

Lives
of
Saints

St Damien of Molokai

1840 –1889

Feastday: 10th May



"It is at the foot
of the altar that
we find the
strength we
need in our
isolation...."

*St Damien
of Molokai*

I was born in 1840, in Belgium. My name was Joseph de Veuster. When I grew up, I followed my elder brother August into the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

I took the name Damien when I made my religious vows. Between 1864 and 1873, I served on the Big Island of Hawaii. I was renowned among my parishioners for my untiring enthusiasm, my cheerfulness, and my physical strength. I was not content just to preach the gospel. I helped his people by farming and raising livestock, and I even drew upon my carpentry skills to build eight chapels and churches on the island.

In 1873, I went to Molokai, the island where the sufferers of Hansen's disease (leprosy) were exiled. There, I cleaned wounds, bandaged ulcers, even amputated gangrenous limbs. When a hurricane destroyed the exiles' shabby huts, I petitioned the Board of Health for lumber and built three hundred houses for the sick. I laid a pipeline to a distant spring to supply water for the settlement. I dug graves, built coffins, and said funeral Masses. Knowing the kanakas' love for festivities, I organized processions for the feast days and formed a choir and a band. Government officials and even my superiors occasionally hindered my efforts, but I persisted.

By 1885, after eleven years at Kalawao, it was evident that I had contracted leprosy. I died in 1889.

Pope John Paul II beatified me on June 4, 1995 and Pope Benedict XVI declared me a saint on October 11, 2009. I am now being adopted as the symbol of how society should treat HIV/AIDS patients.

S. D. C.
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