



The Life of St. Peter Claver, S. J: The Apostle of the Negroes (Classic Reprint)

J. R. Slattery

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Excerpt from The Life of St. Peter Claver, S. J: The Apostle of the Negroes

The Apostolate of St. Peter Claver is unique. In the history of God's Saints we read of heroic souls giving themselves as slaves in exchange for Christian captives. Two orders, the Trinitarians and the Order of Mercy had this for their object. From 1198 to 1787 the former redeemed, from the Moors of Africa, 900,000 white slaves, while the latter from 1218 to 1632 ransomed 490,736, and added a fourth vow to the usual three, viz: "To take the place of a captive if there were no other means of effecting his ransom."

But St. Peter Claver's vocation was different. He was in a new world whose aborigines were rapidly dying out; a new business had sprung up - the slave traffic - by which Negroes were brought from Africa to work in America. Strange commerce! Unholy scheme of money making! Banking houses, mercantile circles, clerks, skippers, et id genus omne, were engaged in this traffic in human flesh. In spite of the commercial loss represented by the bones scattered along the bed of the Atlantic, and over the trackless deserts of Africa, the profits of this traffic were enormous, consequently flesh and bones weighed lighter than the trader's gold.

St. Peter Claver's call was to these slaves; surely a unique vocation. No sympathy was his; no encouragement, nothing but open hostility, ill-concealed contempt, or at best an irritating apathy. For forty years he met the incoming slave ship, to repeat day by day the same round of work.

In his life there are no startling or diversified events, no frequent voyages.

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Robert Lyman:

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