

## **October 13: Authentic Missionary Service**

An obvious parallel exists between today's first reading and the Gospel: the curing of victims of leprosy. The ten lepers call out: "Jesus! Master! Take pity on us." Jesus heals them and asks them to be "certified" by the Jewish priests that they have been cured. Surprisingly, only one returns to express his gratitude to Jesus. Jesus confirms the grateful Samaritan's "profound healing" by telling him: "Your faith has saved you."

These Scripture narratives invite us to recall the life of a sterling missionary who profoundly transformed people's lives. Jozef Damien de Veuster, popularly known as "Damien the Leper," was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI on October 11, 2009. Born in 1840 on a small farm near Louvain in Belgium, he left for Hawaii in 1863 and arrived six months later; he was ordained in Honolulu in May 1864. Damien served for nine years on the Island of Hawaii. In early 1873, he was the first priest volunteer who offered himself to serve the lepers who were segregated on the island of Molokai, since there was no known cure for the dreaded disease which was ravaging the island archipelago.

Damien's assignment letter from Father Modeste, his religious superior, read: "You may stay as long as your devotion dictates." Damien read the letter over and over again—until his death sixteen years later at age 49. As a missionary on Molokai, Damien wrote his brother in Europe: "I make myself a leper with the lepers to gain all for Jesus Christ. That is why, in preaching, I say 'we lepers,' not, 'my brethren'." Damien strove to configure himself to Christ. He died on April 15, 1889; it was Holy Week. Damien lived a transformed and transforming life. His example of service of the poor inspires us not to forget the needy right in our midst. Saint Damien, apostle of compassion, pray for us.