

Faithful shepherds

April 16, 2017

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley

Each year during Holy Week, priests serving in the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City, like priests everywhere, gather with one another and with their bishop for the Chrism Mass. It is during this solemn liturgy that the bishop blesses and consecrates the holy oils and sacred chrism that will be used during the year ahead in the celebration of the sacraments. It is during this Mass that priests reflect upon and renew their sacred priestly promises in the presence of the bishop and the gathered faithful.

This is a very important day for priests. It reminds us of what an awesome gift it is to share in the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ. It brings to our attention the importance of our sacred duties and our communion with the bishop and with one another in the brotherhood of priests.

Over the years, we have developed additional customs in this archdiocese. Our priests spend the afternoon together in prayer and fraternity before the evening Mass. It's a time for spiritual renewal and reflection. Many dioceses do something similar. But, a unique custom has developed here. Each year, the priests honor one of their own.

Inspired by the witness of the Venerable Servant of God Father Stanley Rother, the priests nominate and recommend to me a worthy recipient for the Father Stanley Rother Faithful Shepherd Award. This year this distinguished recognition is being presented to Father Paul Gallatin in appreciation of his dedication to priestly ministry over a lifetime of service. Father Gallatin is the 17th priest honored with the Father Stanley Rother Faithful Shepherd Award since its inception in 2003.

In Oklahoma, we have always recognized the outstanding witness that Father Rother was for his parishioners and for his brother priests. Like Jesus the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his flock. Over the years, he learned to live a life of selfless service to others in countless ways. His daily fidelity in the small things prepared him to make the supreme sacrifice of his life. He was faithful in the little things. It was through his daily fidelity to the law of charity and the promises and obligations he embraced at ordination that he became more and more perfectly configured to Christ, the Good Shepherd.

What the local Church of Oklahoma and Guatemala have long treasured in the life and ministry of Father Stanley Rother is now being recognized and affirmed by the Universal Church. He has been declared a martyr of the Catholic Church. It is the first time such a distinction has been bestowed upon a native born American. He will be beatified later this year and will become the first "Blessed" among priests born in the United States of America.

"The shepherd cannot run at the first sign of danger." These words, written months before his death, foreshadowed the final witness that brought Father Rother's life of selfless service to completion. He did not run. He did not seek his own comfort or ease. Faithful to the end, he bore witness to Jesus, the Good Shepherd and High Priest, who came to serve and not to be served.

The Venerable Servant of God Father Stanley Francis Rother kept his eyes on Jesus. He has left us an outstanding example of dedicated priestly ministry. By honoring our brother priests with the Father Stanley Rother Faithful Shepherd Award we are reminding ourselves of what it means to be a

good shepherd in both the great and small things during a lifetime of priestly service. I pray that his example will continue to inspire and encourage our priests and seminarians, and that through his intercession many more young men will seek to imitate this good shepherd in responding to God's call to the priesthood.