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Daily Reflections



PETER CLAVER: SLAVE OF THE ENSLAVED FOR LOVE

By David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpts from Today's Readings

Brothers and sisters: As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one captivate you with an empty, seductive philosophy ... not according to Christ. For in him dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily, and you share in this fullness in him, who is the head of every principality and power.... You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

COLOSSIANS 2:6-10,12

Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve, whom he also named Apostles.... He came down with them and

stood on a stretch of level ground. A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and even those who were tormented by unclean spirits were cured.

LUKE 6:12-13, 17-18

Reflection

Peter Claver, a 16th century Jesuit missionary, spent some 40 years of service in Colombia. He was known for his ministry to the enslaved Africans who were trafficked through Cartagena, providing a hand of graced healing to those whose health had been broken by abuse and neglect. He also served as a pastoral servant for spiritual care, and baptized some 300,000 persons, becoming a champion of compassionate justice, who inspired others for generations to come. Recognized as the “*slave of the slaves*,” he taught that “*We must speak to them with our hands by giving, before we try to speak to them with our lips.*” He found his grounding in the Ignatian maxim, “*Seek God in all things, and you will find him by your side.*”

Both the Epistle to the Colossians and the selection from Luke’s Gospel highlight two aspects of the life of ministry in Christ—two foundational aspects of Peter Claver’s walk among the enslaved. Paul exhorts: “**As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.**” Claver walked among the dregs of inhumanity and vicious greed as slavery infected the life of Cartagena. Yet he never surrendered the simplicity of God among the enslaved and brought to them a foundation in faith that infused a quiet grace into their world of suffering.

In the passage from Luke, we encounter the power of faithful prayer to unite people in a healing community and to bring solace to the suffering: “**Jesus departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God. When day came, he called his disciples to himself, and from them he chose Twelve.... A great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem ... came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.**” Claver moved in a world scarred by depraved economics and politics. Nonetheless, he continued to abide in the silent mystery of the mountaintop in prayer, that maintained his gentle presence and healing touch among the multitudes of those stolen from their lives.

Our contemporary world is filled with innumerable unravelings of the Gospel

mandate to care for the *anawim* of God—the poor, the sick, the hungry, the homeless, the naked, the orphaned and widowed, the imprisoned, and the refugee. The rationales for this neglect are countless, ignoring the very foundations of our common humanity. The life of Peter Claver shines a beacon in our midst, reminding us that the broken bonds of human community can never destroy the hearts of the faithful who embrace the power of Jesus in their lives—lives of simple prayer, gentle compassion, and the gracious embrace of healing arms. The choice is always ours to make.



Peter Claver, SJ
Image created by David C. Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- Where in your life have you experienced an inner invitation to move beyond your familiar limits in service to those abandoned by others?

- Is there a community of people, who have been left beyond the reach of others' attention, to whom you might bring solace and healing?
- What are the Gospel values you feel are most essential to living a Christian life?

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