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A homily for the Feast of St Peter Claver, priest

Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C

First Reading: Colossians 2:6–15

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 145:1b–2, 8–11 | **Response:** Psalm 145:9

Gospel Acclamation: John 15:16

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:12–19

Preached at: the Chapel of Emmaus House in the Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Today we celebrate the Patronal Feast of our Archdiocese, the Feast of one of our own brothers, St Peter Claver. This is the day the Church in Harare remembers its patron saint—someone whose life shows us what it means to follow Christ in a real and practical way.

Peter Claver was a Jesuit who spent most of his ministry in Cartagena, in what is now Colombia. He gave his life to caring for enslaved people who arrived by ship. He met them where they were—on the docks, in the ship holds—bringing them water, food, medicine, and kindness. He baptised thousands and stayed close to people no one else wanted to go near. He called himself the slave of the slaves forever.

His ministry was visionary, especially in a time when many—including members of the Church, and even more shamefully, the Society—accepted or benefitted from slavery. Today, as Jesuits work to make reparations for the people our own

institutions once enslaved, Peter Claver's life stands as a reminder of what it means to take the side of the suffering, even when it's unpopular or uncomfortable. And it challenges us to take similar prophetic stances in our own day.

That kind of life can seem very far from ours. But the readings today show that the same call—to follow Christ closely, and to serve others—is still ours, right here.

In the first reading, Paul tells the Colossians to stay rooted in Christ. He warns them not to get distracted by ways of thinking that pull them away from the Gospel. That could be pride, self-reliance, or the belief that we need to prove ourselves. Paul says: in Christ, we already have everything we need. He is the source of our life.

The psalm reminds us that God is kind and full of mercy. This is not a new idea for us, but it's something we need to hear again and again. We often feel the pressure to be perfect or productive, even in ministry. But God's mercy is what holds us—not our success or strength.

And in the Gospel, Jesus spends the night in prayer before choosing the Twelve. Then He comes down and heals the people. He begins with prayer, but He doesn't stay on the mountain. He comes back down and responds to the needs around Him.

That rhythm is familiar to us in Jesuit life—prayer and then service. Listening to God, and then acting. It's what Peter Claver did too. He prayed, and then he responded to the people in front of him.

Today, on our Patronal Feast, we also hear Jesus say: "You did not choose me, but I chose you." That's important. We're not here because we worked our way into it. We've been called. And the call is always for the sake of others—not for our own comfort or status, but to serve in whatever way God asks of us.

That might not mean doing great things. It might mean doing ordinary things with care and patience. Listening well. Helping someone quietly. Saying yes again, even when it's hard.

So today, we thank God for the gift of St Peter Claver. We ask for the grace to follow Christ more closely, to stay rooted in prayer, and to serve those around us with love.

Here are a few questions to take into the week:

- Am I placing my trust in Christ, or in other things?
- What does service look like for me at this stage of my life?
- Where is God inviting me to listen, or act, today?

St Peter Claver, pray for us.

Amen.

Source: <https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-09sep-09-yc-ot-23/>

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