Father Damien

For other people with similar names, see Father Damien (disambiguation) or Saint Damien (disambiguation).

Father Damien, SS.CC.,
Saint Damien of Molokai

A photograph of Father Damien taken shortly before his death

Religious, priest and missionary

| Born      | January 3, 1840  
|           | Tremelo, Belgium |
| Died      | April 15, 1889 (aged 49)  
|           | Kalaupapa, Molokaʻi, Hawaiʻi |
| Honored in| Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Catholic Churches, Episcopal Church; some churches of Anglican Communion; individual Lutheran Churches |
| Beatified | June 4, 1995, Basilica of the Sacred Heart (Koekelberg), Brussels, by Pope John Paul II |
| Canonized | October 11, 2009, Vatican City, by Pope Benedict XVI |
| Major shrine | Leuven, Belgium (bodily relics)  
|           | Molokaʻi, Hawaii (relics of his hand) |
| Feast     | May 10 (Catholic Church; obligatory in Hawaii, option in the rest of the United States); April 15 (Episcopal Church of the United States) |
| Patronage | people with leprosy |

Father Damien or Saint Damien of Molokaʻi, SS.CC. or Saint Damien de Veuster (Dutch: Pater Damien or Heilige Damien van Molokai, Hawaiian: Pāpā Kamiano o Molokaʻi; January 3, 1840 – April 15, 1889), born Jozef De Veuster, was a Roman Catholic priest from Belgium and member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, a missionary religious institute. He won recognition for his ministry in the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi to people with leprosy (also known as Hansen's disease), who had been placed under a government-sanctioned medical quarantine on the island of Molokaʻi.

After sixteen years caring for the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of those in the leper colony, he eventually contracted and died of the disease, resulting in his characterization as a "martyr of charity". He was the tenth person recognized as a saint by the Catholic Church to have lived, worked, and/or died in what is now the United States.[1]

In both the Latin Rite and the Eastern Rites of the Catholic Church, Damien is venerated as a saint, one who is holy and worthy of public veneration and invocation. In the Anglican communion, as well as other denominations of Christianity, Damien is considered the spiritual patron for leprosy and outcasts. As the patron saint of the Diocese of Honolulu and of Hawaii, Father Damien Day is celebrated statewide on April 15. Upon his beatification by Pope
John Paul II in Rome on June 4, 1995, Blessed Damien was granted a memorial feast day, which is celebrated on May 10. Father Damien was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday October 11, 2009. The Catholic Encyclopedia calls him "the Apostle of the Lepers" and elsewhere he is known as the "leper priest".

Early life
Damien was born Jozef ("Jef") De Veuster, the seventh child and fourth son of the Flemish corn merchant Joannes Franciscus ("Frans") De Veuster and his wife Anne-Catherine ("Cato") Wouters in the village of Tremelo in Flemish Brabant. He attended college at Braine-le-Comte, then entered the novitiate of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in Leuven, taking the name of Brother Damianus (Damiaan in Dutch, Damien in French) in his first vows, presumably in reference to the first Saint Damian.

Following in the footsteps of his sisters Eugénie and Pauline (who became nuns) and brother Auguste (Father Pamphile), Damien became a "Picpus" Brother (another name for members of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary) on October 7, 1860. His superiors thought that he was not a good candidate for the priesthood because he lacked education. However, he was not considered unintelligent. Because he learned Latin well from his brother, his superiors decided to allow him to become a priest. During his ecclesiastical studies, he would pray every day before a picture of St. Francis Xavier, patron of missionaries, to be sent on a mission. Three years later his prayer was answered when, because of illness, his brother Auguste could not travel to Hawaiʻi as a missionary, so Damien was allowed to take his place.

Mission to Hawaii
On March 19, 1864, Damien landed at Honolulu Harbor on Oahu as a missionary. There, Damien was ordained into the priesthood on May 21, 1864, at the Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace, a church that had been founded by his religious institute and today houses the Cathedral of the Bishop of Honolulu. In 1865 he was assigned to the Catholic Mission in North Kohala on the island of Hawaiʻi.

While Father Damien was serving in several parishes on O'ahu, the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi was facing a public health crisis. Some Native Hawaiians became infected by several diseases brought to the Hawaiian Islands by foreign traders and sailors. Thousands of Hawaiians died of influenza, syphilis, and other ailments that had never been seen there before. One of these other diseases was leprosy (Hansen's disease). At that time, leprosy was thought to be highly contagious, but later it was found that 95% of human beings are immune to it. Leprosy was also thought to be incurable. In 1865, out of fear of its spread, the Hawaiian Legislature passed, and King Kamehameha V approved, the "Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy". This law quarantined the lepers of Hawaii and caused them to be moved to settlement colonies of Kalaupapa and Kalawao on the eastern end of the Kalaupapa peninsula on the island of Molokaʻi. Kalawao County, where the villages are located, is divided from the rest of Molokaʻi by a steep mountain ridge, and even now the only land access to it is by a mule trail. About 8,000 Hawaiians were sent to the Kalaupapa peninsula from 1866 through 1969.

In the beginning, the Royal Board of Health provided the quarantined people with food and other supplies, but it did not have the resources to offer proper health care for them. According to documents of that time, the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi did not plan the settlements to be penal colonies, but the kingdom did not provide enough resources to support them. The kingdom planned for the inhabitants to grow their own crops but, because of the local
environment and the effects of leprosy, this was impractical. By 1868, according to the Catholic Encyclopedia (1911), "Drunken and lewd conduct prevailed. The easy-going, good-natured people seemed wholly changed."

While Bishop Louis Désiré Maigret, the vicar apostolic of the Honolulu diocese, believed that the lepers at least needed a Catholic priest to assist them, he realized that this assignment could become a death sentence. Hence he did not want to send any one person “in the name of obedience”. After much prayer, four priests volunteered to go. The bishop's plan was for the volunteers to take turns assisting the inhabitants. Father Damien was the first priest to volunteer and, on May 10, 1873, he arrived at the secluded settlement at Kalaupapa, where Bishop Maigret presented him to the 816 lepers living there. Damien's first course of action was to build a church and establish the Parish of Saint Philomena. His role was not limited to being a religious priest. He dressed ulcers, built a reservoir, built homes and furniture, made coffins, and dug graves. Six months after his arrival at Kalawao he wrote his brother, Pamphile, in Europe:

...I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ.

Father Damien's arrival is seen by some as a turning point for the community. Under his leadership, basic laws were enforced, shacks became painted houses, working farms were organized, and schools were established. At his own request and of the lepers, Father Damien remained on Moloka‘i.

**Illness and death**

In December 1884 while preparing to bathe, Damien inadvertently put his foot into scalding water, causing his skin to blister. He felt nothing. Damien had contracted leprosy. Despite this discovery, residents say that Damien worked vigorously to build as many homes as he could and planned for the continuation of the programs he created after he was gone.

Doctor Masanao Goto, a Japanese leprologist, came to Honolulu in 1885 and treated Father Damien. It was his theory that leprosy was caused by a diminution of the blood. His treatment consisted of nourishing food, moderate exercise, frequent friction to the benumbed parts, special ointments, and medical baths. The treatments did, indeed, relieve some of the symptoms and were very popular with the Hawaiian patients. Father Damien had faith in the treatments and stated that he wished to be treated by no one but Dr. Goto.

Dr. Goto was one of his best friends and Damien made his last trip to Honolulu on July 10, 1886, to receive treatment from him.

Damien engaged in a flurry of activity in his last years. While continuing his charitable ministrations, he hastened to complete his many building projects, enlarge his orphanages, and organize his work. Help came from four strangers who came to Kalaupapa to help the ailing missionary: a priest, a soldier, a male nurse, and a Religious Sister.
Louis Lambert Conrardy was a Belgian priest. Mother (now also Saint) Marianne Cope had been the head of the Franciscan-run St Joseph's Hospital in Syracuse, New York. Joseph Dutton was an American Civil War soldier who left behind a marriage broken by alcoholism. James Sinnett was a nurse from Chicago. Conrardy took up pastoral duties; Cope organized a working hospital; Dutton attended to the construction and maintenance of the community's buildings; Sinnett nursed Damien in the last phases of the disease. An arm in a sling, a foot in bandages and his leg dragging, Damien knew death was near. He was bedridden on March 23, 1889, and on March 30 he made a general confession.\[2\]

Father Damien died of leprosy at 8:00 AM on April 15, 1889, at the age of 49. The next day, after Mass by Father Moellers at St. Philomena's, the whole settlement followed the funeral cortège to the cemetery where Damien was laid to rest under the same pandanus tree where he first slept upon his arrival on Molokaʻi.

In January 1936, at the request of King Leopold III of Belgium and the Belgian government, Damien's body was returned to his native land. It was brought back aboard the Belgian sailing ship Mercator and now rests in Leuven, a historic university city close to the village where Damien was born. After his beatification in June 1995, the remains of his right hand were returned to Hawaii and re-interred in his original grave on Molokaʻi.\[3\]

Order of Kalākaua

King David Kalākaua bestowed on Damien the honor "Knight Commander of the Royal Order of Kalākaua". When Crown Princess Lydia Liliʻuokalani visited the settlement to present the medal, she was reported as having been too distraught and heartbroken to read her speech. The princess shared her experience with the world and publicly acclaimed Damien's efforts. Consequently, Damien's name was spread across the United States and Europe. American Protestants raised large sums of money for the missionary. The Church of England sent food, medicine, clothing, and supplies. It is believed that Damien never wore the medal given to him, although it was placed by his side at his funeral.

Criticism and commentary

C. M. Hyde; rebuttal by Robert Louis Stevenson

Upon his death, a global discussion arose as to the mysteries of Damien's life and his work on the island of Molokaʻi. Much criticism came out of the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in Hawaii. It is possible that these church leaders took a stance against Damien largely because of their bias against Catholicism. The most well-known treatise against Damien was by a Honolulu Presbyterian, Reverend Charles McEwen Hyde, in a letter dated August 2, 1889, to a fellow pastor, Reverend H. B. Gage; in it, Hyde referred to Father Damien as "a coarse, dirty man" whose leprosy should be attributed to his "carelessness".

In 1889 Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson and his family arrived in Hawaii for an extended stay. While there Stevenson, also a Presbyterian, drafted a famous open letter as a rebuttal in defense of Damien. The Catholic Encyclopedia judges that in this treatise "the memory of the Apostle of the Lepers is brilliantly vindicated". Prior to writing his letter, dated February 25, 1890, Stevenson stayed on Molokaʻi for eight days and seven nights, during which he kept a diary. In the letter Stevenson answered Hyde's criticisms point by point. He sought testimony from critical Protestants who knew the man, which he recorded in his diary. The treatise included some extracts, like the following, which upbraided Rev. Hyde for his fault finding:
But, sir, when we have failed, and another has succeeded; when we have stood by, and another has stepped in; when we sit and grow bulky in our charming mansions, and a plain, uncouth peasant steps into the battle, under the eyes of God, and succours the afflicted, and consoles the dying, and is himself afflicted in his turn, and dies upon the field of honour — the battle cannot be retrieved as your unhappy irritation has suggested. It is a lost battle, and lost for ever. One thing remained to you in your defeat — some rags of common honour; and these you have made haste to cast away.

In writing to Hyde, Stevenson proved prescient:

If that world at all remember you, on the day when Damien of Molokai shall be named a Saint, it will be in virtue of one work: your letter to the Reverend H. B. Gage.

Stevenson further chided Hyde for nit-picking Damien and failing to acknowledge his heroic virtue:

You are one of those who have an eye for faults and failures; that you take a pleasure to find and publish them; and that, having found them, you make haste to forget the overvailing virtues and the real success which had alone introduced them to your knowledge. It is a dangerous frame of mind.

Stevenson then comments on his own journal entries:

...I have set down these private passages, as you perceive, without correction; thanks to you, the public has them in their bluntness. They are almost a list of the man's faults, for it is rather these that I was seeking: with his virtues, with the heroic profile of his life, I and the world were already sufficiently acquainted. I was besides a little suspicious of Catholic testimony; in no ill sense, but merely because Damien's admirers and disciples were the least likely to be critical. I know you will be more suspicious still; and the facts set down above were one and all collected from the lips of Protestants who had opposed the father in his life. Yet I am strangely deceived, or they build up the image of a man, with all his weakness, essentially heroic, and alive with rugged honesty, generosity, and mirth.

The Catholic Encyclopedia further states that a correspondence in the Pacific Commercial Advertiser, June 20, 1905, "completely removes from the character of Father Damien every vestige of suspicion, proving beyond a doubt that Dr. Hyde's insinuations rested merely on misunderstandings".

Mahatma Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi offered his own defense of Father Damien's life and work. Gandhi claimed Damien to have been an inspiration for his social campaigns in India that led to the freedom of his people and secured aid for those that needed it. Gandhi was quoted in T.N. Jagadisan's 1965 publication, Mahatma Gandhi Answers the Challenge of Leprosy, as saying,

The political and journalistic world can boast of very few heroes who compare with Father Damien of Molokai. The Catholic Church, on the contrary, counts by the thousands those who after the example of Fr. Damien have devoted themselves to the victims of leprosy. It is worthwhile to look for the sources of such heroism.\[4\]
**Canonization**

In 1977 Pope Paul VI declared Father Damien to be venerable, the first of three steps that lead to sainthood. On June 4, 1995, Pope John Paul II beatified him and gave him his official spiritual title of Blessed. On December 20, 1999, Jorge Medina Estévez, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, confirmed the November 1999 decision of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to place Blessed Damien on the liturgical calendar with the rank of optional memorial. Father Damien was canonized on October 11, 2009, by Pope Benedict XVI. His feast Day is celebrated on May 10. In Hawaii it is celebrated on the day of his death, April 15.

Two miracles have been attributed to Father Damien's posthumous intercession: On June 13, 1992, Pope John Paul II approved the cure of a nun in France in 1895 as a miracle attributed to Venerable Damien's intercession. In that case, Sister Simplicia Hue began a novena to Father Damien as she lay dying of a lingering intestinal illness. It is stated that pain and symptoms of the illness disappeared overnight.

In the second case, Audrey Toguchi, a Hawaiian woman who suffered from cancer, was completely cured after having prayed at the grave of Father Damien on Moloka‘i: In 1997 Toguchi was diagnosed with liposarcoma, a cancer that arises in fat cells. She underwent surgery a year later. A tumor the size of a fist was removed from the side of her left thigh and buttock. Unfortunately, the cancer spread to her lungs. Her physician, Dr. Walter Chang, told her, "Nobody has ever survived this cancer. It's going to take you." The Toguchi case was documented in the Hawaii Medical Journal of October 2000.

In April 2008 the Holy See accepted the two cures as evidence of Father Damien's sanctity. On June 2, 2008, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican voted to recommend raising Father Damien of Moloka‘i to sainthood. The decree that officially notes and verifies the miracle needed for canonization was promulgated by Pope Benedict XVI and Cardinal José Saraiva Martins on Thursday, July 3, 2008, with the ceremony taking place in Rome and celebrations in Belgium and Hawaii. On February 21, 2009, the Vatican announced that Father Damien would be canonized. The ceremony took place in Rome on Rosary Sunday, October 11, 2009, in the presence of King Albert II of the Belgians and Queen Paola as well as the Belgian Prime Minister, Herman Van Rompuy, and several cabinet ministers, completing the process of canonization. In Washington, D.C., President Barack Obama affirmed his deep admiration for St. Damien, saying that he gave voice to voiceless and dignity to the sick.[3] Four other individuals were canonized with Father Damien at the same ceremony: Zygmunt Szczęsny Feliński, Sister Jeanne Jugan, Father Francisco Coll Guitart and Rafael Arnáiz Barón.
Father Damien

 Damien is honored, together with Marianne Cope, with a feast day on the liturgical calendar of the Episcopal Church (USA) on April 15.

**In arts and media**

The Father Damien Statue on the steps of the State Capitol Building honors him, while a replica is displayed in the National Statuary Hall Collection in the United States Capitol.

Screenwriter and film director John Farrow wrote a biography of him called *Damien the Leper*, which was published in 1937.

Director David Miller made a short film of Father Damien's life in 1938 entitled *The Great Heart*, released by MGM.

The first full-length film on Father Damien was *Molokai* (1959), a Spanish production directed by Luis Lucia with Javier Escrivá, Roberto Camardiel, and Gerard Tichy playing the main roles.

The one-man play *Damien* tells the story of Damien's life in the first person through a series of flashbacks.

Father Damien was portrayed in 1980 by Ken Howard in the television film *Father Damien: The Leper Priest*.

Belgian film producer Tharsi Vanhuysse produced and Paul Cox directed the 1999 film *Molokai: The Story of Father Damien*.

Interviews of former residents can be found in the documentary *The Soul of Kalaupapa: Voices of Exile* (2011). It focuses on the efforts of Father Damien among Catholic lepers and Jonatana Napela among LDS lepers in Kalaupapa in first-hand accounts.

**Legacy**

In 2005, Damien was honored with the title of *De Grootste Belg*, chosen as "The Greatest Belgian" throughout that country's history in polling conducted by the Flemish public broadcasting service, VRT. At the same time he was placed third on *Le plus grand Belge* ("The Greatest Belgian") by the French-speaking public channel RTBF.

In both ecumenical religious and nonsectarian communities, Damien's ministry to lepers is being cited as an example of how society should minister to HIV/AIDS patients. On the occasion of Damien's canonization, President Barack Obama stated, "In our own time, as millions around the world suffer from disease, especially the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, we should draw on the example of Father Damien's resolve in answering the urgent call to heal and care for the sick." Several clinics and centers nationwide catering to HIV/AIDS patients bear his name. There is a chapel named after him, and dedicated to people with HIV/AIDS, in St. Thomas the Apostle Hollywood, an Episcopal parish.

The Blessed Damien Society and other charities fighting leprosy have been set up in his name. A centre for "peace for families and individuals affected by bereavement, stress, violence, and other difficulties with particular attention to Northern Ireland".
The founding of Saint Damien Advocates was influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson's open letter to Reverend Charles McEwen Hyde defending Father Damien's work from criticism.

Damien is considered an important person in the history of Hawaii. The Father Damien Statue on the steps of the Hawaii State Capitol Building honors him, while a replica is displayed in the National Statuaries Hall Collection in the United States Capitol.[14]

Schools are named after him, including Damien High School in Southern California and Damien Memorial School in Hawaii. The village of Saint-Damien, Quebec is also named after him. Churches worldwide are also named after him.

St. Damien of Moloka‘i Catholic Church in Edmond, Oklahoma is believed to have been the first Roman Catholic church in the continental United States to be named for Saint Damien when it was dedicated in 2010. A Traditional Latin Mass church, it is operated by the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) and was authorized by Eusebius J. Beltran, Archbishop of Oklahoma City, in 2010.

At Waikiki, Honolulu, Hawaii, there is a Damien and Marianne of Moloka‘i Heritage Center, at the St. Augustine by the Sea Catholic Church. Marianne of Moloka‘i became a saint in 2012. The center is open several hours every day except holidays. Admission is free.

References

3_W_region:US-HI_type:landmark
1_E_region:BE-VBR_type:landmark

[13] Damien House, Ireland " (http://www.damienhouse.net/)
Sources


Further reading


External links

- Saint Damien of Molokai (http://www.fatherdamien.com)
- Kalaupapa National Historic Park (http://www.nps.gov/kala/) – about the human and natural community of Father Damien’s work
Article Sources and Contributors

Father Damien

Father Damien's signature 1880

Father Damien In 1873

Father Damien in wheelchair

Father Damien on his deathbed

Father Damien on his funeral bier with Mother Marianne Cope by his side

Father Damien grave
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Father Damien Sin

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