

Damien's Return - A Personal Reflection

Several weeks ago in Rome, Father Damien of Molokai was elevated from blessed to sainthood. A week ago here at St. Anthony's Church, we re-dedicated the Blessed Damien Chapel to Saint Damien. Now a major relic of Damien is being taken on a tour of all the churches in the islands and this evening it was brought here to St. Anthony's in Wailuku.

While I had never been inclined to honor relics, this evening was different for me – VERY different. As the relic was carried to the sanctuary, I found my eyes filling with tears! What was THAT about? Maybe it was the memories of Sr. Mary Herman talking about "Damien the leper" in my grade school years.

Maybe it was the fact that it was the young Fr. Damien who celebrated the Mass of Thanksgiving when our first eight Marianists disembarked from the ship and walked to Our Lady of Peace Cathedral in Honolulu on Sept. 3, 1883. He just happened to be in Honolulu on one of his rare trips away from Molokai.

Perhaps it was the fact that in May 1873 – at the dedication of the old St. Anthony's Church, where I live and work every day – he received and accepted the call of his bishop to work among the people sent for isolation due to their illness. He never left that ministry until his death in 1889. He was a person who felt the suffering of the people and, much to the dismay of his superiors, did not cease his efforts on their behalf.

Were those the reasons I was so moved tonight – or was it simply the fact that I was standing on holy ground? If nothing else, I was keenly aware of Damien's legacy, as are all the people of the islands these days.

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