

# Stewardship Saint for September: Saint Peter Claver



ICSC | SEPTEMBER 6, 2023

Peter Claver, a Spanish Jesuit priest, is the patron saint of Colombia and of evangelization among people of color.

Born in 1580 to a Spanish farming family, Claver was educated at the University of Barcelona. He was known for his prayerfulness and intellectual prowess. He joined the Jesuit community in 1602 and was inspired to become a missionary. In a notebook he wrote the words that he kept with him throughout his life: “I must dedicate myself to the service of God until death, on the understanding that I am like a slave.”

In 1610 Claver was sent to Cartagena, Colombia, a major center for the African slave trade. He also spent time in Bogotá and Tunja, Colombia, where he became deeply disturbed by the horrific treatment of the slaves being brought from Africa. By this time the slave trade had been established in the Americas for about 100 years. Although it was condemned by the Church, slave trading was an extraordinarily profitable industry and thus continued to flourish.

In Cartagena, where thousands of slaves were brought each year, Claver headed to the wharf as soon as a slave ship was sighted. He moved through the filthy and diseased holds to doctor and minister to their ill-treated and terrified human cargo. After the slaves were herded from the ship and penned in nearby yards to be studied by buyers, Claver brought them medicine, food, and other basic necessities. He assured the slaves of their human dignity and Christ’s love for them.

During his 40-year ministry, Claver worked tirelessly for the spiritual and physical care of slaves. It is estimated that he single-handedly catechized and baptized 300,000 of them.

Claver's ministry extended beyond slaves as well. He preached in the city square, gave missions and brought the sacraments to sailors, traders and the wealthy landowners too. He was also a frequent visitor to the city's hospitals. He became a moral force in the city, eventually becoming instrumental in improving slave conditions.

At age 70, Claver contracted a paralytic illness resembling Parkinson's Disease that almost killed him. For the last four years of his life he suffered constant pain and could no longer celebrate Mass. His care was neglected and he became largely forgotten. He died on September 9, 1654.

It was only after his death that the amazing scope of Peter Claver's ministry began to be realized. He was canonized in 1888 by Pope Leo XIII and his feast day is September 9.

## September Stewardship Prayer

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*Lord Jesus Christ,  
As we begin to shift from summer schedules to autumn demands,  
teach us to recognize you, and help us follow you amidst our busy  
life.*

*Open the Scriptures to us that we may know you, see you, hear you –  
in the voices of friends and family, in the ministries of our parish, in  
the proclamation of the Word, and in the Breaking of the Bread.*

*Teach us to be good stewards, that we may use your gifts wisely and  
care for all those you place in our path.*

*Encourage us, when we are overwhelmed. Strengthen us, when we  
are frightened. Challenge our complacency*

*Help us make this new season a time of spiritual renewal, hope, and  
action to proclaim the Gospel in our words and in our deeds.*

*For the kingdom and the power and the glory are yours, now and  
forever.*

*Amen.*