

## Peter Claver and the Pandemic

*Jesus said to the sheep at his right hand, "Blessed are you of my Father! Come and inherit the kingdom prepared for you, for...I was sick and you took care of me, in prison, and you visited me." (Matthew 25:36)*

On September 9 Lutherans and Roman Catholics remember Peter Claver and ask God to renew our commitments to human rights and ending racism and slavery. In Colombia, it is Human Rights Day, in honour of his life and 40 -year ministry with and for the African slaves brought to the New Kingdom of Granada through the 17th century. What does a Jesuit priest who died 350 years ago have to offer to us in the midst of this pandemic today?

We can learn from his example and his mistakes. His example: he moved the centre of ministry away from the plantations and onto the docks and into the slaver's ships, baptizing the sick and dying, hearing confessions, providing clothing, medicine, food and drink, arranging burials, weddings, confirmations, communions. Peter Claver was a front-line worker in the global slavery pandemic. It is estimated he baptized 300,000 people; what is more, he provided teaching for them on the plantations where they worked, living in slave quarters, not plantation palaces, and insisting that slaves be treated as fellow Christians. Peter Claver's example helped end the global slavery pandemic. His mistakes: He purchased slaves to work in his ministry and used corporal punishment on immoral behaviour. It may be that Claver himself repented of this sin: when he was sick and dying, the former slave who attended to his care abused and starved him. Claver accepted this treatment as justice for his sins. We too must repent of attitudes, decisions, and behaviours contributing to the pandemic, and accept that Christ does not use cruelty to change people.

Thanks be to God that the ministry of human rights and the work to end racism and slavery continues to be inspired and strengthened by the Holy Spirit through the COVID-19 pandemic today.