



Saint Damien

While Damien was in Hawaii, the illness called “leprosy” was spreading quickly. Leprosy is a contagious illness and at that time there was no medicine yet. When you became ill, you were sent to the island Molokai. Sick children were sent away as well. On the island, all the inhabitants were sick.



Damien wanted to be close to them, so he took the boat to Molokai. Before he began his work, he rested under a special tree, a Pandanus tree. He prayed, and he came close to God and God came close to him.

The work at Molokai was hard: there were few houses, there were no doctors, and many people died from leprosy. But Damien remained joyful and full of energy.

He built wooden houses for the people. He built a little church where he celebrated mass every week. He visited the sick and he played with the children. And from time to time, he wrote a letter to his family in Belgium. Then he asked how everyone was doing. He asked for money or for building materials. He never stopped asking for help.

He still was as diligent as a bee. He found a new home, and a new family. And God was close to them.



SAINT DAMIEN

(REMEMBERED ON MAY 10, DIED IN 1889)



Damien came close to the people suffering from leprosy, so close that he became sick himself. After a while, he could not get out of his bed anymore. He knew that he was going to die, but stayed joyful and full of energy.



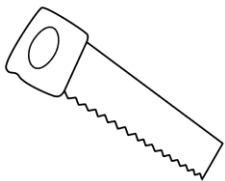
He was still concerned about his new family, especially about the children. He wrote letters to ask for marbles for the children, so they could play.

He died with a smile on his face. He knew that he was going home, God's home. He was buried under a special tree, the Pandanus tree.

We remember Damien, because he knew that all people are one big family.

The story of Father Damien

Almost 200 years ago, Damien was born in Belgium. His name was not yet Damien by then. His parents named him "Jozef". He grew up in a big family: he had 3 brothers and 4 sisters, and God was close to them.



His parents were farmers. On a farm, there is always work to do. The children helped along. Little Jozef took care of the animals and worked in the fields. A carpenter nearby showed him how to work with wood.

When he was 18 years old, he decided to leave the family home and went to the monastery, just as his older brother Pamfiel did. At the monastery, he found a new home. He liked his new home, and was filled with joy and laughter. His name was changed into Damien.

His brother Pamfiel was ready to leave Belgium and to travel to Hawaii, as a missionary priest. But shortly before the departure, he became ill. Damien took his place. He was 23 years old. It would be his work to tell about Jesus and to care for the people.

He said goodbye to his family and took the boat to the other side of the world. The journey would last for 140 days.



At Hawaii, everything was different: the language, the habits, the religion, the weather, the animals, even the flowers... It did not scare Damien. He knew that God was close to him.

At first, he learned the new language and he became a priest. Then, he began his work, excited and full of energy. But ... what was his work?

He visited people, especially the sick people.

He told stories about Jesus. He built wooden churches and little chapels.



He cultivated vegetables. He kept sheep and bees. He was as diligent as a bee.

At Hawaii, he had found a new home and a new family. He cared for them. From time to time, he wrote a letter to his family in Belgium.