

St. Damien of Molokai
May 10



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1840–1889 • Belgium

More than anything, Damien wanted to be a missionary. His older brother had joined the order of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and Damien followed in his brother's footsteps and also joined the order. He continued to pray hard to be a missionary, but it was his older brother who was selected to go on a mission to Hawaii. It seemed as if Br. Damien's prayer would not be answered. Then, right before he left, Br. Damien's older brother fell sick, and Br. Damien asked to go in his place. Permission was granted, and Br. Damien set sail for Hawaii.

Soon after Br. Damien landed in Honolulu, he was ordained a priest. There was an outbreak of leprosy in the kingdom of Hawaii. At that time, leprosy was an incurable disease that damaged the skin and the nerves. The Hawaiians were so afraid of leprosy that they quarantined the worst cases in a colony on the island of Molokai. Not even doctors and nurses went to Molokai because they were afraid of catching leprosy, too. Fr. Damien saw that that the lepers of Molokai needed a priest to share the love of Jesus with them and give them hope. And so he volunteered to go to Molokai.

Fr. Damien was tough, brave, and determined. He took care of the lepers' bodies as well as their souls. He dressed their sores; constructed coffins and dug graves; and built them a school, a church, and many homes. Fr. Damien said Mass for the lepers and heard their confessions. He told them that their lives were precious in the eyes of God. He spent many years comforting them and teaching them the Faith.

One evening, Fr. Damien was preparing his bath, and the water was so hot that it was scalding. He accidentally stepped into the hot water—but his foot felt nothing. Fr. Damien knew that he had caught leprosy. The nerves in his foot were so damaged by the illness that he felt no pain from the burning water. But leprosy did not stop Fr. Damien. His illness only made him work harder because now he knew he had less time to take care of his beloved lepers. He dragged his bandaged foot behind him as he traveled from sick bed to sick bed. Eventually, a nun traveled to Molokai to take care of him as he lay dying. The nun's name was Sister Marianne Cope. She, too, was a missionary and would also become a saint. She promised to carry on Fr. Damien's work and watched over him until he died a holy death. St. Damien of Molokai, help me never to be afraid to take care of others!