



## Patron Saint of Leprosy

(Also HIV/AIDS, those who are bullied, Outcasts, the State of Hawaii)

Saint Damien was born Jozef De Veuster in Belgium on January 3, 1840. He was the youngest in a large family of seven. He knew early on that he didn't want to run the family farm like he was intended. Instead, he wanted to follow in the footsteps of three of his older siblings (1 brother and 2 sisters!) who had entered the religious life. Jozef wanted to use his desire for adventure to glorify God. He attended school until he was 13, when his help was needed full time on the farm.

Around the age of 19, Jozef joined the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and became Br. Damien. Soon after, Br. Damien offered to take the place of his ill brother, who was also part of the Congregation, on a mission to Hawaii. There was a concern that he was too uneducated to become a priest, but he demonstrated his intelligence by quickly learning Latin from his brother. He was also devoted in prayer, praying each day before an icon of Saint Francis Xavier to be sent on a mission. Eventually, his religious brothers agreed to send him to Hawaii and there, he was ordained a priest in 1864. After almost a decade of quiet service, he was sent to the island's newly established leper colony.

What was supposed to be a temporary placement ended up being Fr. Damien's lifelong vocation. Upon arriving, he quickly realized this was where his earlier drive for adventure had been leading him. The colony was so poorly maintained and anarchy reigned among the people living there. Many patients required treatment but there was no one to care for them. Others took to drinking and became severe alcoholics. There was no law, and no order. He volunteered to stay permanently, despite the risk he would have of getting the disease too.

At that time, leprosy was still highly misunderstood and feared, so lepers were completely outcast by society. The mental, societal, and emotional implications of the disease were often far worse than the physical ramifications. The



people really needed someone who would love them unconditionally and see their humanity beyond their disease.

Fr. Damien ministered to the quarantined and misunderstood people with love, understanding, and orderliness. He did the unthinkable through this ministry. He would eat with, touch, and even embrace them, something no one else was willing to do out of fear for their own lives. Fr. Damien believed that he wouldn't be able to reach the people spiritually without joining with them physically. He provided them leadership, but also love. Through his help, houses and schools were built, and even a parish church, St. Philomena, that still stands today. The colony went from unruly depression to joyful community because of his efforts. The sick were cared for and the dead buried. Order and routine made the colony livable. Father Damien personally provided much of the care the people needed.

He was supposed to only work in the colony for a time then he would be replaced by one of three other volunteers for the work. But the leper colony was to become his permanent home. After working with the people for a time Fr. Damien grew attached to the people and his work. He asked permission to stay at the colony to serve. His request was granted.

Leprosy is not as contagious as most people of the period assumed, however five percent of the human population is susceptible. The disease can also take several years to show symptoms.



Inevitably, Fr. Damien contracted leprosy himself. He suffered through disfigurement and pain for four years. He eventually died from the disease in 1889 after spending 16 years ministering to these people. He provided for those so

desperately in need of God's love and the care of a human who wasn't afraid of them.

St. Damien of Molokai is very appropriately the patron saint of people with leprosy. He is still heralded as a heroic figure in Hawaii today. He was even selected to represent the state in the National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol building. The 19th century saint, Damien of Molokai, certainly wasn't satisfied with sitting around waiting for someone else to solve the world's problems. He saw a need and took action to help – and that particular need was ministering to lepers.

<https://www.praymorenovas.com/st-damien-of-molokai-novena> and [https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint\\_id=2817](https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=2817)



St. Damien in 1873



## Praying the Chaplet of St. Damien of Molokai

Modified from a Novena from

<https://prayers4reparation.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/novena-prayer-to-st-damien-patron-of-those-with-hiv-aids-and-of-people-who-are-bullied/>

Opening Prayer: <https://novenaprayer.com/2021/04/30/st-damien-of-molokai-novena-2/>

**Opening Prayer on Medal:** Saint Damien, you ministered to those in despair and isolation. I call upon you to open my heart and mind, to care for the poor, the sick, the weary, and those forgotten. Bestow upon me the inner strength of faith, and unconditional compassion to be a disciple of Christ. I come before you a humble servant of God, please bless me with the spirit of your love and instill in me the touch of healing and grace that you yourself possessed. Amen

**Invitatory Bead:** For the Leper Colonies still in existence today, especially those hidden in Vietnam, *Our Father*

**FIRST DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you were sent away to school in a region where you didn't speak the language and people tried to bully you because of it. We pray for those who are bullied whether at school or at work or in whatever situation. May they emulate you in not accepting it. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**SECOND DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you loved your parents but you loved God more. You knew God was calling you to the priesthood and you answered that call although you knew your parents had other hopes of you. May we put God first and never refuse his call because of any other attachment. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**THIRD DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you gave up family, country and language to go and evangelize, knowing that you would never see your home or family again. Accord us something of your courage and clear-sightedness. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**FOURTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, in Hawaii you worked tirelessly, giving everything to make Christ known. We pray that we can value our faith as much as you did. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**FIFTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, when you went to Molokai you were prepared to give up your life to serve others. Help us to understand this Christian love and

begin to desire it for ourselves. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**SIXTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, when you first arrived in the leper colony you were revolted by the patients, but you didn't let them see this and continued to work for them. We pray to have this spirit so we can put others first, thinking of their needs and feelings rather than our own. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**SEVENTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you didn't deal well with bureaucracy and often offended people by your brusqueness. You had to learn to ask forgiveness. May we never think God cannot use us because of our character, and may we too have the humility to ask pardon of those we have offended. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**EIGHTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you suffered greatly on Molokai because you were cut off from the sacraments, especially the sacrament of reconciliation. May we understand the importance of this sacrament and have recourse to it often. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**NINTH DAY/SET:** Dear St Damien, you suffered terrible loneliness and turned to the Blessed Sacrament for comfort. We pray for all who are lonely. Help us to give time to anyone we know who is lonely, and to give time to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. We pray especially for (mention your request). *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be.*

**Closing Prayer on Centerpiece (or Medal):** God, our Father, we give thanks for Damien, our brother. Following Jesus, Your Son, he went to the lepers of Molokai, he became one of them even unto death; he showed them that You love them; he gave them back the pride of being human, and the hope of a future. Therefore, we ask You; may we be resurrected by Your Spirit to walk in the footsteps of Damien, to be animated by the same faith. Open our eyes, open our hearts, that we might go to all those abandoned, ignored, forgotten. Obtain that through us they may discover who You are. Raise up men and women ready to follow the road he has walked. This is the prayer that we address to You, Father full of tenderness and love, You, our God, always and for all eternity. Amen.

Closing Prayer: <https://prayers4reparation.wordpress.com/2014/06/30/prayer-to-st-damien-of-molokai/>

**\*Lepers still exist today, and still need our help. Get more information, and learn how you can help:**

<https://damientheleper.org/our-mission/about-us/>