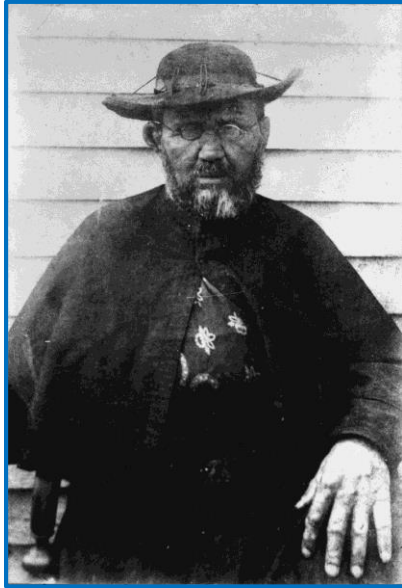


# The Martyr of Charity on Molokai



In 1873, a Belgian Catholic priest named Joseph Damien De Veuster was sent to minister to lepers on the Hawaiian island of Molokai in the Kingdom of Hawai'i, where they were required to live under a government-sanctioned medical quarantine.

When he arrived, he immediately began to meet each one of the lepers in the colony in hopes of building a friendship. But wherever he turned, people shunned him. It seemed as though every door was closed.

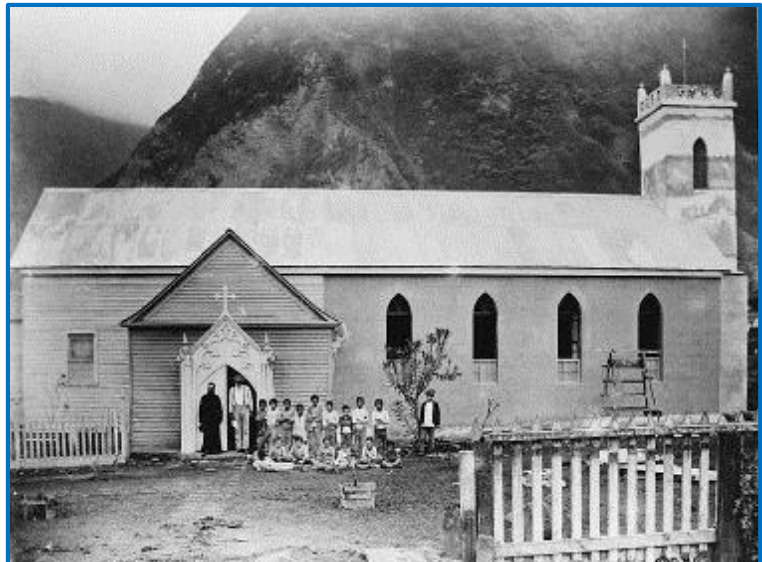
He plunged his life into his work, erecting a chapel, beginning worship services and pouring out his heart to the lepers. But it was to no avail. No one responded to his ministry. After 12 years, Father Damien made the decision to leave.

Dejectedly, he made his way to the docks to board a ship to take him back to Belgium. As he stood on the dock, he wrung his hands nervously as he recounted his futile ministry among the lepers. As he did so, he looked down at his hands and noticed some mysterious white spots and felt some numbness. Almost immediately, he knew what was happening to his body. He had contracted leprosy.

It was then Father Damien knew what he had to do. He returned to the leper colony and to his work. Quickly, the word about his disease spread throughout the colony. Within a matter of hours, everyone knew.

Hundreds of the lepers gathered outside his hut. They understood his pain, his fear and his uncertainty about the future.

But the biggest surprise came the following Sunday. As Father Damien arrived at the chapel, he found hundreds of worshippers there. By the time the service began, the chapel was crowded, and many – unable to get in – were gathered outside.



(more)

His ministry became enormously successful. The reason?

He was one of them. He understood and empathized with them. And they with him.



When Father Damien died in 1889, he was described as a “martyr of charity.”

What’s the lesson for us to be drawn from the story of Father Damien?

We don’t have to develop a disease or some condition to identify with those we serve – or lead.

If we project ourselves as superior – whether intentionally or not – because of

title, education or economic benefits, that is a turn-off. People respond much better because we are one of them, working *with* them rather than issuing directives. They want to know we are one of them.

Such an example allows us to be successful.

*Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:3-4 ESV).*

– Beecher Hunter