

... TAKING UP THE CROSS ...

Life of Damien

Among the crosses that Damien had to bear were the long times of loneliness and the absence of brothers with whom he could share his life and from whom he could receive the sacrament of forgiveness. This feeling was already present in the early years of his ministry in the district of Kohala, where, over many months, he never saw a brother. In the context of misery and moral degradation, this loneliness became unbearable for him at times. Thus, he wrote to his brother Pamphile from Kohala on September 22, 1870:

“Even though the missionary feels God’s help in a special way, nonetheless, the heart requires this kind of external assistance from colleague to remove the dark thoughts that daily contact with the corrupt world engenders.”

Later, there was the cross of his obligatory confinement in Molokai because of his illness. He wrote this to his brother Pamphile: *“As I was temporarily the only priest on the island of Molokai, I had to take as a confessor, our Lord, who remains in the tabernacle. Alas, my dear brother, it is at the foot of the altar that we find the necessary strength in our isolation. There I meet you every day and all the dear fathers of our beloved Congregation. Without the Blessed Sacrament, a situation like mine would be untenable. But with our Lord at my side, I’m always joyful and content.”* (Damien to Pamphile, December 13, 1881).

Then there was the cross of Damien’s relationship with some of his superiors. At times these relations were tense, above all when, in Damien’s judgment, the good of the mission came into play. Régis Moncany, the Vice-provincial of Hawaii, wrote about

Damien to the Superior General, Marcellin Bousquet, at the end of 1879 telling him: *“Without questioning his virtue and his zeal, the formation in Louvain once again has delivered a failed priest. On top of it, he has no brains and he lacks savoir vivre (sic).”* (Moncany to Superior General Bousquet, July 5, 1880)

Another cross was Damien’s character, which, at times, made his much desired community life with the brothers very difficult. This is demonstrated, for example, in the differences in criteria and pastoral style between Damien and Father Albert Montiton. These were so strong that Damien began to think about leaving the island of Molokai. Damien wrote to Bishop Koeckemann:

“If my attitude, which is not shared by Father Albert, does not please you either, then I will gladly leave the island of Molokai.” (Damien to Koeckemann, August 31, 1882)

Finally there is the cross of leprosy. Damien accepted it with all of the angles it entailed: pains, confinement, progressive limitations and impediments to the exercise of his ministry among the leprosy patients. The cross was part of following Jesus.

“The terrible disease which the Almighty allows to appear externally at this moment was expected from the time I set foot in the leper colony thirteen years ago. I had voluntarily accepted it beforehand. I hope that through the prayers of many; our Lord Jesus Christ will give me the strength necessary to carry my cross as far as our special Golgotha, Kalawao.” (Damien to Sr. Marie-Gabrielle, March 25, 1886)

As a disciple, like Simon of Cyrene, Damien always helped to carry the cross of Jesus.

In Damien’s letter of November 9, 1887 to his brother Pamphile, he wrote:

“You already know that Divine Providence has selected me to become a victim of the loathsome disease which is rife here. I hope to remain forever grateful to God for this mark of his favor. I feel that this illness will make the road to our beloved fatherland shorter and straighter. In this hope, I have accepted this special cross. I’m trying to carry it as Simon of Cyrene carried our Divine Lord’s-following in the footsteps of the Master. Help me with your prayers, that I may get the grace of perseverance until I have reached the hill of Calvary.”

At your feet, Jesus

Here at your feet I bring the cross that I find difficult to take up, yet try to carry with the same strength as you did.

I also bring you my brothers’ crosses, the crosses they have entrusted to me and that I help to carry as Simon of Cyrene did.

I am also here on behalf of so many other brothers and sisters who bear their crosses with a profound faith that reveals my lack of faith; and others whose crosses are so big that it makes them lose all hope of comfort and relief.

In contemplating you in your love given for all, help me to bear my cross and those of my brothers with a trusting and hopeful heart.



...taking up the cross...

“Then he said to all: – If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”

(Lk. 9: 23-24)

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The Year of Damien - 2014

Adoration Guide

ADORATION AND THE POOR