St. Peter Claver

September 9

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1581–1654 • Spain

Peter Claver bravely entered the hold of the ship, carrying medicine, food, and wash towels. His heart wept at what he saw there. Slaves, chained and fettered, were so packed together they could barely move. The hull was dark and the air heavy with sweat and disease. He knelt among the slaves, washing and applying medicine to their wounds. His touch was gentle. His words in the Kongo language were kind. His lips formed a silent prayer.

Peter was a priest. He had left Spain to become a missionary in Cartagena, the great harbor city of Colombia. Ten thousand African slaves arrived at the port each year, where they were bought and sold. Peter did not know how men could treat other men so. Slavery was evil. The way his white, Spanish brethren treated the Africans was a terrible sin. He would do everything he could to care for the slaves and bring them to Jesus. He called himself the "slave of slaves."

When the slaves left the ship, Peter Claver would wrap the sick and injured in his cloak and carry them to the hospital. Sometimes, his very touch healed the sick.

To the healthy, Peter spoke about Jesus and how Jesus had died for them. He told them that they were children of God who had great worth and dignity, no matter what others told them. Peter baptized three hundred thousand African slaves. Black and white alike he invited to his church, ignoring anyone who complained about the African slaves.

Peter's face was always sad. He knew that when people rejected the slaves, they rejected God. He cared for, taught, and baptized slaves until he turned seventy and caught the plague. He did not die, but he had to stay in bed for the last four years of his life. He offered all of his suffering to God before he died a holy death.

St. Peter Claver, help me to treat everyone like a child of God!