

**Memorial of St. Peter Claver - Friday of the 23rd Week
September 9, 2016**

The saint we honor today can help us to understand the readings more deeply and grow in holiness. St. Peter Claver was born in Spain in 1580. As he grew up he discerned a call to religious life and to the priesthood. He joined the Jesuits, and was eventually sent out on mission to Colombia here in the Americas. In 1616, Fr. Claver took on a great work. At the time, the slave trade was very strong throughout our continent, and he saw the suffering of the people who were being bought and sold as property. They were being mistreated, beaten, starved, and worse. They were considered to be less than human. Fr. Claver saw the truth, he looked beyond the popular ideas of his day and saw these slaves for what they truly were, God's holy people! He saw his sisters and brothers!

St. Peter Claver set out to minister to the enslaved people of Columbia, to bring the gospel and the sacraments to them, as well as food, clothing, medicine and education. He decided to do what he could to fight the slave trade, and to bring the gospel and the sacraments to those who were enslaving these people, to try and open their eyes to the truth. This was a man who did as St. Paul said. He ran the race so as to win. He made himself "a slave to all so as to win over as many as possible." He fought against one of humanity's most horrible evils, but found a way to love those who were carrying

out this evil as well. He was not a person with a blind spirit leading other people with blind spirits. The eyes of his soul were wide open, and he did amazing things for people who were suffering so greatly.

Pope Francis calls us to hear the message of today's Mass clearly. He said: "How often do we feel annoyed when we see people in the streets who are sick or hungry? How often are we annoyed by the sight of refugees and migrants? May we too open our eyes and hearts to God's love for the poor and to the gift of healing that he offers to all who turn to him in faith" (Gen. Audience, 15 June 2016).

The challenge is there for you, too, my young friends. This school, your families, your parishes, your groups of friends, these are your racetracks. Run the race of faith so as to win! Run like Christians with the eyes of your hearts open! Don't leave the wooden beams in your eyes that keep you from seeing those in need around you. Open your hearts, see those who are struggling, who are hurting, who feel trapped, who need grace and love and forgiveness. Share with them the love God has shared with you. Show them that they are our brothers and sisters. We have been called to a great work of mercy, may Mary, our Mother, and St. Peter Claver pray for us today, so that we may run the race well, and lift up our sisters and brothers in need.