



Father Damien

Given by Hawai'i to the National Statuary Hall Collection

FATHER DAMIEN WAS BORN JOSEPH DE VEUSTER in Tremelo, Belgium, on January 3, 1840. The son of well-to-do parents, he entered the Sacred Hearts Congregation at Louvain in January 1859 and five years later was ordained a priest in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace in Honolulu.

While in Kohala, Father Damien wrote to the Father General that many of his parishioners had been shipped to a leper colony on Moloka'i and that he had "an undeniable feeling that soon I shall join them." On May 10, 1873, Father Damien traveled with Bishop Maigret and a shipload of lepers to Moloka'i. After two days Damien was willing to devote the rest of his life to the leper settlement. The bishop replied that he could stay as long as his devotion dictated. Father Damien accomplished amazing feats while residing on Moloka'i. Six chapels were built by 1875. He constructed a home for boys and later a home for girls. He bandaged wounds, made coffins, dug graves, heard confessions, and said Mass every morning. In December 1884, Father Damien noticed severe blisters on his feet without the presence of pain. As he suspected, the disease was leprosy.

Father Damien died peacefully on April 15, 1889, on Moloka'i after sixteen years of undaunted dedication. On October 11, 2009, Father Damien was canonized (i.e., elevated to sainthood) by Pope Benedict XVI in a ceremony at the Vatican, thus becoming Saint Damien.

The bronze statue is based on photographs taken of Father Damien near the end of his life, with the scars of his disease visible on his face and his right arm in a sling beneath his cloak. His



Bronze by Marisol Escobar
Given in 1969; located in Hall of Columns

broad-brimmed hat was traditionally worn by missionaries. His right hand holds a cane.

Hawai'i's Statuary Hall Commission received offers from sixty-six artists to create the statue of Father Damien for the Capitol and selected seven to submit models. New York sculptor Marisol Escobar's contemporary design was chosen over more classically styled representations. Aware of Damien's fondness for carpentry as a recreation, she first created a full-size model in wood, her preferred medium. The plaster model that she then created for casting was broken on its voyage to the foundry in Viareggio, Italy; a second plaster model reached Italy but was then lost. Finally, a wax impression of the statue reached the foundry. The bronze statue was shipped to New York, where it lingered because of a longshoremen's strike, so a second statue was sent directly to Washington, D.C. This statue and that of King Kamehameha I, Hawai'i's other gift to the National Statuary Hall collection, were unveiled in the Capitol Rotunda on April 15, 1969, eighty years after Father Damien's death.

The statue's design is typical of the sculptor's work; she is known for her portraits with faces, hands, and feet attached to large blocks of wood. In this case in particular, it reflects her decision "to undertake the work directly and simply in much the same way Father Damien did his work."

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