

January 23

St. Marianne Cope

1838–1918 • Germany

When Marianne Cope was only two years old, her family immigrated to the United States from Germany. Ever since she was young, Marianne knew that God wanted her to be a nun, and she joined the Franciscan sisters. Eventually, she was elected the mother superior and ran the local hospital. Some people criticized her for receiving “outcasts” in the hospital, but Sr. Marianne rejected no one who needed help. God used her time with the sick to prepare her for an important mission He had planned for her.

In 1883, the Hawaiian government sent a letter to Sr. Marianne, pleading that she come to Hawaii and take care of the lepers on the islands. At that time, there was no cure for the terrible disease of leprosy that damaged the flesh. The Hawaiian government had begged many other religious communities to send help, but none had answered the call. But Sr. Marianne’s heart leapt at the opportunity to serve the sick in Hawaii in Christ’s name. Immediately, she wrote back that it would be her greatest delight to serve the abandoned lepers.

Sr. Marianne and six of her nuns arrived in Honolulu and took charge of the hospital there. They tidied it up and made it a pleasant place to stay. They served the patients with tenderness and love. There were many young girls who had nobody to take care of them because their parents were sick with leprosy; so Sr. Marianne and her nuns started a home for the girls near the hospital.

A few years later, Sr. Marianne heard that a holy priest had fallen ill with leprosy. The priest’s name was Fr. Damien, and he would later become a saint. Fr. Damien served the lepers in a settlement colony on the island of Molokai, where the most hopeless cases of leprosy were sent. Sr. Marianne knew that this priest who had dedicated his life to care for others must now also be taken care of. She traveled to Molokai to comfort the dying priest and promised him that his beloved lepers would be looked after.

For the rest of her life, Sr. Marianne cared for the lepers in Hawaii. She worked so hard that eventually she had to use a wheelchair because she had worn her body out. She never caught leprosy herself, and she died a holy death in old age. St. Marianne Cope, help me take care of the sick!

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