

James deKoven, priest, 1831-1879

Observed 22 March



Father James DeKoven was called the 'greatest product of the American Church' by FC Morehouse in *Some American Churchmen*, 1892.

Born in New England, he was offered prominent positions in a number of outstanding parishes after seminary. His preference was to establish a mission in

the slums of New York City. When that was considered too radical for the times, he went West. He proved to be a superbly gifted teacher, at Nashotah Seminary, as long-time president of Racine College, and in many parish schools he established and nourished. He was an articulate theologian who was able to express clearly what so many others rendered obscure, a remarkable proponent of reason and tolerance in a period of division and fear.

In 1871, when some were proposing a new canon which would have forbidden such dangerous 'High Church' innovations as teaching about the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament, Father DeKoven spoke up on behalf of those who were threatened with trials for heresy and was vilified for his championship of a church open to competing ideas. Although partisan people,

a plague of the Church since the days of Saint Paul, made his life a misery and thwarted the will of the people to elect him bishop in three different dioceses, his eloquence prevented the church from persecuting some of its most able and devoted servants. He was so admired for his intelligence and diplomacy that many secular people tried to persuade him to run for the US Senate, and many leaders of the Roman Church attempted to draw him into their fold, citing his rejection by so many in his own communion as a reason to 'cross the Tiber' as Cardinal Newman had in 1845. No matter the provocation, Father DeKoven maintained his equanimity, an inspiration to all. His greatest legacy was in the many people he inspired to lives of faithful devotion and service to God, the Church, and the world.

In an article for the May 1893 *Sewanee Review* T F Gailor writes eloquently of the death of the man who inspired so many: "As a profound theologian, a brilliant preacher, the unequalled parliamentarian and debater in the House of Deputies—above all as a man of loftiest spirituality and heroic unselfishness, he won universal love and admiration. His sudden death, in the very prime of life, was regarded as the greatest calamity to the Church, both by those who had known and loved him, and by those who, having misunderstood and wronged him, would have made reparation had he lived. From Boston to San Francisco the lament went up with genuine sorrow. Those who had differed with him were foremost in deploring his loss. No clergyman ever received from the secular world and outside the bounds of his own State, such tributes of love and admiration as were paid to him. The great Northwest was stricken with the consciousness of its bereavement, and governors and legislatures and public corporations and citizens of every creed and class hastened to do him honor. He died as he had lived, brave, loyal, consecrated to his Master's service. His last public act was a sacrifice of himself for a friend who needed his help—his last private care was for the instruction of a soul

that was groping for the light of the gospel. It was a grand life—pure, manly, unselfish, noble in every instinct, gentle in its strength, great in its simplicity.”

Lessons 2 Timothy 2:10-15,19; Psalm 84:7-12; Matthew 13:47-52

Collect Almighty and everlasting God, the source and perfection of all virtues, you inspired your servant James De Koven to do what is right and to preach what is true: Grant that all ministers and stewards of your mysteries may impart to your faithful people, by word and example, the knowledge of your grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*