

... IN ORDER TO SERVE YOU IN THE POOREST OF THE POOR ...

Life of Damien

On his arrival in Molokai in 1873, Damien had to overcome his aversion to the wounds and above all the stench of those who had leprosy: *"Many a time in fulfilling my priestly duties at their domiciles I have been obliged not only to close my nostrils, but to remain outside to breathe fresh air...As an antidote to counteract the bad smell I got myself accustomed to the use of tobacco, whereupon the smell of the pipe kept me, somewhat, from carrying the obnoxious odor of our lepers in my clothes."* (Damien to Pamphile, November 25, 1873)

The orders that his superiors and the medical personnel had given him were very clear: "Don't touch them. Don't allow them to touch you. Don't eat with them". But how can you communicate the nearness of the love of God without approaching, touching and allowing yourself to be touched by the leprosy patients? Had this not been the practice of Jesus toward those with leprosy? Damien shared his pipe, food and hospitality with them, touching the suffering body of Jesus in the leprosy patients.

Damien wrote to the Superior General Marcellin Bousquet, from Molokai in August of 1873:

"They are repugnant to look at, but they also have a soul redeemed at the price of the precious blood of our Divine Savior. He too, in his divine love, consoled lepers. If I cannot heal them as he could, at least I can offer them comfort". (Damien to Superior General Bousquet, August 1873)

In this gradual and tangible closeness to the leprosy patients, the God of Jesus, proclaimed by Damien, became believable and kind. So at the end of his first year in Molokai he wrote to his family about the surprising happiness he found there:

"I find my greatest happiness in serving the Lord in his poor and sick children-who are rejected by others." (Damien to his parents and brothers, November 25, 1873).

After his visit to the island of Molokai in 1884, the writer, Charles Warren Stoddard (1843-1909), wrote to Damien thanking him for the time that had been an oasis of happiness in his life. One of the reasons for this happiness was Damien's untiring life in service to his brothers with leprosy. "You seemed to me to be happy, much happier than those who live in the world." (Stoddard to Damien, December 4, 1884)

In April 1967, Raoul Follereau, a Fervent Catholic Frenchman, who dedicated his life to the battle against poverty by looking for economic and social justice, handed Pope Paul VI a petition for the Beatification of Damian with the signatures of 32,864 lepers. Nearly half of the signatures were those Hindus. The other signatures were Christian, Muslim and Buddhist. The petition demonstrated the great affection for Father Damian throughout the entire world.

At your feet, Jesus

Here I am at your feet, Lord, as a useless servant. I have done nothing more than what I had to do. And yet, sometimes it is hard for me because I have to fight with my laziness, my comfort, my weariness with the things that don't turn out or with the things that don't seem to have a solution.

You know well the resistances both within me and towards the people I meet in order to be servant to my brothers.

I see you Lord in so many people who live on our streets, in the train station, in the slum areas, and in the prisons who are the untouchables, the undesirables, those who don't count, and those who no one looks at. Lord, how do you see these untouchables, these marginalized?

Transform my heart, my way of seeing, so I can go to meet these brothers who are on the edges of our streets, abandoned by all, as Damien did, because you would do it.

Lord, help us, as Christians, to go beyond our borders in order to serve you in the poorest and most suffering members of humankind.



**...in order
to serve
You in the
poorest of
the poor...**

“And then a leper approached, did him homage, and said, – Lord, if you wish, you can make me clean. – He stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, – I will do it. Be made clean. – His leprosy was cleansed immediately.”

(Mt. 8: 1-3)

The Year of Damien - 2014

Adoration Guide

ADORATION AND THE POOR