

Saint Peter Claver

- Feastday: September 9
- Patron Saint of: African missions, African-Americans, slaves, and Colombia
- Birth: 1580
- Death: September 8, 1654
- Canonized: by Pope Leo XIII in 1888



*"We must speak
to them
with our hands,
by giving,
before we try to
speak to them
with our lips."*



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Saint Peter Claver was born to devout, upper-class parents in Spain. At twenty years old, he entered the Jesuit novitiate and decided to become a missionary in the Spanish colonies in South America. In 1610, he set sail for Cartagena, Colombia, which was a major hub in the transatlantic slave trade.

The conditions the slaves endured on the ships were horrific. They were poorly fed once a day, chained naked to each other, abused, threatened, and forced to sit in their own excrement and vomit. This led to the death of an estimated one-third of them during three-month long the journey.

Father Peter committed himself to serving the African slaves for the rest of his life. When he made his final profession, Father Claver signed it with these words: "Peter Claver, slave of the slaves, forever." It is conservatively estimated that Father Claver catechized and baptized over 300,000 slaves.

Once the ships arrived, Father Claver brought his small band of African interpreters and charitable workers and entered the hull of the ship where he found many dead and others lifeless, filled with fear, and in need of medical treatment and compassion. As a sign of his love for them, he often kissed their sores and washed the wounds with his own handkerchiefs. He would baptize babies, provide food to the hungry,

and demonstrate a depth of compassion that many had never seen. He then helped transport the slaves to a new location, carrying those who could not walk, where they could be well-fed and regain their strength before being sold. He helped them see their innate dignity and restored that dignity, not by railing against the abuses they endured, but by railing against sin and helping the slaves find freedom in Christ.

After more than forty years of dedicated and heartfelt ministry to the slaves, Father Claver himself fell ill. He spent his final days enduring mistreatment from one of his caregivers, who was also a slave. Far from complaining, Father Claver accepted this treatment, uniting it with the suffering of Christ on the Cross. He died on September 8, 1654.