

Corporal Work of Mercy To Visit the Sick



St. Damien of Molokai

Catechism of the Catholic Church

“Christ's compassion toward the sick and his many healings of every kind of infirmity are a resplendent sign that “God has visited his people” and that the Kingdom of God is close at hand. Jesus has the power not only to heal, but also to forgive sins; he has come to heal the whole man, soul and body; he is the physician the sick have need of. His compassion toward all who suffer goes so far that he identifies himself with them: “I was sick and you visited me.” His preferential love for the sick has not ceased through the centuries to draw the very special attention of Christians toward all those who suffer in body and soul. It is the source of tireless efforts to comfort them” (CCC 1503)

Sacred Scripture

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” – James 1:27

In the Old Testament, we read that anyone diagnosed with leprosy – or any skin condition that could be viewed as leprosy – would be declared ritualistically unclean and cast out of the camp for purification. If, after purification according to the Law of Moses, one was not cleansed of leprosy, the leper had to wear “torn clothes and let the hair of his head hang loose, and he shall cover his upper lip and cry, ‘Unclean, unclean’” (Leviticus 13:45). The leper would then be forced to “dwell alone in a habitation outside the camp” (Leviticus 13:46).

From the earliest days of our history, leprosy has been feared as an incurable disease. It was not until relatively recently that a treatment for leprosy was discovered, yet even still we tend to ignore those most in need of our compassion and service. It is easy to overlook the sick and the sorrowful when we are ourselves physically, spiritually, or mentally healthy.

Christ is our model to Visit the Sick. When an outcast leper approached him in the Gospel of Matthew, Christ unhesitatingly reached out to him, touched him, and healed him of his leprosy (Matthew 8:3). So too has St. Damien of Moloka'i emulated Christ by serving the least among us by visiting the sick, particularly the Leper Colonies of Moloka'i.

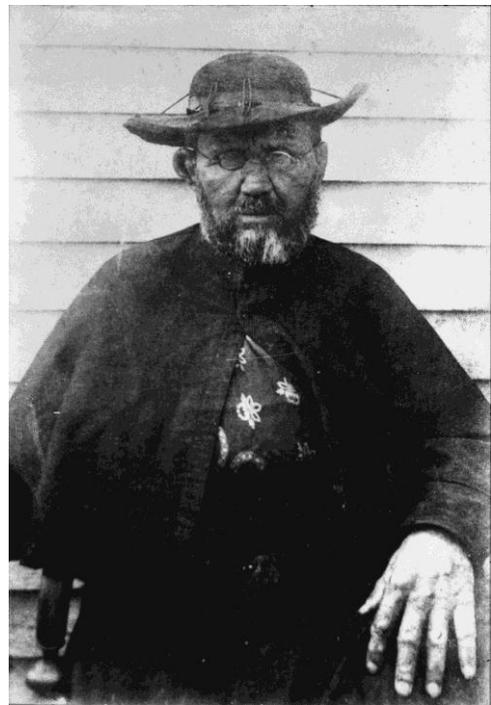
“I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all to Jesus Christ.”

Visit the Sick

St. Damien of Molokai

Fast Facts:

Born	• January 3, 1840
Ordained	• May 21, 1864
Feast Day	• May 10
Canonized	• October 11, 2009 by Pope St. John Paul II
Quote	• <i>"Having no doubts about the true nature of the disease, I am calm, resigned, and very happy in the midst of my people. God certainly knows what is best for my sanctification and I gladly repeat: 'Thy will be done.'"</i>



His Life:

- Born to a Flemish corn merchant in Tremelo, Belgium in 1840.
- Attended college in Braine-le-Comte, then entered the novitiate of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary.
- He became a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary on October 7, 1860.
- Though he was considered uneducated by his superiors, he was able to become a priest.
- For years Damien would pray before a picture of St. Francis Xavier and ask to be sent on a mission.
- On March 19, 1864, Damien landed at Honolulu Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii.
- He was ordained a priest on May 12, 1864.
- In 1865 he was assigned to a Mission in North Kohala.
- In 1865, the Hawaiian Legislature passed the "Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy" and quarantined all of their lepers to a settlement colony of Kalawao on the island of Moloka'i.

- At the Bishop's request, Fr. Damien was the first priest to volunteer in 1873 to serve the leper mission.
- Under his leadership, basic laws were enforced, shacks were upgraded, working farms were organized, schools were established, and the parish of St. Philomena was constructed.
- In 1884, Damien realized he contracted leprosy, but still continued to serve the Mission.
- In 1889, Damien died in his bed at the age of 49.

How is St. Damien of Molokai a model for living out the Corporal Work of Mercy – To Visit the Sick?

Leprosy was still not fully understood in the late nineteenth century, and the first effective treatment for leprosy was not discovered until the 1940s. The stigma and fear surrounding leprosy was still very real in the 1800s, yet this did not stop St. Damien from serving the people of Moloka'i. Though he was considered uneducated, his zeal and passion for the Lord did not stand in his way of volunteering to serve the community at Moloka'i. Like Christ, he visited the outcast and ministered to those who had been alienated from their community.

Practices to Foster growth in Visiting the Sick

- **Read a passage of Scripture that give examples of *Visiting the Sick*. Re-read the passage and pick a word or phrase that stood out for you.**
 - Matthew 25:34-40
 - Luke 4:40
 - Galatians 6:2
 - Philippians 2: 3-4
 - James 1: 27
 - James 5:13-15
- **Catechetical Texts that speak to *Visiting the Sick*:**
 - “The man of the Old Testament lives his sickness in the presence of God. It is before God that he laments his illness, and it is of God, Master of life and death, that he implores healing. Illness becomes a way to conversion; God's forgiveness initiates the healing. It is the experience of Israel that illness is mysteriously linked to sin and evil, and that faithfulness to God according to his law restores life: "For I am the Lord, your healer." The prophet intuits that suffering can also have a redemptive meaning for the sins of others. Finally Isaiah announces that God will usher in a time for Zion when he will pardon every offense and heal every illness” (CCC 1502).
- **Name some people from the Bible or saints who lived out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Visit the Sick*.**
 - Examples: (Elisha, St. Peregrine, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, St. Catherine of Siena, St. John Paul II)
- **Ask the Lord how he is calling you to live out the Spiritual Work of Mercy, *To Visit the Sick*?**