

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
MEMORIAL OF SAINT DAMIEN OF MOLOKAI, PRIEST AND RELIGIOUS  
CATHEDRAL BASILICA OF PEACE  
HONOLULU, HAWAII  
MAY 10, 2022**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, the personal representative of the Holy Father to the United States, I greet you in his name and express the Holy Father's personal closeness as today we celebrate the Feast of St. Damien of Molokai and open the formal cause for beatification and canonization of Joseph Dutton. I greet Bishop Larry Silva and thank him for his kind invitation to be with you on this occasion.

This past Sunday we celebrated the Fourth Sunday of Easter, which is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. Christ is the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep. He is the Good Shepherd who calls each of us by name, and His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him.

The whole of Christian life is an imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd and a response to the call to follow Him. Father Damien heard the call of Christ and left his native Belgium, as a member of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, to be a missionary and a true father to the lepers at Molokai. In imitation of Christ, he showed solidarity with those at the margins of society, ministering daily to the lepers, who, just as in Jesus' day, were outcasts, perceived more as a threat than as persons to be loved.

In imitation of Christ, who showed solidarity with sinners, Father Damien so identified with his flock that he became a leper himself, and eventually succumbed to the disease. In imitation of Christ, the Good Shepherd, he laid down his life for his friends. He loved those who were His own; he loved them to the end.

Yet, Father Damien was not alone in this type of heroic charity and sacrifice. As you know, saint Marianne Cope, a native of Germany and a member of the Sisters of Saint Francis of Syracuse, also heard the voice of the Good Shepherd, and she responded to the call to be a missionary. She and the other sisters of her congregation established a hospital and much of the medical infrastructure of these islands at that time. She too ministered to the dying Father Damien. Through her heroic labors, she helped bring healing to many, and this healing is a sign of the proclamation of the Kingdom and a sharing in Christ's ministry as Good Shepherd and Divine Physician.

Today, at the conclusion of Mass, we will also open the cause for Joseph Dutton, who was a convert to Catholicism, having served in the Civil War. He wanted to put his many gifts and talents to work in the service of caring for lepers and orphans, founding the Baldwin Home for boys. He not only heard the call to Christ's Church, but desirous to do penance for his sins, he briefly entered a Trappist monastery, before arriving here at age 43. When he arrived, he apparently told Father Damien: "My name is Joseph Dutton; I've come to help, and I've come to stay."

He remained here until his death in 1931. On his deathbed, Father Damien is reported to have said, "I can die now. Brother Joseph will take care of my orphans." What we see in Father Damien,

Marianne Cope, and Joseph Dutton is commitment – commitment to Christ and commitment to the sick and the marginalized, to those made in God’s image and likeness. We see total commitment – commitment to the very end in imitation of Christ the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for the sheep. There is a generosity in love in responding to the call of the Good Shepherd that is worthy of imitation. It is easy to observe how priests, religious, and laity can respond to the call and give witness to Christ.

In our First Reading from Acts, the Church suffered persecution following the death of Stephen. Nevertheless, rather than hiding in fear, the hand of the Lord was with the first disciples. Their dispersion allowed the Gospel to spread everywhere, and the hand of the Lord was with them. Even in the face of persecution, the Church was missionary, and the mission was Spirit-driven. Barnabas, whose name means “son of encouragement” was sent to Antioch, as more and more were added to the Lord’s flock.

*When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he rejoiced and encouraged them all to remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart.* In many ways, men like Father Damien and Joseph Dutton were like Barnabas, sons of encouragement. Barnabas would then find Saul and bring him to Antioch. Gathering them in prayer and instructing them in preaching, huge numbers were added to the disciples of Jesus, and there at Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians.

What are we to learn from all this? First, the Church is missionary by her nature. She always goes forth to the spiritual and existential peripheries. She is not concerned so much with self-preservation as in going forth with apostolic boldness to proclaim the joy of the Gospel.

Second, this mission is Spirit-driven. It is not driven by any spirit but by the Spirit of God. It is not driven by politics, money, or the winds of the day! Moreover, opposition cannot prevent the Word from going forth; it must go forth.

Third, living in a polarized world, with so much negativity in the media and elsewhere, we are called to be sons and daughters of “encouragement.” Ultimately, what gives us courage and strength for our mission is our connection with God through prayer, Eucharistic worship and the sacraments, and the teachings of the Faith, which offer us a sure guide for living our faith. Would Father Damien, Marianne Cope, or Joseph Dutton have been able to accomplish anything without the power of God?

Fourth, today it is fashionable to speak of missionary discipleship, but this is not a mere slogan. We are first disciples who learn from Christ, the Good Shepherd. We respond to the voice of the Good Shepherd to follow Him. We might ask ourselves, “But do I follow when I hear His voice?” Only after we become disciples and learn from Him and from the Spirit can we then be missionaries and go into the whole world.

In Father Damien, Sister Marianne Cope, and Joseph Dutton, we have models to imitate of holiness and of missionary discipleship. They went into the whole world to preach the Good News and they willingly and lovingly laid down their lives for their friends; thus, they lived and died, not only as the friends of lepers, but as the friends of God. May we do the same.