

Stanley Kromer, O. Carm.
1926-1999

Although he spent much of his priestly life in the parish apostolate of the PCM Province, Stanley Kromer was very much a teacher. This is especially true in the Industrial Arts field while he was welding teacher at the former Joliet Catholic High School. He had actually attended Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois, where he majored in Industrial Arts when he first taught at JCHS. This writer's initial memories are of Stanley with a large industrial-type apron over his Carmelite habit, plus heavy goggles to protect his eyes while teaching welding. Students responded well to his instruction. He was also known as a great community man and enjoyed the company of his fellow Carmelites. He was likewise willing to offer encouragement and help to the young Carmelite priests and brothers who were assigned to JCHS back in the 1950's.

Stanley Stephen Kromer was the son of the late Stephen F. and Ruth (Boyle) Kromer. He was born on 1 February 1926 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and grew up there with his two sisters, Marjorie and Ruth.

A diligent student, he attended St. Mary of the Mount School in Pittsburgh, the city where he came in contact with Fr. Kieran O'Hara who visited each year from Chicago as the vocation director for the PCM Province. It was Fr. Vincent Metzler, the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Pittsburgh, who arranged for Fr. Kieran to visit the Catholic schools in the area.

Stephen Kromer signed up to study for the priesthood at Mt. Carmel Prep Seminary in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Here his affable nature and good humor enabled him to make many friends, attend classes, play sports, and develop his spiritual life. As a senior, he received the partial Carmelite habit (without a capuce) and was given the religious name of "Stanley."

As was the custom in those days, he and his classmates then left for the Carmelite Novitiate at St. John the Baptist Monastery in New Baltimore, Pennsylvania, where they spent the year growing in spirituality and in the understanding of the vows and Carmelite life. The late Fr. Leo Walters was their novice master. On 15 August 1944, Frater Stanley professed his simple vows with his classmates in St. John the Baptist Church in the presence of family and friends. The group then returned to Mt. Carmel College for philosophy studies with the late Fr. Richard Haag, along with the other courses of their college studies.

In 1947 Stanley and his classmates completed their college courses at Niagara. Although there was no accredited degree given in those years, Catholic colleges, especially the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., accepted the Carmelite students who usually went on for an M.A. degree in some field. Stanley majored in education at Catholic University but did not complete that degree.

Sometime during his studies at Niagara, Stanley's family moved from Pittsburgh to Sandusky, Ohio. He was often referred to as "Sandusky Stan" and seemed to enjoy the new moniker. It also led to an oft-told tale of Stanley's encounter with the late Prior General, Fr. Hilary Doswald, who inquired of him about his home. Fr. General wanted Stanley to think of Heaven as his true home, but he stuck by his family home in Sandusky.

But the main focus of his life in those days was theology at Whitefriars Hall. He studied the intricacies of moral and dogmatic theology, canon law, spirituality, homiletics and other subjects.

As was the Carmelite privilege in those days, Stanley and his class were ordained to the priesthood at the end of their third year of theology. But first the class professed their solemn vows on 28 September 1947.

Stanley was ordained to the priesthood at the then unfinished Shrine of the Immaculate Conception on 6 June 1950 by Auxiliary Bishop Thomas McNamara of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

By this time, the Kromer family had moved to Sandusky, Ohio. It was here on 11 June 1950, that the newly-ordained Stanley offered his First Mass at St. Mary's Church in the joyful company of family and friends.

He then returned to Whitefriars Hall for his final year of theology, and life as a "simplex" priest helping out at Carmelite parishes in the Northern Valley of New Jersey, and at other assignments.

In September of 1951, Stanley was assigned to teach at Joliet Catholic High School. He enjoyed both community and teaching, plus helping out at parishes for both weekday and weekend Masses. Each weekday morning a car-load of Carmelites would leave each half hour for Mass assignments. They would hurry back so that there would be time for breakfast before classes. Morning prayer and meditation came before Mass runs, while the prior of the community offered morning Mass for the brothers. Sunday morning Masses were usually the late ones in those days of fasting from midnight on Saturday. Stanley was often at St. Anne's parish in nearby Crest Hill, and the parishioners enjoyed his Masses.

Stanley's hobby of photography proved to be a great help in the production of "The Victory Light" school newspaper and "The Hilltopper" yearbook. He could often be seen at the various sports activities taking photos.

At the Provincial Chapter of 1960, held at Mt. Carmel College in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Stanley's life took on a different experience. He was appointed novice master for the brothers in training at the Infant of Prague Villa in Akron, Ohio. He was also appointed prior of the community.

At Akron, Stanley entered a new life of not only teaching the novices about Carmelite spirituality and community life, but also became the director of the farm. He also learned a great deal about raising chickens and distributing eggs throughout the Akron area.

Also with this work, however, he remained very interested in the Carmelite Missions and would attend the annual convention of the Mission Sending Societies at the Shoreham Hotel in Washington, D.C. each Fall with Fr. Kieran O'Hara, then director of the Carmelite Missions, and this writer.

He also oversaw the printing of the newly-founded "Carmelecta" newsletter (later "The Carmelite Review") and also became an associate editor of "The Sword" Magazine in charge of the "Brothers' Page" which contained news and information of interest to the Carmelite brothers of the PCM Province.

In August of 1966, Stanley entered the pastoral part of his apostolate in Carmelite parishes. He was appointed associate pastor of St. Cecilia's Parish in Englewood, New Jersey, and the following year was appointed to a similar position at St. Leo's Church in Pittsburgh.

From 1969-75, he was appointed associate pastor of Mt. Carmel Church in Tenafly, New Jersey, and also prior of the local Carmelite community.

He also served as an associate pastor at both St. Joseph Church in Demarest, New Jersey (1975-77) and St. Albert Church in Houston, Texas (1977-88), where he was a very effective pastor.

In 1988 he joined classmate Thomas Walsh, pastor, to work at St. Raphael's Church in Englewood, Florida. They were not only classmates in the seminary, but also taught together at Joliet Catholic High School. They worked well at St. Raphael's with a congregation that included many senior citizens. In spite of heart problems which included several operations, Stanley ministered well and was enjoyed by the parishioners. It would prove to be his last assignment.

In addition to his other studies, Stanley attended St. John's University in Jamaica, New York, where he received a master's degree in pastoral counseling.

And in spite of his German surname, he was proud of his mother's Irish heritage. While at Akron, Ohio he hosted the monthly meetings of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), and eventually became the Ohio State Chaplain of the group.

On 18 November, he died at Englewood Community Hospital just before 6:00 PM. A Mass of Christian Burial was held at St. Raphael's Church on Monday, 22 November at 10:00 AM. Fr. Leo McCarthy, PCM Provincial, was the principal celebrant, assisted by Fr. Thomas Walsh. Fr. Jack Welch of the Washington Theological Union, and a former

student of Stanley at JCHS, was the homilist. Interment was at Mt. Carmel Cemetery in Tenafly, New Jersey.

"Stan Kromer was always a joy, always the cheerful guy in our class with a laugh to keep us going," summed up Fr. Philip Nessinger, a classmate. "He could be mischievous in a good sense to relieve times of tension, and was always a calming factor for us. He was not a person to offer any type of criticism."

A fitting tribute to a great Carmelite!

Kevin Shanley, O. Carm.
St. Simon Stock Priory
Darien, Illinois

Homily

A few days ago, in preparation for this funeral Mass, I was reading letters of St. Paul for his comments on death. Later in the day I took a customary walk in the neighborhood and saw "John" coming out of his house. John is a Protestant minister who, with his family, recently moved into the neighborhood. He is a large, ebullient man who ministers in the jail and who is constantly on message regarding the Gospel.

As I was passing, I off-handedly greeted him with, "How is the fight going, John?" He boomed back, "We are winning, we are winning, thanks to the Resurrection of Our Lord Jesus Christ. We are, however, having difficulty along the way, but we are winning thanks to the Resurrection." And then he finished with, "And the last enemy to be defeated is death!"

Realizing he had just quoted scripture to me, I got into the spirit of this mini-revival and answered back, "1 Thessalonians!" He then responded, "No, 1 Corinthians, chapter 15!" Naturally, he was right. "And the last enemy to be defeated is death," is from Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

We are today celebrating the defeat of death because in our faith we believe that the power of the Resurrection is with Fr. Stan and he now lives fully with the Lord.

But by guess, 1 Thessalonians, also has a consoling message. This letter from Paul is the earliest Christian writing on record. The community of Christians in Thessalonica expected the imminent coming of the Lord to take them up into God's reign. But as they waited for that day, they began to die one by one. They started to worry that when the Lord comes their loved ones who have already died will miss this Second Coming at the end of time.

Paul, who shared their belief in the imminent appearance of Christ, wrote to them and said, in effect, "Don't worry." Everything and everyone is subject to the Lord. Whether

we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. The Lord is the Lord of both the living and the dead!

Paul's words are offered us as a consolation today. Certainly, Fr. Stan belongs to his family, who now mourn his death. He belongs to his Carmelite brothers who miss his presence. He belongs to God's people whom he served in his long priesthood. And he belongs to his close friends, with whom he shared decades of life. But all the while he also belonged to the Lord. And while we would like to have Stan in our hands, St. Paul tells us he is in very good hands. Though dead he still belongs to the Lord.

Fr. Casimir Zielinski reminded me of a French saying: "When we are born we are crying and everyone else is smiling. When we die, everyone else is crying, and we are smiling." It is a simple way to remember that Stan now shares in the Resurrection of the Lord.

I wanted to remind us of the qualities which helped endear Stan to us. Not wanting to trust my impressions from sporadic contacts with Stan over the years, I asked others about their memories. He was as he appeared. He was a genuinely good person and that goodness was immediately evident. Everyone observed that he was even-tempered, common-sensed, down to earth, with feet on the ground.

There is a famous story about Stan. Fr. Tom Butler reminded me of the details. The general of the Order was preparing to celebrate the Eucharist at Whitefriars Hall in Washington. He called the servers together, Stan among them, and gave them a pep talk about heaven as the goal of their lives and he reminded them that their true home is in heaven. At the end, to reinforce the message, he asked Stan, "Now, frater, where is your home?" "Sandusky, Ohio," Stan replied.

Stan was a humble, self-effacing person. You did not have the sense you were in the presence of a large ego that needed attention. He attended to others. He had a number of assignments which he accepted willingly. He was not always in charge in a particular ministry, but Stan willingly shared the burdens of the work.

He was available to people and listened to their cares. His sister, Margorie, was impressed with the number of people at the wake who told her how much Stan meant to them and how helpful he had been in their time of loss or other troubles.

Stan was obviously good-natured and found ways of enjoying life's ups and downs. Stan was novice master for the Brothers in Akron, Ohio. One former novice remembers Stan sitting alone at the head table during the silent breakfast chuckling to himself, quietly enjoying his thoughts. Novitiates always presented opportunities to laugh if you were so disposed.

On another occasion, the novices were to engage in a religious ceremony called "Culpa" during which the novice knelt in the middle of the chapel floor and confessed faults. On this occasion three novices in a row confessed leaving water run over: one, in the laundry room; another, in the chicken house; and the third, in the cow barn. By the

time the third novice was confessing letting water overflow, Stan was having difficulty controlling his laughter. He called off the remainder of the ceremony.

We all have lived long enough to know that the type of person Stan was does not happen without personal difficulties. Over the years, Stan would have experienced many "conversions" or "transformations" in his attempts to live a generous and fruitful life as a Carmelite and a priest.

Fifty-two years ago Stan knelt before the provincial and promised a life of poverty (living simply, generously, not forgetting priorities in the clutter of life), chastity (being available, compassionate and loving), and obedience (listening for the Lord in his heart, in life situations, and through his community). He made these promises to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the general of the Order. Fifty-two years ago he said he would allow these vows to shape his life. Today we can attest that they did.

Almost fifty years ago Stan was ordained a priest and promised to serve God's people in whatever way he could. Today, we can say, he did it! He celebrated Mass, preached, baptized, absolved, anointed, counseled and, basically, fulfilled the promise he made fifty years ago.

Stan's last assignment was here in the diocese of Venice. Bishop Nevins and the clergy of the Diocese warmly welcomed Stan and the other Carmelites who have come to serve the Church of Venice. These men have been principals, pastors, missionaries, chaplains, and counselors. Stan is the first among us to die here.

I think the best way to honor Stan is to live the life he would want us to live. He lives now with God in the power of the Resurrection. The last enemy, death, has been overcome. We would best honor Stan by not being afraid of our lives, nor being afraid of our deaths. While alive we are the Lord's; in our death we are the Lord's. St. Paul reminds us that the Lord died for us "so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him." (1 Thessalonians 5:10)

John Welch, O. Carm.
Whitefriars Hall
Washington, D.C.