

Saints of the Week: John Coleridge Patteson (Bishop of Melanesia) (1827-1871)  
and companions, martyrs

*Observed 20 September*



A gifted student of languages at Oxford, John Coleridge Patteson seemed destined for a settled life as an English priest and scholar. He became a fellow of Merton College, Oxford in 1852 and was ordained the next year. He was serving as curate in Devon when a talk by New Zealand's Bishop George Selwyn inspired the young man to offer himself for service in the South Pacific mission field. He was sent to Melanesia where he founded a school to train Christian workers from the native population. His gift for languages was remarkably challenged in this context - he learned 23 of the disparate languages of Melanesia and Micronesia. In recognition of his work, he was ordained Bishop of Micronesia in 1861.

Bishop Patteson was devoted to stamping out illegal slaving in the British territories in his charge. It was already illegal to capture and trade slaves, but the laws existed largely on paper. Greedy slave traders attacked small, undefended island communities and stole many individuals off into slavery. Bishop Patteson was known to be a compassionate advocate for his people, but also looked to those who did not know him like any other European interloper. In 1871 he led a group to minister to a village which had been attacked by traders, only to be mistaken for another slaving raid and killed by furious and frightened villagers.

When the British authorities learned of the murder of Bishop Patteson and his company,

they realized that sterner measures were needed to stamp out the slave trade permanently. Although their deaths were in mistaken retaliation for crimes in which they had no part, Bishop Patteson and his coworkers served in death to accomplish what they could not in life, the end of the brutal slave trade in the part of the British Empire of which they had spiritual oversight.

*Lessons:* Jeremiah 22:1-4; Psalm 119:49-56; I Peter 4:12-19; Mark 8:34-38

*Collect:* Almighty God, who called your faithful servants John Coleridge Patteson and his companions to be witnesses and martyrs in the islands of Melanesia, and by their labors and sufferings raised up a people for your own possession: Pour forth your Holy Spirit upon your Church in every land, that by the service and sacrifice of many, your holy Name may be glorified and your kingdom enlarged; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*