

Learn About the Saints



St. Damien de Veuster of Moloka'i

Biography

People may be familiar with leprosy from Biblical times, but not so much in the 1800s. However, St. Damien de Veuster of Moloka'i (January 3, 1840 – April 15, 1889) would eventually shed a light on the effects of this devastating disease and allow people to see those afflicted with it with more compassion and love.

Born Joseph de Veuster in Tremelo, Belgium, he quit school at 13 so he could work on the family farm. Feeling called for more, however, he entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary six years later, where he took the name of a fourth-century physician and martyr. His brother, a priest from the same congregation, fell ill and was unable to go to his assigned location. Damien quickly volunteered in his place and found himself on the Hawaiian Islands in 1864. Two months after arriving, he was ordained a priest of Honolulu and assigned to the Island of Hawaii.

In 1873, he visited the Hawaiian government's leper colony on the island of Moloka'i, where he petitioned to stay permanently to care for their physical, medical, and spiritual needs. After years of working to improve their location and those who lived there, he contracted Hansen's disease and died of its complications. He found the strength to endure isolation and disease in Eucharistic adoration and the celebration of the Mass. St. Damien was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009.

St. Damien de Veuster of Moloka'i, pray for us!

