

SAINTS ALIVE! SEPTEMBER 8, ST. PETER CLAVER, PATRON OF SLAVES



Peter Claver was a Spanish Jesuit who became a missionary in Columbia in the early 17th century. Affected by the thousands of African slaves who arrived each year to work in the Columbian gold and silver mines, he devoted his life to them. During the 40 years of his ministry in Colombia it is estimated he personally baptized around 300,000 slaves. **Peter Claver is the patron saint of slaves.**

Four and a half centuries later, the world continues to be infected by the disease of slavery. Today's slavery goes by another name: human trafficking. Pope Francis devoted his 2015 World Day of Peace message to this blight: *No Longer Slaves, But Brothers and Sisters*.

According to the [UN global initiative to fight human trafficking](#), the trafficking of people is the fastest-growing form of international crime and the third-largest criminal industry after drugs and arms trafficking.

"Today, as the result of a growth in our awareness, slavery, seen as a crime against humanity, has been formally abolished throughout the world. The right of each person not to be kept in a state of slavery or servitude has been recognized in international law as inviolable." (*No Longer Slaves*, 3)

Claver visited the slave ships when they entered the port. He entered the filthy and diseased holds to minister to slaves who had survived a long voyage across the Atlantic. He would baptize them. He would follow up on them to ensure that they received their Christian and civil rights.

Claver saw the slaves as they were, fellow Christians.

When we look upon today's slaves as anything else than fellow Christians and gifts of God, we view them as commodities. We deprive them of their dignity. These are the poor and vulnerable who are forced, coerced, or by economic choice enter into this nether world.

"Millions of people today – children, women and men of all ages – are deprived of freedom and are forced to live in conditions akin to slavery." (*No Longer Slaves*, 3)

"I think of the many men and women laborers, including minors, subjugated in different sectors, whether formally or informally, in domestic or agricultural workplaces." (*No Longer Slaves*, 3)

"I think also of the living conditions of many migrants who...upon arriving at their destination after a grueling journey marked by fear and insecurity, are detained in at times inhumane conditions. I think of those among them, who for different social, political and economic reasons, are forced to live clandestinely." (*No Longer Slaves*, 3)

"I think also of persons forced into prostitution, many of whom are minors, as well as male and female sex slaves." (*No Longer Slaves*, 3)

For this reason I urgently appeal to all men and women of good will ... not to become accomplices to this evil, not to turn away from the sufferings of our brothers and sisters, our fellow human beings, who are deprived of their freedom and dignity. Instead, may we have the courage to touch the suffering flesh of Christ, revealed in the faces of those countless persons whom he calls "the least of these my brethren" (Mt 25:40, 45). (*No Longer Slaves*, 6)

Like Saint Peter Claver, let us see the "Christ" within each and every person, especially those who are the world's modern slaves for whom we pray.



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