

Damien Choir Concert

Cathedral of Our Lady of Peace – September 25, 2009 – 7:00 P.M.

[prologue]

Joseph deVeuster was born on January 3, 1840; the seventh of eight children. The family owned a small farm in Tremeloo, a Flemish village near the provincial city of Louvain in Belgium. Of the eight children, four chose to devote their lives to the Church. Young Joseph felt the call to religious life, and wrote to his parents in 1858: “I could not fail to write you on this beautiful Christmas Day, which assures me that the Holy Will of God is that I leave the world and embrace the religious state. So dear Parents, I ask you once again if you would be happy about this, since without being sure you are content, I would not dare to commit myself to such a state... We must choose the state God has predestined for us, so as to be happy in the next life.” On February 2, 1859, he received the habit of the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary and became Brother Damien. Taking his brother’s place, young Damien set sail in October of 1863 to serve in the mission lands of Hawai‘i.

Here Am I, Send Me (Purifoy)

This Is Hawai‘i (Pukui/Lam, arr. Naluai/Liu)

[the missionary arrives]

Brother Damien arrived in Honolulu on March 19, 1864. In his first letter to his parents dated March 22, he writes: “This first Sunday I was strongly edified by the piety of the people in church. There were more than 300 communions during the first two Masses. During the high mass celebrated by our Bishop Maigret... Father Herman and a large number of Kanakas sang so well that I have not heard anything like it... They have very good hearts... They own almost everything in common... I hope to be able to speak Hawaiian in five months... Pray for me, since I will soon be ordained a priest and shall go to live among a savage and unbelieving people.” In years to come, Damien will refer to these “savage and unbelieving people” as his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jubilate Deo Omnis Terra (Peeters)

O Sacrum Convivium (Remondi, arr. Liu)

[Father Kamiano]

On May 21, 1864, Damien was ordained to the priesthood and was first assigned to the Big Island of Hawai‘i in the Puna District and later to Kohala on the Hamakua Coast. Damien labored nine years on the island of Hawai‘i. He experiences great joy as well as the pain of isolation. He writes: “Our poor islanders are very happy when they see Kamiano coming, and I, for my part, love them very dearly; I would gladly give my life for them. I do not spare myself when it is necessary to go on a sick call that takes me twenty to twenty-five miles away... I already know enough [Hawaiian] to preach, to hear confessions and to carry on discussions with non-Catholics. All things considered, I am very happy, for, along with all the privations and hardships, God often gives me consolations beyond all expectation.”

Kamiano (Camacho)

The Heart of Damien (Downes, arr. Mondoy)

[the new pastor]

On May 10, 1873, Bishop Maigret accompanied Damien to the Kalaupapa settlement. The Bishop proudly presented the new pastor to the Catholic residents. There was no residence for the priest so Damien spent the first weeks of his stay under the branches of a hala tree whose roots also served as a home for rodents, centipedes, roaches and ants. At the outset of his mission, Damien aimed to restore in each resident of Kalaupapa a sense of personal worth and dignity. To show his poor battered flock the value of their lives, he had to demonstrate to them the value of their deaths. And so he turned his attention to the cemetery area beside his little chapel. He fenced it to protect the graves from the wild pigs and dogs. He called the cemetery the "Garden of the Dead." Damien continued to minister to the sick: hearing confessions, bringing the Holy Eucharist, and anointing the bedridden patients. He washed their bodies, bandaged their wounds and tidied their huts. He did all that he could to make them as comfortable as possible. Damien's cheerful disposition and desire to serve touched the people's heart without patronizing or bullying them. Little by little their accomplishments restored the sense of dignity their illness threatened to destroy. During his first year, he writes to his parents: "My greatest pleasure is to serve the Lord in his poor sick children rejected by other people."

Āhea Lā Ku‘u Hālāwai (Mondoy)

Iesu No Ke Kahuhipa (Bradbury, arr. Bock/Liu)

[Damien the Leper]

Damien was alone on the frontier of the mission. His loneliness oppressed him. He speaks of "black thoughts" and the "insupportable melancholy that arose from his lack of religious companionship." He counseled himself: "Be severe toward yourself, indulgent toward others. Have scrupulous exactitude for everything regarding God: prayer, meditation, Mass, administration of the Sacraments. Unite your heart with God... Remember always your three vows, by which you are dead to the things of the world. Remember always that God is eternal and work courageously in order one day to be united with him for ever." Damien set aside his fear of contagion. He touched those afflicted with leprosy, he embraced them, he dined with them, he cleaned and bandaged their wounds and sores. He put his thumb on their forehead when he anointed them with the holy oil. All these actions involved touch. Touch is, of course, necessary if one is to communicate love and concern. The Hawaiians instinctively knew this. It is no mystery as to their attraction to Fr. Damien's church. One day in December 1884, while soaking his feet in extremely hot water, Damien experienced no sensation of heat or pain. The evil disease that Damien had battled for so long now claimed him. He hastened to complete many building projects and organize his work. As the end drew near, Damien's voice was reduced to a raucous whisper. He was known to have said: "How sweet it is to die a child of the Sacred Hearts." On April 15, 1889, at the age of 49, Father Damien died. It was Holy Week. Truly, no greater love does a man have than that he lay down his life for his friends.

Greater Love Hath No Man (Ireland)

Aloha ‘Oe (Lili‘uokalani, arr. Fong)

A Faithful Son of Sacred Hearts (Mondoy)