S.M.

Our Lady and the Church, Hugo Rahner, S.J.

Our Lady of Guadalupe: History and Meaning of the Apparitions, Manuela Testoni

The Gospel of Mary: A Month with the Mother of God, Gabriel Amorth, S.S.P.

The World's First Love: Mary, Mother of God, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

True Devotion to Mary, St. Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort

SAINTS

A City on a Mountain: *Padre Pio of Pietrelcina, O.F.M. Cap.*, Pascal P. Parente, S.T.D., Ph.D., J.C.B.

A Simple Life – Wisdom from Jane Frances de Chantal

Augustine – Major Writings, Fr. Benedict Groeschel, C.F.R.

Augustine on Prayer, Thomas A. Hand, O.S.A.

City of God, St. Augustine

Confessions, St. Augustine of Hippo

Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena

Divine Mercy in My Soul - Diary of St. Maria Faustina Kowalska, St. Maria Faustina

Elizabeth Bayley Seton 1774-1824, Annabelle M. Melville

For the Life of the World–St. Maximilian and the Eucharist, Jerzy Domański, O.F.M. Conv.
I Believe in Love – A Personal Retreat based on the Teaching of St. Therese of Lisieux, Father Jean C. J. d'Elbée

Introduction to the Devout Life -- Treatise on the Love of God, St. Francis de Sales

John of Avila, Audi, Filia – Listen, O Daughter, trans. by Sr. Joan Frances Gormley

John of the Cross -- selected writings, Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D.

Kolbe and the Kommandant - Two Worlds in Collision, Ladislaus Kluz, O.C.D.

Knowing the Love of Christ – An Introduction to the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, Michael Dauphinais / Matthew Levering

Life of St. John-Baptist Vianney: *Cure D'Ars (1907)*, Alfred Monnin & Henry E. Manning

Love Without Measure: Extracts from the Writings of St. Bernard of Clairvaux, introduced and arranged by Paul Diemer

On Living Simply, St. John Chrysostom

Padre Pio's Words of Hope, ed. Eileen Dunn Bertanzetti

Philip Neri -- The Fire of Joy, Paul Türks of the Oratory

Saint Ambrose – Seven Exegetical Works, trans. by Michael P. McHugh

Saint Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879), Abbe Francios Trochu

Saint Peter Chrysologus: Selected Sermons and Saint Valerian Homilies, transl. by George E. Ganss, S.J.

Saintly Solutions to Life's Common Problems, Fr. Joseph Esper

Spiritual Canticle; Living Flame of Love; Dark Night of the Soul; The Ascent of Mt. Carmel, St. John of the Cross

St. Benedict and St. Therese – The Little Rule and the Little Way, Dwight Longenecker

St. Francis of Assisi, G. K. Chesterton

Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Therese of Lisieux

The Art of Loving God – Simple Virtues for the Christian Life, St. Francis de Sales

The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, vol. 2, The Way of Perfection; Meditation on the Songs of Songs; The Interior Castle, eds. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D, Otilio Rodriquez, O.C.D.

The Cure d'Ars (St. John Vianney), Abbé Francis Trochu; trans. by Dom Ernest Graf, O.S.B.

The Eucharist – Our Sanctification, Rev. Raniero Cantalamessa

The Last Letters of Thomas More, Alvaro de Silva

The Life of St. Teresa of Avila by Herself, transl. with an Introduction by J. M. Cohen

The Science of the Cross, Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, O.C.D.), transl. by Josephine Koeppel, O.C.D.

The Spirit of St. Francois de Sales, Jean Pierre Camus (Bishop of Belley)

The Spiritual Direction of Saint Claude de la Colombière, transl. by Mother M. Philip, I.B.V.M.

The Wisdom of the Saints – An Anthology, Jill Haak Adels

Vincent de Paul - the Trailblazer, Bernard Pujo

PRAYER

A Theology of Christian Prayer, John H. Wright, S.J.

A Treatise on Prayer from the Heart: A Christian Mystical Tradition Recovered for All, Jean Pierre Caussade, SJ

Augustine on Prayer – St. Augustine

Beginning to Pray, Archbishop Anthony Bloom

Deep Conversion – Deep Prayer, Rev. Thomas Dubay, S.M.

Difficulties in Mental Prayer, Rev. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

Fire Within: St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and the Gospel on Prayer, Thomas Dubay, S.M.

In Silence – Why We Pray, Donald Spoto

Meditations on the Cross, Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Letters to My Brother Priests (Holy Thursday 1979-1991), John Paul II

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On the Priesthood: Classic and Contemporary Texts, edited by Matthew Levering

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The Grace of Ars, Rev. Frederick L. Miller

The Mass: *The Presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross* – Charles Cardinal Journet

The Priest in Union with Christ, Rev. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.

The Priest's Way to God, Father M. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

The Shepherd Who Didn't Run – Fr. Stanley Rother, Martyr from Oklahoma, María Ruiz Scaperlanda

The Spiritual Life of the Priest, Rev. Eugene Boylan, O.C.S.O.

The Victory of Father Karl, Otto Pies, S.J. (transl. from the German by Salvator Attanasio)

Theology of the Priesthood, Jean Galot, S.J.

We Are Your Servants – St. Augustine's Homilies on Ministry

With God in Russia, Walter J. Ciszek, S.J. with Daniel L. Flaherty, S.J.

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Courage to be Chaste, Benedict Groeschel, O.F.M., Cap.

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When God Asks For An Undivided Heart – Choosing Celibacy in Love and Freedom, Andrew Apostoli, C.F.R.

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ST. JOHN PAUL II

Annual Lenten Letters to Priests (see Vatican website)

Blessed are the Pure of Heart: Catechesis on the Sermon on the Mount and Writings of St. Paul, John Paul II

Christ is the Answer: the Christ-Centered Teaching of Pope John Paul II, John Saward

Crossing the Threshold of Hope, John Paul II

John Paul II's Way of the Cross, Pope John Paul II

The Theology of Marriage & Celibacy, John Paul II

Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II, George Weigel

BENEDICT XVI

Behold the Pierced One – An Approach to a Spiritual Christology

Co-workers of the Truth

God and the World

God Is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life

Jesus of Nazareth

Salt of the Earth

POPE FRANCIS

Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)

Lectio Divina

Tolle lege, "take it and read" (St. Augustine, *Confessions,* Book VIII, 12)

> *"Scripture was not given to us only to be preserved in books, but to be kneaded into our hearts..."*
> -St. John Chrysostom

***Lectio Divina* is:**

- A meditated reading of the Bible that is prolonged in contemplative prayer
- A pilgrimage of words towards the Mystery of the Word
- A reading gratuitously made in order to receive gratuitously from the Author of grace
- A transformative reading that evangelizes us, making us evangelizers
- A slow assimilation of saving Truth while in dialogue with the Savior

The gratuity of *lectio divina* is different from the utility of study. Study endeavors to master the word; *lectio divina* surrenders and yields before it.

Lectio divina also differs from spiritual reading. Although ideally spiritual reading can lead to prayer, it can also be simply the acquisition of knowledge and the formulation of convictions. The aim of *lectio divina* is prayerful union with God in faith and love.

Generally speaking, given that it is an active/passive activity of long duration, *lectio divina* may not be immediately gratifying. *One does not reap the harvest the day after one sows!*

There is nothing as purifying as when one endures the silence of the Word. All who know how to do it wait to reap the reward.

In *lectio divina* do not neglect the Fathers of the Church, for their writings confirm and amplify the biblical message. Because of their Christian spirit the Fathers are sure guides of correct interpretation; and by their holiness of life they teach us how to live and help us to commune in the Holy Spirit.

Other books are helpful in the measure that they allow us to assimilate the Mystery and be transformed by it.

The various movements of *lectio divina* come together in one movement of the Spirit. They can co-exist and mutually overlap; they can even alternate in an ever-changing order. A pedestrian makes many movements, but all come together in one action: walking.

Reading is a form of listening that permits one to return to what was heard in an interpersonal relationship. If you read *to read* and not merely to have read, then your *lectio* is serene, restful, and disinterested. Read slowly and pay attention; it is God who wishes to speak to you.

How to practice *lectio divina*

1. *Lectio divina* is a daily practice at a privileged hour. Choose a time when you are least likely to be distracted.

2. Sit upright. Make sure your posture is one that allows for attentive reading of the text. Be mindful of the holiness of the One before Whom you place yourself as you begin to read the Scriptures *("Do not come near; put off your shoes from*

your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." Ex 3:5).

3. Choose your text: perhaps the day's liturgical readings or a particular passage from the Bible.

4. Resist the temptation to think, *"I already know this text"* and skip over it. The wise man knows that it is one thing to know the chemical formula of water and another to savor it on a summer's day.

5. Read slowly—very slowly, listening to the words interiorly and with your full attention. Read the text in its context; perhaps compare it with parallel texts. Look up key words to determine their true meaning.

6. When a word or phrase gets your attention, when it speaks to your heart, then stop and rest with it. Allow the thought to continue for as long as possible.

7. After a time, allow for quiet prayer: praise, petition, thanksgiving or contrition.

8. Silence can also be a prayerful response, as much for the one who prays and is carried out of himself as for Him Who knows you better than you know yourself.

9. Conclude your *lectio divina* with humble gratitude for the gift of God's presence to you.

"Learn to know the heart of God in the words of God"
-St. Gregory

Smaragdus, 9th-century Benedictine priest, biographer of St. Benedict; from *Praying the Bible – An Introduction to Lectio Divina,* Archbishop Mariano Magrassi, OSB, 1998.

To contemplate is to take silent delight in the Lord. Contemplation is to be at a loss for words simply because one knows. He who has progressed in lectio divina experiences the need for fewer words and more of the Word.

For those who practice it, the experience of lectio divina sharpens perception, enriches understanding, rouses from sloth, banishes idleness, orders life, corrects bad habits, produces salutary weeping, and draws tears from contrite hearts...curbs idle speech and vanity, awakens longing for Christ and the heavenly homeland.

It must always be accompanied by prayer and intimately joined with it, for we are cleansed by prayer and taught by reading. Therefore, whoever wishes to be with God at all times must pray often and read often, for when we pray it is we who speak with God, but when we read it is God who speaks with us.

Every seeker of perfection advances in reading, prayer and meditation. Reading enables us to learn what we do not know, meditation enables us to retain what we have learned, and prayer enables us to live what we have retained.

Reading Sacred Scripture confers on us two gifts: it makes the soul's understanding keener, and after snatching us from the world's vanities, it leads us to the love of God."

~*~

The Duty of Self Denial

Parochial and Plain Sermons, Blessed John Henry Newman

I hope I have made it clear, by these instances, what is meant by Christian self-denial. If we have good health, and are in easy circumstances, let us beware of high-mindedness, self-sufficiency, self-conceit, arrogance; of delicacy of living, indulgences, luxuries, comforts. Nothing is so likely to corrupt our hearts, and to seduce us from God, as to surround ourselves with comforts, – to have things our own way, – to be the center of the sort of world, whether of things animate or inanimate, which minister to us.

For then, in turn, we shall depend on them; they will become necessary to us; their very service and adulation will lead us to

trust ourselves to them, and to idolize them. What examples are there in Scripture of soft luxurious men! Was it Abraham before the Law, who wandered through his days, without a home? or Moses, who gave the Law, and died in the wilderness?… or the Baptist, when the Gospel was superseding it, who was clad in raiment of camel's hair, and ate the food of the wilderness? or the Apostles, who were "the offscouring of all things?" or our blessed Saviour, who "had not a place to lay His head?" Who are the soft luxurious men in Scripture? There was the rich man, who "fared sumptuously every day," and then "lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments."… .

Far be it from us, soldiers of Christ, thus to perplex ourselves with this world, who are making our way towards the world to come. "No man that wars entangles himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also competes as an athlete, yet is he not crowned, unless he strives lawfully" (2 Tim. 2:4,5).

This is St. Paul's rule, as he has already been referred to: accordingly, in another place, he bears witness of himself that he "died daily." Day by day he got more and more dead to this world; he had fewer ties to earth, a larger treasure in heaven. Nor let us think that it is over-difficult to imitate him, though we be not Apostles, nor are called to any extraordinary work, nor are enriched with any miraculous gifts: he would have all men like himself, and all may be like him, according to their place and measure of grace.

If we would be followers of the great Apostle, first let us with him fix our eyes upon Christ our Saviour; consider the splendor and glory of His holiness, and try to love it. Let us strive and pray that the love of holiness may be created within our hearts; and then acts will follow, such as befit us and our circumstances, in due time, without our distressing ourselves to find what they should be. You need not attempt to draw any precise line between what is sinful and what is only allowable: look up to Christ, and deny yourselves everything, whatever its character, which you think He

would have you relinquish.

You need not calculate and measure, if you love much: you need not perplex yourselves with points of curiosity, if you have a heart to venture after Him. True, difficulties will sometimes arise, but they will be seldom. He bids you take up your cross; therefore accept the daily opportunities which occur of yielding to others, when you need not yield, and of doing unpleasant services, which you might avoid.

He bids those who would be highest, live as the lowest: therefore, turn from ambitious thoughts, and (as far as you religiously may) make resolves against taking on new authority and rule. He bids you sell and give alms; therefore, hate to spend money on yourself. Shut your ears to praise, when it grows loud: set your face like a flint, when the world ridicules, and smile at its threats. Learn to master your heart, when it would burst forth into vehemence, or prolong a barren sorrow, or dissolve into unseasonable tenderness. Curb your tongue, and turn away your eye, lest you fall into temptation. Avoid the dangerous air which relaxes you, and brace yourself upon the heights. Be up at prayer "a great while before day," and seek the true, your only Bridegroom, "by night on your bed."

So shall self-denial become natural to you, gently and imperceptibly; and, like Jacob, you will lie down in the waste, and will soon see Angels, and the way open for you into heaven.

Excerpts of Cardinal Mercier's Conferences

Delivered to his Seminarians
(Archbishop of Mechlin, Belgium, 1906-1926)

Stirrings of Vocation

Dislike for worldly pleasures went hand-in-hand with an inclination for prayer. The more you withdrew from the world, the nearer you drew to God. You began to see a nobler, a higher object in your life, your thoughts became deeper; half unconsciously, perhaps, he began to feel that life in the world, however good it might be, however suitable for others, would be for you a void.

But the day comes when repentance seizes on their hearts; they conceive a sudden disgust for what has led them captive; they recognize the voice of God calling them out of their self-made darkness, and, like Paul on the road to Damascus, they rise again in the full light of grace to become apostles of Christ. Thus God has various ways of acting on the souls he prepares for the service of his altars . . . .

Love of Silence

Now, if the knowledge of God can be reached only by our own efforts, do you not see at once how much of the religious soul that yearns for God needs silence?

Apostles of the inner life, as you will one day be, establish yourselves, I beg of you, and keep yourselves in the requisite condition for the development of your own inner life. Withdraw willingly into solitude, and there learn to love silence.

St. Bernard: *"When we keep silence with men, we will speak all the better with God."*

Zeal for Souls

But to preach the faith with efficacy you must have it; to bring others to love God before all else, you must be convinced that your own love for Him will never be full and perfect. Therefore, under pain of total or partial failure in your vocation, you must consider it your bounden duty to profit to the uttermost by the years of retreat

the Church provides for you in this home of prayer and study, to the end that you may accumulate within you a rich store of apostolic ardor, and so carry, later on, into your long desired field of labor, a burning zeal for the salvation of souls.

Prayer

Prayer is, and must remain, an essentially friendly conversation with Jesus. . . To know that we are loved is the fundamental condition, the necessary starting point, the very soul of prayer.

Since the multiplicity of things that solicit and absorb our attention obliges us to devote to prayer a fixed time of the day, let us impose on ourselves strict punctuality in the fulfillment of this pious duty.

Trust in God

But you, my dear friends, have quite a special motive for putting your trust in God. You are called to further His interests in this world; you are His delegates to the peoples of the earth.

Prayer

"You and I must really take the resolution never to miss making our mental prayer, every day--I repeat, every day!"

– St. Vincent de Paul

"Do not fail to apply yourself to whatever inspires the most devotion in you. The most beneficial prayer will be the one which moves your heart in the most beneficial way."

–Blessed John of Saxony

"The mouth speaks through the medium of words; the heart speaks through the medium of its desires. It is your heart's desire that is your prayer.... It is not words that God wants of you, but your hearts. It is with the heart that we ask; with the heart we seek; and it is to the voice of the heart that the door is opened... The cry of the heart is a solemn earnestness of thought, which, when given vent to in prayer, expresses the profound yearning of the one who prays.

–St. Augustine

"If a soul is seeking God, its Beloved is seeking it much more."

–St. John of the Cross

"It is your divine calling to pave the way in men's souls for the love and grace of Jesus Christ. To do it you must yourselves first be enkindled with that love. If you ask Us what is Our message to priests at the beginning of Our Pontificate, We answer: Pray! Pray more, and more earnestly."

–Pope Pius XII (discourse to seminarians of the Roman Colleges, June 24, 1939)

The Mount: Cradle of Saints

Mount Saint Mary's Seminary has been called "The Cradle of Bishops" on account of the many graduates who have served in the American hierarchy. Her illustrious sons range from the first Cardinal of New York City to the present Archbishop of Baltimore.

Nonetheless, Mary's Mountain is more appropriately thought of as a "Cradle of Saints". Many persons have drawn inspiration here to grow in holiness, only some of whom are highlighted below.

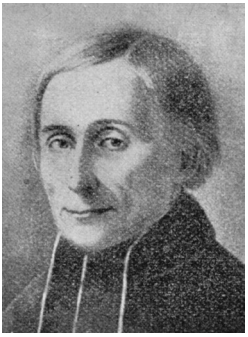
A. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Mother Seton moved to Emmitsburg in 1809, one year after the founding of Mount Saint Mary's School for boys. She lived on the site of the Grotto for six weeks, while her school for girls was being built with the financial contribution of one of the seminarians, a convert by the name of Samuel Southerland Cooper.

The White House was the first school for girls.

Along with her sisters, St. Elizabeth Ann would come on foot every Sunday to the Mount for Mass and to teach catechism.

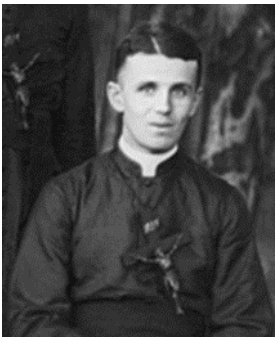
B. Servant of God Father Simon Bruté



Father Bruté grew up without a father in Brittany, during the French Revolution. As a boy, disguised as a baker's assistant, he took the Holy Eucharist to imprisoned priests. After the revolution, although trained as a medical doctor, he joined the fathers Saint Sulpice. Turning down an offer to be chaplain to Napoleon I, he set his sights on the missions in the newly United States.

Father Bruté had a great reputation for piety and learning, serving at Mount Saint Mary's as Spiritual Director for over twenty years. This included directing St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. He left the Mount in 1834 to become first Bishop of the Diocese of Vincennes, bifurcated from the Diocese of Bardstown. He was consecrated bishop by Bishop Flaget of Bardstown, with whom he had travelled from France so many years before. His territory included all of Indiana and half of Illinois. In the five years of life remaining to him, he did all possible to obtain priests, sisters and money for the faithful entrusted to him.

C. Bishop James Edward Walsh



Father Walsh before departure for China.

James Walsh was born in Cumberland, Maryland, in 1891, and attended Mount Saint Mary's College where he played baseball. Upon graduation, he joined the Maryknoll Missioners and took part in their first mission to China in 1918.

At the age of thirty-six, he was consecrated bishop, on Sancian Island, where St. Francis Xavier had died in 1552. The Communists took control of China in 1949, but Bishop Walsh was not arrested until 1958. He spent twelve years in isolation but was unexpectedly released in 1970. Returning the United States, he died at the age of 90 in 1981.

D. Father Flanagan

The founder of Boys Town, Father Edward Flanagan, came to the Mount soon after his arrival from Ireland in 1904. (He is pictured here returning to the Mount in 1945.) Ordained for the Diocese of Omaha, Nebraska, he began to dedicate himself to the care of homeless boys. After the first boarding house he opened quickly filled, he obtained a larger tract of land outside the city. Here, contrary to the prevailing culture, he welcomed boys of all races and creeds, accepting even boys convicted of serious crimes. His work became legendary, especially after the 1938 film starring Spencer Tracy and Mickey Rooney.

E. Blessed Stanley Rother

[The following is taken from "Father Stanley Rother: American Martyr in Guatemala" by John Rosengren St. Anthony Messenger, July 2006]

Fr. Stanley Rother was murdered 25 years ago, but his memory still lives large in his native Oklahoma and in his adopted homeland.

Raymond Bailey, a staff member at the United States Embassy,

had hastily departed Guatemala City that morning upon learning about the murder of an American missionary, Fr. Stanley Rother. Bailey traveled 50 miles west to Father Stan's mission in Santiago Atitlán, a village of 20,000 Tzutujil [pronounced ZOO too heel] Mayans on the shores of Lake Atitlán.

The diplomat was not prepared for the throng crowded into the dirt

plaza outside the colonial church. Over a thousand dark leathery faces turned toward the whitewashed church with the volcano rising behind it, eyes imploring, beseeching the heavens. Their silence thundered through Bailey. *"It was as if they'd lost their God,"* he said.

Fr. Stanley Rother so endeared himself to the Tzutujil over 13 years as their parish priest that they still feel his loss today, a quarter century after his murder by a paramilitary death squad. Caught between the revolutionary poor and the military government in Central America's longest and bloodiest civil war, Fr. Stan refused to preach rebellion, but his pastoral devotion to his people eventually cost him his life.

Declared a martyr and since proposed for sainthood by the bishops of Guatemala, Fr. Stan was an ordinary man who found extraordinary courage in his faith.

Ordinary Start

Fr. Stanley Rother arrived in Santiago Atitlán in 1968 without fanfare. The then-33-year-old diocesan priest had driven his Chevrolet over 2,000 miles from his native Oklahoma to the Guatemala mission sponsored by the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City. Ordained four years earlier, he had avoided a near miss.

The farm kid from Okarche had flunked out of the seminary on his first try, defeated by the Latin. Only on a second chance from a supportive bishop did he complete his training at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland (Class of 1963), where he was more comfortable restoring the school's grotto than studying in the library.

After several brief pastoral assignments in his home diocese, he accepted an invitation to join five other priests, three religious sisters and three laypeople who staffed the Guatemala mission. Once in Santiago Atitlán, Fr. Stan lent a hand to the construction of a hospital and set about the more difficult task of learning Spanish.

By 1975, Fr. Stan had become the head missioner by default. The others had left to marry, retire or pursue other assignments. Fr. Stan worked hard, true to his German heritage and farm roots, replacing the church's stained-glass windows, raising the altar, commissioning the renovation of an elaborate altarpiece, overseeing the translation of the New Testament into Tzutujil, experimenting with different crops on the parish farm and fulfilling his pastoral duties. That sometimes meant as many as five Sunday Masses in four different locations and up to 1,000 Baptisms a year. He seemed to blossom with the challenge.

He endeared himself to the people with his unpretentious style.

The men who worked the fields respected a priest who was as comfortable atop a tractor as he was at the altar. Families appreciated his visiting their homes—often shacks no more than 15 feet square—and sitting on the floor to break bread with them. The elders honored him with a traditional scarf that he wore proudly on special occasions. Perhaps most significantly, Fr. Stan not only learned Spanish, he also learned Tzutujil, a difficult Mayan dialect spoken by the villagers but not by many gringos.

By 1980, Guatemala's civil war had reached the highlands, including the region of Lake Atitlán. In October, army trucks rumbled into Santiago Atitlán. Troops set up camp on the outskirts of town, occupying a section of the parish farm.

Land of the Disappeared

That week, community leaders started to disappear. The night of October 23, day three of the army's occupation, soldiers blocked the ends of the street where Gaspar Culan lived. Culan, a former deacon who left the seminary to marry, ran the mission's radio station, using it as a platform for human rights. Masked men entered his house, shot Culan and dragged him out to a waiting car. His wife and their baby daughter watched the car drive off.

Fr. Stan wrote to his archbishop, Charles Salatka, *"Anyone who has made an advancement at all is being pursued,"* but resolved, "*I still don't want to abandon my flock when the wolves are making random attacks."*

Fr. Stan reinforced the church and rectory with fences and locks. He and his assistant, Padre Pedro Bocel, avoided going out at night. Hundreds of villagers sought refuge in the colonial church at night while catechists took turns keeping watch. Fr. Stan slept in different rooms of the rectory to confuse possible intruders. The night following the radio station break-in, he slept with his shoes on, afraid that the same group would attack the rectory.

Fr. Stan was not a political activist; nor was he swayed by

liberation theology, a movement catching hold in Latin America in the early 1980s. He was aware of the government's abuses, but his old-school faith swayed him to respond pastorally rather than politically. He set up a fund for the widows and orphans of the disappeared men in his village, knowing the danger of such a charitable deed. *"Shaking hands with an Indian has become a political act,"* he wrote home.

When one of the mission's brightest catechists, Diego Quic, wound up on a death list after openly criticizing the army and asked Fr. Stan to shelter him in the rectory, the priest knew the danger but couldn't refuse. His pastoral orientation won out over prudence.

The evening of January 3, 1981, Fr. Stan was listening to music in the rectory living room, the way he liked to unwind after a long day. Diego was returning to the rectory, shortly after nightfall. Three masked men ambushed him in front of the church's stone steps.

Diego fought his way to the rectory porch. The thugs pried him from the wooden banister, splintering the railing. Padre Pedro, the assistant pastor, heard the ruckus and called Fr. Stan.

The three masked men wrestled Diego down to a car waiting in the plaza. Fr. Stan and Pedro watched the men shove Diego into the backseat. The attackers had Diego's head covered, but Fr. Stan knew it was him. *"¡Ayudame!* [Help me!]," Diego screamed. One of the kidnappers tried to clamp his hand over Diego's mouth. *"¡Ayudame!"*

Fr. Stan and Pedro watched in disbelief. The car kicked up dirt out of the plaza. Fr. Stan feared they would torture Diego, then murder him in some brutal way, the way he had seen it happen to others. He could do little more than phone the police in the next village, the direction the kidnappers had headed.

In a letter to Father John Steichen, chancellor of the Oklahoma

City Archdiocese and official liaison to the Santiago mission, Fr. Stan described Diego's abduction in detail. He also described his effort to raise funds to support the eight widows and 32 fatherless children of the 11 men who disappeared since the army's occupation began less than three months earlier.

"Since helping these people," Fr. Stan wrote, *"could very easily be considered as subversive by the local government, we have asked that the money be deposited directly in the bank there, and that there be no direct communication between the donors and me....Be careful about sending letters here mentioning relief, etc.*

We never know when the mail may be intercepted and read. This letter is being hand-carried to the States and I can say things that I ordinarily wouldn't, using the local mails."

The New York Times printed this letter after Fr. Stan's death. It had been circulated by human-rights groups and some speculated that it had been seen by the wrong eyes, which may have made Fr. Stan a marked man.

Four days after Diego's kidnapping, in retaliation for a guerrilla attack, the army indiscriminately gunned down 17 civilians near the Chacaya coffee plantation in the Santiago Atitlán area. Fr. Stan surveyed the bloody corpses laid out in the plaza under the watchful eyes of his Tzutujil parishioners and the army soldiers. He ordered the bodies of the dead Catholics to be carried to the church for Christian burial—another pastoral duty that could be viewed as public defiance of the military's terror tactics.

Marked Man of God

On January 12, friends stopped Fr. Stan on his way through the neighboring village of San Lucas Toliman, where fellow American missioners Father Greg Schaffer and Father Pat Greene warned Fr. Stan, *"They're on the streets to get you."*

Fr. Stan refused to leave the country without Padre Pedro, whom the death squads had also fingered. Father Schaffer smuggled Pedro out of Santiago, wrapped in blankets in the back of his car. Fr. Stan and Pedro hid for 16 days in Guatemala City until Fr. Stan could secure special clearance for the Guatemalan priest to enter the United States.

Fr. Stan languished three months at his family's farm in Okarche, where he grew up. He lent a hand to the spring harvest. He helped his mother clean the house. But his thoughts were in Guatemala. His family would find him sitting in a darkened room, gazing out the window.

He knew the danger, but he could not stomach the thought of abandoning his people. He told a friend about some nuns in Nicaragua who left during the fighting and later wanted to go back. The people asked them, "*Where were you when we needed you?"*

"I don't want that to happen to me," he wrote. *"I have too much of my life invested* [in Atitlán]."

In April, word arrived that Fr. Stan's name was no longer on the death list. At the time, he did not know that his source for this information was no longer reliable. The archbishop counseled Fr. Stan that he might not come back to Oklahoma alive, but Fr. Stan insisted he must return to his people. He belonged back with them. He told friends that whatever happened to him would be God's will. He returned in time to celebrate Holy Week with his parish. Padre Pedro remained in hiding.

Fr. Stan plunged back into his ministry. In the early morning hours of July 28, three tall men wearing ski masks and civilian clothes sneaked into the rectory and moved directly to Fr. Stan's upstairs bedroom. Not finding him there, they startled Francisco Bocel in the room across the hall. They demanded that the assistant pastor's brother, who had been staying at the rectory, lead them to Fr. Stan. Francisco noted that they spoke a Spanish dialect unlike that of the

local villagers. He also felt a gun pressed against his head.

He led them to the downstairs study that Fr. Stan had converted into his bedroom. *"Padre, they've come for you,"* he shouted, before slipping away.

Fr. Stan had told friends that he did not want to be tortured like those whose bodies he had found with eyes gouged, skin peeled off their face, cigarette burns over their flesh. Francisco heard thuds and furniture tumble. The fight rubbed Fr. Stan's knuckles raw. Francisco heard him yell, *"Kill me here!"*

The killers pinned Fr. Stan into a corner. One fired a shot into his face. Fr. Stan crumpled to the floor. The assassin bent over him, placed a handgun against his left temple and fired another shot.

Francisco heard the shots from where he hid in his bedroom. He heard rummaging in the rectory office for several minutes, then quiet. He finally worked up the nerve to wake the Carmelite sisters in the adjoining convent and an American nurse staying in the rectory. They found Fr. Stan lying in a pool of his blood. The nurse pronounced him dead. The nuns knelt to pray.

Parishioners Without a Padre

Word of the priest's murder raged through the village and summoned the Atitecos [residents of Santiago Atitlán] to the town's heart. They grouped on the church's stone steps and clustered throughout the plaza. They had already lost over 30 of their brothers, fathers, uncles, sons and neighbors. Now their priest was gone.

The crowd alarmed Father Greg Schaffer, who had driven over from San Lucas early that morning. How much longer until the mourners morphed into a mob that marched out to the barracks to avenge their beloved pastor's murder? Their blind anger would

turn a murder into a massacre. With the help of others, he ushered them into the church, where Sister Ana Maria Gonzalez, one of the Carmelite sisters, comforted the crowd with hymns of resurrection.

Inside the church, Schaffer came upon a Tzutujil woman, shriveled by age and curled up in the corner of a pew. Sobs racked her frail body. Schaffer placed a hand upon her shoulder. *"They killed our priest,"* she said. "*He was our priest. He spoke our language."*

Meanwhile, back inside the rectory, Sister Linda Wanner, an American nun who lived and worked in San Lucas, preserved the slain priest's blood. Just three days earlier, Sister Linda had spent Saturday afternoon with him in that very room. He had sat in the red plastic chair now splattered with his blood. His generous and patient hospitality had impressed her.

She thought of this while she ladled his blood into a mason jar. She thought of the terror he must have felt fighting his attackers. She thought of the senseless brutality behind the bullets they fired. She saw his life poured out on these tiles. She sensed that his faith, his courage had seeped into the very carpet. On her knees, she reverently scooped Fr. Stan's blood into the jar. *"I sensed what the blood of martyrs really means,"* she says.

Sister Linda found a bullet slug on the ledge of a bookshelf. It must have struck the floor and jumped there. She brought the inch-long bullet to Fr. Schaffer, who turned it over to the U.S. embassy officials. The slug came from a nine-millimeter shell used in a Smith & Wesson. This wasn't the type of gun that fell into the hands of guerrillas or bandits; it was the type used by the army and government-backed paramilitaries.

The Guatemalan police arrested three men from Santiago Atitlán and charged them with killing Fr. Stan during a botched burglary attempt—despite the fact that they did not match Francisco

Bocel's description. The three men were convicted, though later acquitted by an appellate court under pressure from the U.S. State Department.

Archbishop Salatka and U.S. Senator Charles Boren of Oklahoma, among others, called for a thorough investigation, though none occurred. Fr. Stan's killers were never brought to justice.

Where he Found his Treasure his Heart Remains

Fr. Stan's Tzutujil parishioners believed Fr. Stan should stay with them. His parents wanted to bury their son in the family's Okarche plot. They struck a compromise: The Tzutujil enshrined Fr. Stan's heart in the church along with the mason jar of his blood, and Fr. Stan's body returned to Oklahoma. In death, as in life, Fr. Stan was of Oklahoma, but his heart resided in the Mayan church.

His memory burns strong in the hearts of those who knew him. *"I think he's a saint,"* Father Schaffer says, voicing the thoughts of many, "*because of his complete and total dedication and care and giving to those people. That was built on his faith and love of God. He is a good example of what a martyr is about."*

In Santiago Atitlán, the room where Fr. Stan was murdered has been converted into a chapel visited annually by hundreds of people from as far away as Japan and Kenya. The church fills to capacity every year on the anniversary of his death for a memorial Mass attended by many children named after him. His heart rests in a shrine inside the church, part of a memorial to all of the Atitecos who have died for their faith.

Fr. Stanley Rother was beatified in Oklahoma City, OK on the 23rd of September, 2017.

Blessed Stanley Rother,
pray for us!