

# 3 January

## Anniversary of the Birth of St. Damien De Veuster ssc

*Painting (1840) of the birthplace of Joseph De Veuster in Tremelo.*



Damien was his name in religion. He did not acquire it until his twentieth year.

Born on January 3, 1840, he was baptized Joseph, youngest son and seventh of the eight children of Frans and Anne-Catherine De Veuster, small farmers with land and a house of modest substance at Tremeloo, a village near the provincial city of Louvain in Belgium.

The De Veusters were Flemish-speakers, rural people with neither especially broad horizons nor high worldly expectations.

The father, Frans, was an adequate provider, and by the standards of his time and place an adequate Christian as well, meaning that he was a Catholic who confessed and went to communion perhaps four times a year.

The mother, Anne-Catherine, was more devout, more intimately involved in religion; and the children, Joseph among them, took homely instruction in holiness from her. She kept a book of saints' lives about the house, an impressive volume, 60 by 40 cm, written in Old Flemish and printed in gothic characters. It fascinated the children; and they would often insist that she stop work and read aloud to them, especially stories of hermits, devoted Christians who turn their backs on the world, and ancient martyrs, ready to suffer death for the faith.

The farm and Church, rusticity and religiosity – Joseph grew up watching his brothers and sisters make their accommodations with these two worlds in one. Three of the De Veuster children before him, two girls and a boy, chose to give their lives to the Church; Joseph's own religious vocation was the fourth and last in the family.



*The De Veuster family.*

Gavan Daws, "Holy man"