

VISIONS



May 3, 2020
4th Sunday of Easter



Who Are the Good Shepherds Among Us?

Pope Francis wears this pectoral cross every day. Read Psalm 23. Why is the shepherd a good symbol for the Pope?

Who stands by you and protects you?

What shepherds or guides your life?

A SHEPHERD Knows His Sheep

Christians refer to Jesus as the Good Shepherd, a constant guide and selfless protector for his people. Shepherding was often a rigorous, lonely, and dangerous profession. Shepherds moved their herds to find good grazing land, they sheltered with their animals, and they braved bad weather and attacks from predators.

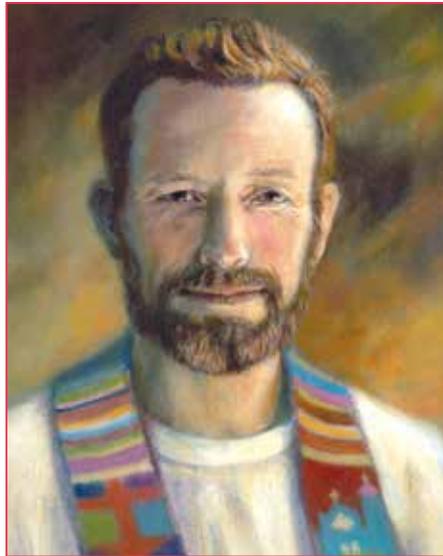
The life and death of Father Stan Rother is very much the story of the Good Shepherd. He led his flock, cared for their needs, protected them, and, in the end, gave up his life for them.

Stanley Francis Rother grew up in the 1940s and 50s in Okarche, Oklahoma, a small German farming community. Not many people in Oklahoma were Catholic, but Stan's life revolved around the Church. He lived close to his parish church, Holy Trinity, where he was an altar server. He attended daily Mass and said the Rosary every day with his family.

His teachers and classmates liked Stan. His second-grade teacher, Sister Flora Jentgen, A.S.C., described him as "kind, unassuming, and deeply caring."

School wasn't easy for Stan. His third- and fourth-grade teacher, Sister Agatha Wassinger, said, "I think studying was hard, but he worked like a trooper." This could describe almost everything Stan did, from playing sports to working on the farm.

Most of the graduates from Okarche either became farmers or married one. Only four of the twenty-two kids in Stan's class



went to college. Three of those, including Stan, were discerning a religious vocation. Stan struggled with his seminary studies—all of his textbooks were written in Latin. He failed philosophy and had to repeat an entire year. He barely passed the second time. Eventually, Stan failed out of seminary and was sent home.

One of his elementary teachers, Sister Clarissa, wrote to remind Stan of Saint John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, who also struggled with his studies. "I told Stanley that if he really wanted to be a priest, he should pray and trust, and God would take care of things."

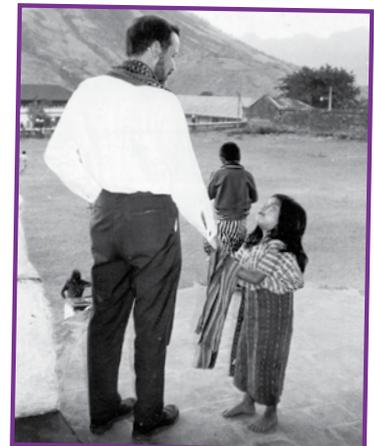
Stan's bishop helped him get accepted to a new seminary. He finally completed his seminary studies and was ordained a priest on May 23, 1965.

After his ordination, Father Stan served in several parishes in Oklahoma. He also liked to work on building projects for the diocese. In 1968, he asked

to join the Catholic Mission of Oklahoma team in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala. He loaded up his pickup truck with supplies and drove 2,500 miles to his new home.

Eventually, Father Stan became the pastor of Santiago Apóstol (St. James the Apostle) parish in Santiago Atitlán. Even though Father Stan had struggled to learn Latin while in seminary, he mastered Spanish and Tz'utujil, the indigenous Mayan language that many of his parishioners spoke. He said Mass in Tz'utujil and translated the New Testament and catechist materials.

Father Stan had learned how to work hard as a farm kid. Shortly after arriving in Santiago, he began to help his parishioners on their farms and make repairs around the mission. He also did all of the regular work of a priest—saying Mass, baptizing babies, preparing children for First Communion, and visiting the sick. He trained





people to become catechists and encouraged young men to join the priesthood.

Families in Santiago and out on the fincas (plantations) regularly invited Father Stan for meals.

He insisted on eating whatever the family ate. A parishioner noted that the people trusted Father Stan because he always listened to their needs first. “Whenever the people were hungry, he gave them food. Whenever they needed money, whenever there was an emergency, they would come to him first because they could trust him.”

Father Stan became more and more aware of the dangers his parishioners faced. Catechists began to disappear from their homes. Their dead bodies would show up later, showing signs of torture.

Soldiers forced people to join the Guatemalan Army. Young men came to the mission, and Father Stan hid them inside the church buildings. The government wanted to keep control of the wealth; the people wanted to put land in the hands of the poor farmers. The Church supported the poor, so the army began to threaten and kill priests.

Father Stan stayed in Guatemala until he learned that he was number eight on the Army’s death list. Then he returned to Oklahoma. Friends and family in the United States

and Guatemala told Father Stan that he would be killed if he returned to the mission.

When Bishop Angélico Melotto Mazzardo, O.F.M., warned him not to come back, Father Stan told him, “My life is for my people. I am not scared.” He wrote to a friend: “At the first sign of danger, the shepherd can’t run and leave the sheep to fend for themselves.”

When he returned to Guatemala, Father Stan married a record number of couples, baptized babies, and celebrated feast days with his parishioners. He also buried people murdered by the Army.

Maryknoll missionary Linda Wanner remembered Father Stan’s reaction to the dead. “He just impressed me as a man so concerned about the people, all of them... the whole image of the shepherd becomes so real,” she said. “You could see the pain in his eyes.”

Young men often came to the church rectory at night, begging to be hidden. One night, Father Stan helped three men who needed a safe place

Catholic

FAITH WORD +

MARTYR A person who dies for his or her faith.

to stay. Then he said goodnight and went to bed.

At 1:30 a.m., masked men broke into Father Stan’s room, beat him, and shot him twice in the head. He fought back but never called out for help. He wanted to protect the people with whom he lived from getting hurt.

His parishioners grieved his horrible death. At a memorial Mass, Bishop Melotto said, “We will never forget his goodness, his optimism, his generosity, his preoccupation for the poorest and those who suffered most.” Father Stan, he continued, “knew his sheep, and, knowing them, loved them and shepherded them according to their needs.”

After his death, Father Stan’s body was returned to Oklahoma, but his heart remains buried under the altar at Santiago Apóstol.

Many people considered him a **martyr** immediately after his death. Pope Francis formally recognized Father Stan’s martyrdom in December, 2016. He is the first American-born martyr and priest to receive this official recognition. Father Stanley Rother was declared Blessed in 2017. He lived and died for love of God and for the love of his people.

“TALK”

- 1** What life experiences prepared Father Stan to be a missionary in Santiago Atitlán?
- 2** How did Father Stan get to know the people he served?
- 3** Why do you think Father Stan returned to Guatemala, knowing that he likely would be killed?
- 4** Name two examples of how Father Stan acted like a good shepherd.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

4th Sunday of Easter

John 10:1-10

Jesus Comes to Give Life

Jesus 1: Truly I assure you: Whoever does not enter the sheepfold through the gate but climbs in some other way is a thief and a marauder.

Jesus 2: The one who enters through the gate is shepherd of the sheep; the keeper opens the gate for the shepherd. The sheep hear the shepherd's voice, calling each of them by name and leading them out.

Jesus 3: After bringing out the sheep, the shepherd walks in front of them. The sheep follow because they recognize the shepherd's voice.

Jesus 4: The sheep will not follow a stranger; they will run from a

stranger because they do not recognize a stranger's voice.

Narrator: The Pharisees did not understand what he was trying to tell them by using this figure of speech. So he spoke to them again.

Jesus 5: My solemn word is this: I am the sheepgate. All who came before me were thieves and marauders whom the sheep did not follow. I am the gate.

Jesus 6: Whoever enters through me will be safe. They will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.



TALK

- 1 What is the relationship between a shepherd and the sheep?
- 2 What is the difference between a good shepherd and a stranger?
- 3 How is Jesus like a sheepgate for Christians?
- 4 What do you learn from Jesus, the Good Shepherd, about how to be a good shepherd of people?



and DOCTRINE

Connecting GOSPEL

God Knows Us and Calls Us Through Baptism

Jesus says that just as the shepherd is the gate of a sheep pen, he is the gate of the Church. People come into the Church because they believe in Jesus.

Jesus is the person in whose name Christians gather and form the Christian family. Baptism is the sacrament through which Christians enter the Church. Through Baptism, Jesus forgives our sins, gives us new life, and welcomes us into his family.

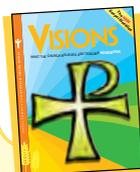
We are all invited to receive the graces offered to us through

Baptism. The Church teaches that Baptism is necessary for salvation, and that's why many parents seek Baptism for their children soon after they are born. Baptism leaves an indelible mark on those who receive it. It imprints the soul with a permanent mark, so we receive this sacrament only once.

Like the shepherd, God knows each one of us. "God calls each one by name. Everyone's name is sacred. The name is

the icon of the person. It demands respect as a sign of the dignity of the one who bears it" (CCC, 2158).

- 1 Shepherds risk their comfort and safety to protect their flocks. How did Jesus care for and protect his friends and followers?
- 2 How does your faith in Jesus give you comfort and make you feel safe?



The Church honors Mary, the Mother of God, on feast days throughout the Liturgical Year; however, we recognize Mary in a special way in May. Turn to pages 52, 55, and 56 in *What the Church Believes and Teaches* and read the Marian prayers—the Hail Mary and Hail, Holy Queen (on page 52) and the *Memorare* (on page 56). Then turn to page 55 and review the prayers of the Rosary. The Joyous and Glorious Mysteries recall many of the most important events in Mary's life. List them.

Why Is Psalm 23 so Popular?

In Psalm 23, King David imagined God as a shepherd who provides for us in Creation. Like a shepherd, God provides green pastures and still waters that restore us. God leads us on right paths.

The Ten Commandments are the path on which God leads the People of Israel—and us today. Keeping these laws builds up a community of gratitude to God and harmony with one another.

This description of God as a shepherd is the first of the three parts of Psalm 23. A psalm is a prayer poem. Tradition pictures David singing his prayer poems and accompanying the songs with a lyre:

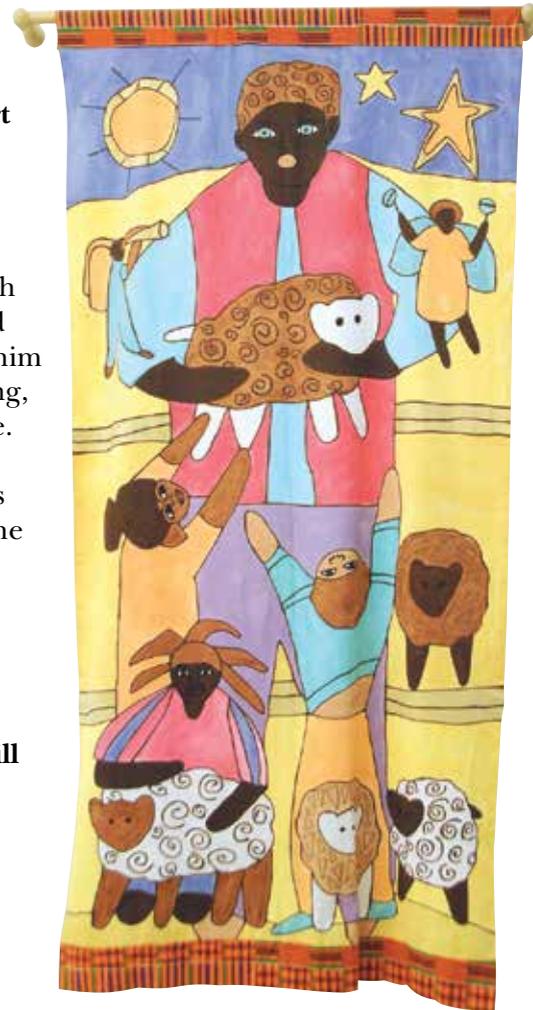
**The LORD is my shepherd;
there is nothing I lack.
In green pastures
he makes me lie down;
to still waters he leads me;
he restores my soul.
He guides me along right paths
for the sake of his name.**

After describing God’s gifts in Creation and the holy path of the commandments, David moves in the second part of Psalm 23 to his experience of God’s abiding presence. The king trusts that God is always on duty, guiding him no matter how dark his life seems:

**Even though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff comfort
me.**

In the third part of Psalm 23, David imagines a feast with a table and a cup overflowing with God’s goodness. God has called David to rule Israel, anointing him king. In all his early years as king, David leads the people in battle. In his final lines of the psalm, the king desires to rest from his battles and dwell with God in the Temple all his life long:

**You set a table before me
in front of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Indeed, goodness and mercy will
pursue me
all the days of my life;
I will dwell in the house of the
Lord for endless days.**



**Why do you think
this prayer has
stayed the top
prayer song for
thousands of
years? What do you
like about it?**

**King David uses an everyday
kind of work to describe God.
Today, shepherds are far less
common. What image helps
you describe the way you
experience God in your life?
Write a poem prayer, using
this image.**

How Will You Serve This Summer?

In the First Reading for this Sunday from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and the Eleven announce that Jesus has been crucified and has died. Everyone who hears this news is brokenhearted. They ask the disciples what they should do.

Read Acts 2:14a, 36–41 to learn how the disciples responded.

In Baptism and Confirmation, the Holy Spirit pours forth on us. The Spirit helps us to be witnesses and missionaries who bring Jesus' Good News to

others. How will the Spirit help you to be a witness? This activity explores ways that you can use your gifts and serve others this summer. Add your own ideas too.

Spend a morning picking up litter at a park or a beach. Enjoy the sights and sounds of nature as you work. Think of all the ways that God's Creation is alive in your life.



Build a blessings box. Fill it with items for people in need, including nonperishable food items (granola bars, other healthy snacks), first-aid and health items (bandages, tissues, toothpaste), and small clothing items (socks, for example). Search "blessings box" or visit communityblessingbox.org for building instructions and fundraising tips.

Volunteer to help coach T-ball, swimming, or any other sport offered by your park district. Younger children will appreciate the time and attention you can give them.



Say one positive thing to someone every day. Say one positive thing to yourself too.

Help to lead a group at your parish's Vacation Bible School. Or you may choose to lead crafts, games, or song time.

Start a story hour for kids in your neighborhood. Sit on your front steps with a pile of children's books. Watch how many kids come to listen.



Limit your screen time this summer. Use the time you save to go outdoors with friends.



Babysit for free. Find a parent you know in your neighborhood who seems especially tired or frazzled. Give this person some time to take a walk in the park—without the kids.

Go to Sunday Mass every week. Install an app on your phone that points you to the Sunday readings.



Sign up to work at a local soup kitchen. If you're nervous about going alone, bring a few friends along with you.



Use the library to find easy plays for kids. Help some little kids in your family or neighborhood to make props and costumes and put on one of the plays.

Make one new friend.



Find one way to experience God's Creation. Fly a kite, wind surf, swim, hike, or sit on the beach and stare at the waves. Use all five of your senses.



With My Family and Friends



Pray

Jesus, I want to be like you and care for other people. Help me to care for others through loving thoughts and actions. Amen.



Think

Who are the people I can trust to always take care of me?



Act

Ask a parent to use your vehicle's navigation system to direct you home from Mass. Take a few wrong turns. Reflect together on the way that Jesus always leads us on the right path even if we make some mistakes along the way.

Plant a garden and help it grow. Brighten a family member's or neighbor's day with fresh-cut flowers or vegetables. Extra veggies can also be a blessing to those without enough to eat. Check with your nearest food bank to see if they can accept produce.



➔ For **free** at-home activities, visit [@gospelweeklies.com/seasonal](https://gospelweeklies.com/seasonal)

Saint Isidore the Farmer

Patron saint of farmers and Madrid, Spain

Born in Spain in 1071, Isidore the Farmer was named for Saint Isidore of Seville.

Along with his wife, Maria, Saint Isidore is known for his piety (reverence for God) and for his care of animals and people who were poor.

Saint Isidore is often portrayed in art as a peasant holding a sickle and a sheaf of wheat. In the United States, he is the patron of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference. The cities of San Ysidro in California and New Mexico are named for him. His feast day is celebrated on May 15.

Stories tell of Isidore's generosity to all creatures. One day, for example, it is said that Isidore was on his way to the town's mill to have his wheat ground into flour. As he walked, he found hungry pigeons. Though he was mocked by others, Isidore took pity on the birds and fed them half his bag of valuable wheat. When he arrived at the mill, the story continues, not only was the bag filled to the brim, the grain produced twice the normal amount of flour.

Saint Isidore was married to a woman named Maria Torribia who became known as Santa María de la



Cabeza, though she has not yet been canonized. She is Blessed.

Maria gave birth to a son. When he was young, the son fell into a deep well. A story says that his parents' prayers were answered when the waters of the well miraculously raised so that the boy could be rescued.

Maria and Isidore, though not wealthy themselves, always offered a meal to those in need. One story tells of a time when Isidore brought home more hungry people than usual, and Maria told him that there wasn't enough stew left in her pot to feed one more person. Isidore told her to look back in the pot; miraculously, there was enough food for everyone.

Saint Kateri Habitats

Build a Space for Creation and for the Holy Spirit Born in 1656, Saint Kateri Tekekwitha is a patron saint for ecology and the environment, exiled people, and Native Americans. She was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012, the first Native American to be recognized as a saint. Today, people honor her memory and legacy by building areas called Saint Kateri Habitats.

These areas, which are often built at schools and parishes, promote protection for the environment and offer a spiritual space for visitors. A habitat must include three of the following items, plus one religious element:



- Food, water, cover, and space for wildlife
- Native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers to promote biodiversity, such as milkweed and goldenrod for monarch butterflies
- Food, water, cover, and space for people, including vegetable gardens, flower gardens, community-supported gardens, indoor gardens, and farms
- Ecosystem services, such as pollination, clean air and water, carbon storage for climate regulation, and control of invasive species
- Sustainable practices of gardening, landscaping, and farming, such as minimizing the use of pesticides and using organic or no-phosphorus fertilizer
- Sacred and sacramental places for prayer and contemplation, including Mary gardens, prayer gardens, and Rosary gardens

Religious elements may include crosses, wayside shrines, grottos, Stations of the Cross, Saint Kateri Habitat signs, or statues of Mary, an angel, or a saint, such as Saint Francis of Assisi. This is included to remind us that the Holy Spirit is present and active throughout Creation.

To find out how you can build a Saint Kateri Habitat, visit kateri.org.