

SEPTEMBER 9  
SAINT PETER CLAVER  
PRIEST  
MEMORIAL

Peter Claver was born in 1580 at Verdú in Spain. In 1596 he entered the University of Barcelona as a student of literature and arts, and joined the Society in 1602. It was largely through St. Alphonsus Rodríguez, the porter at the Jesuit College in Majorca, that he conceived the idea of a missionary vocation. He was ordained in 1616 in the Colombian mission, where he devoted the rest of his life to apostolic work among the black slaves, in fulfillment of a vow to be "slave for ever to the Ethiopians." Broken in health, he died at Cartagena in Colombia on September 8, 1654, and was canonized by Leo XIII in 1888. In 1896 the same Pope declared him special patron of missions to the black nations.

From the Common of Pastors, or the Common of Saints Noted for Works of Mercy.

THE OFFICE OF READINGS

Second Reading

From the Letters of St. Peter Claver

(Letter to his Superior, May 31, 1627, ed. [in Spanish] A. Valtierra, S.J., *San Pedro Claver*, Cartagena, 1964, pp. 140-141)

*To bring good tidings to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives (cf. Is. 61:1)*

Yesterday, May 30, 1627, the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, a great number of black people who had been seized from along the African rivers were put ashore from one very large vessel. We hurried out with two baskets full of oranges, lemons, sweet biscuits, and all sorts of other things. When we reached their huts it was like entering

another Guinea. We had to force our way through the crowds till we reached the sick. There was a great number of them, lying on the damp earth, or rather in mud; but someone had formed the idea of making a heap of tiles and broken bricks in case the damp should be too much for them. This was all they had for a bed, all the more uncomfortable because they were naked, without any covering at all.

We took off our cloaks, went to a store, bought from there all the wood that was available and put it together to make a platform; then, forcing a way through the guards, we eventually managed to carry all the sick onto it. Then we separated them into two groups; one of them my companion addressed with the aid of an interpreter, the other I spoke to myself.

Two of the black slaves were more dead than alive; they were already cold, and we could hardly feel any pulse in their veins. We got together some glowing embers on a tile, placed the dying men near them, and then threw aromatic spices on the fire. We had two bags of these spices, and used them all. Then with the help of our cloaks—for the slaves had none of their own, and it would have been a waste of time to ask their masters—we got them to inhale the vapors, which seemed to restore their warmth and vitality. You should have seen the expression of gratitude in their eyes!

In this way we spoke to them, not with words but with deeds; and for people in their situation who were convinced that they had been brought there to be eaten, any other form of address would have been pointless. Then we sat or knelt beside them and washed their faces and

bodies with wine; by such acts of kindness we tried to cheer them up, and performed for them all the natural services which are calculated to raise the spirits of the sick.

Then we began to instruct them for baptism. We first explained to them the wonderful effects of the sacrament on both body and soul, and when they showed by their answers to our questions that they understood us sufficiently well, we began to teach them at greater length concerning the one God who rewards and punishes each according to his deserts, and so on. We urged them to repent and give some indication of sorrow for their sins. Finally, when they seemed to be sufficiently prepared, we explained to them the mysteries of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Passion. We showed them a representation of Christ crucified above a baptismal font, into which the blood flowed from his wounds. Then we taught them to repeat after us the act of contrition in their own language.

**Responsory** (Mt. 25:35, 40; Jn. 15:12)

**R.** I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.

**V.** This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Truly I say . . . .

### Concluding Prayer

Lord God, you called St. Peter to be the servant of slaves and a heroic example of patient charity. Grant through his prayers that we may seek what belongs to Christ, and love our neighbor, not in word only but in our whole lives. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever.

### Alternative Concluding Prayer

Lord, for love of you St. Peter became the faithful servant of slaves. Through his prayers help us to see the true dignity of the human family, all children of one Father, and to spend ourselves for their salvation. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.