

St. Damien knew he had contracted Hansen's disease when in 1884, he scaled his feet and felt no pain. Over the next five years, he gradually succumbed to the ravages of the disease. On April 15, 1889, the Monday of Holy Week, sixteen years after setting foot at Kalaupapa, at the age of forty-nine, he died. St. Damien's body was buried under the Pandanus tree where he first slept at the settlement, beside St. Philomena Church. It was where he wanted to be buried. In 1936, at the request of the Belgian government, St. Damien's body which was exhumed and brought to the country of his birth, Belgium, where it was laid to rest in St. Joseph Chapel in Louvain.

*\*(written by Anna Weaver for the Hawaii Catholic Herald on May 18, 2007).*

**\*\***His fame spread to the entire world. In 1938 the process for his beatification was introduced at Malines (Belgium). Pope Paul VI signed the Decree on the "heroics of his virtues" on July 7, 1977. In Father Damien, the Church proposes an example to all those who find sense for their life in the Gospel and who wish to bring the Good News to the poor of our time.

In 1995, Father Damien was beatified by Pope John Paul II in Brussels. On October 11, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI raised Father Damien to the rank of "sainthood." Father Damien's Feast Day is May 10.

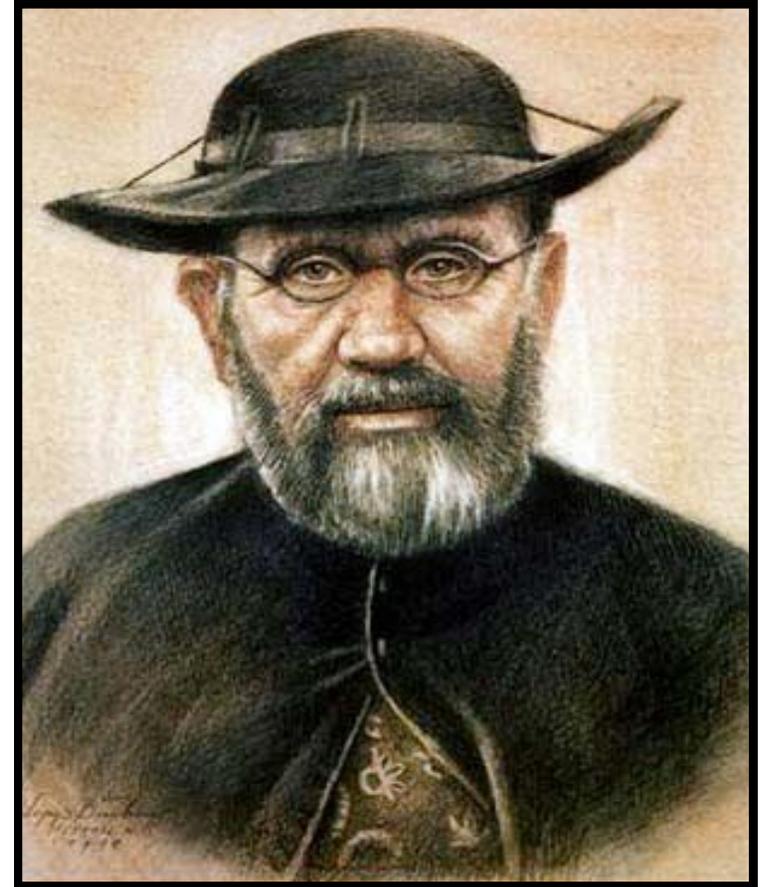
*\*\**(excerpted from: [www.fatherdamien.com](http://www.fatherdamien.com))



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## Saint Damien Joseph de Veuster of Molokai

**Feast day: May 10**



*"It is at the foot of the altar that we find  
the strength we need in our isolation"*

## **\*The life of father Damien**

Joseph de Veuster, later to be known as St. Damien of Molokai, was born January 3, 1840, in the small town of Tremelo in Belgium, the seventh of eight children of Frans and Anne Catherine de Veuster. Joseph's father was a farmer – merchant and expected his son to take over the family business. Muscular, strong and energetic, the young Joseph had the physical qualifications for the farming life, but not the heart. Two older sisters and one older brother had joined the religious life and Joseph wanted to follow their footsteps.

Joseph's sisters Eugenic and Pauline had become Ursuline nuns and his brother Auguste had entered the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and the Perpetual Devotion of the Most Blessed Sacrament. At eighteen, Joseph joined Auguste in his order at Louvain, Belgium. Auguste had taken the religious name Pamphile. On February 2, 1859, Joseph made his first vows and took the name Damien after the ancient physician and martyr.

St. Damien embraced the religious life with enthusiasm, taking in his final vows on October 7, 1860, at the Sacred Heart's Motherhouse on Rue Picpus in Paris and receiving his minor orders in 1863. That year, the newly ordained Father Pamphile was supposed to join a group of priests and nuns going to the Sacred Hearts mission in Hawaii, but fell ill. St. Damien volunteered and received permission to take his brother's place.

On March 19, 1864, after a five-month voyage St. Damien arrived at Honolulu in the Kingdom of Hawaii. After two months of studies, he was ordained on May 21 a priest at the Cathedral of our Lady of Peace in downtown Honolulu. St. Damien was assigned, with the also newly ordained Father Clement Evrard, to the Big Island of Hawaii. His first "parish" was in Puna, an area on the island's east side. Before a year was out, he had exchanged districts with Father Clement, moving to the larger and more rugged northern regions of Kohala and Hamakua. St. Damien spent almost ten years on the Big Island endearing himself to the Hawaiian people with his friendliness, vigor and enthusiasm. He learned their language, shared their food, and traversed their land, while building churches, spreading the Gospel, and baptizing hundreds.

Early Hawaiians were particularly susceptible to the leprosy bacillus as well as numerous other diseases introduced from the outside. By the time St. Damien arrived to Hawaii, approximately four fifths of the original pre-Captain Cook population, estimated at about 250,000 people, had already been killed off by typhus, cholera, syphilis, influenza, measles, smallpox and other diseases for which they had no immunity. Hansen's disease was probably introduced to Hawaii by Chinese immigrant laborers. The official response to the disease in Hawaii was the centuries-old western "solution" of isolation and segregation. In 1863, King Kamehameha V decreed that persons suspected of having leprosy be inspected by the newly formed Board of Health. "Incurables" was sent to Kalaupapa.

The Kalaupapa Peninsula juts out from the northern coastline of Molokai, a four-square mile plain extending from the base of a 2000 – 3000 foot-high cliffs. The only way in or out of the settlement is by foot or mule down a zigzag trail from the cliff top, or by boat, or today by small airplane. The west side of the peninsula is dry, the east side wet, windy, and often in the shadow of the towering heights. It was on the east side, called Kalawao, which the victims of leprosy were left to fend for themselves.

Sacred Hearts Bishop Louis Maigret was extremely concerned about the plight of those abandoned at Kalawao, in fact, occasional visits by men of his congregation resulted in the building of the small St. Philomena chapel. However, the Bishop did not want to force a priest there permanently "in the name of obedience." However, at a meeting on Maui in 1873, four priests volunteered to take turns visiting the settlement. Taken the first "shift" was St. Damien. Soon after his arrival into Kalawao on May 10, 1873, St. Damien wrote to his superior in Honolulu saying that it was "absolutely necessary" for a priest to remain there permanently and that he was willing to be the one.

Abandoned for nearly a decade, the Kalawao community had collapsed into chaos by the time Damien had arrived. The neglect had resulted in despair, drunkenness, licentiousness and abuse. Upon entering Kalawao, to the outside world Damien became an instant hero. Inside Kalawao he was doctor, nurse, carpenter, farmer, legal advocate, landscaper, plumber, supplies procurer, gravedigger and coffin maker.

His transformation of Kalawao surprised many people. He gave dignity and respect to a community previously left for dead. With the help of the stronger patients, he built houses, an orphanage, and a church. He enlarged the hospital, laid water pipes, and improved the boat landing and the road leading to the wharf. Although at times he was physically repulsed by the infection, stench and disfigurement of Hansen's disease, he managed to treat the victim with compassion and a gentle touch. Disregarding contemporary medical precaution, he ate with his people, accepted them into his house, and touched them. St. Damien visited the sick and every house in his settlement at least once a week. He organized religious associations, a children's band, and a choir. He even instituted perpetual devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, a practice special to his religious congregation. The number of catechumens increased by tens and then thousands.

First and foremost, St. Damien was a priest and faithful to the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts. Into each day, he scheduled prayer, adoration, meditation, Mass, the Divine Office, spiritual reading and the Rosary. "Without the Blessed Sacrament, a position like mine would be intolerable," he wrote.