

Peter Donders and the works of mercy

Peter Donders had a great talent for preaching. Nevertheless, apart from his letters, he has not left us any writings. He was a man of deeds, an example of how to practise the seven classical works of mercy.

From Paramaribo, Peter Donders visited the slaves in the plantations, so far as he was permitted to do so. The lepers, too, who had been brought to remote and initially inaccessible places, did not have the option of residing where they wanted. Returning to the inhabited world was not open to them. Having started a journey which never let him return to the Netherlands, Peter Donders lived amongst the lepers at Batavia for 27 years.

He helped them to eat and to drink, because this was difficult for people whose fingers were eaten away by leprosy. He engaged in providing better food for those who could no longer produce their own food themselves.

He took care of the sick and helped them to dress. Peter Donders, who on his arrival in Suriname had been welcomed enthusiastically, negotiated for better housing for the lepers at Batavia. These at first did not have wooden floors in their huts and therefore were often literally sitting in the mud. He accompanied many of those who died to the graveyard where he too was ultimately to be buried.



Graveyard at Batavia

Links

Many bodies are involved in promoting devotion to blessed Peter Donders and the maintenance of the places where he is being honoured. Here you find the (web)addresses of the most important organisations.

The sanctuary in Tilburg, Peerke Donderspark 3, 5011 XL Tilburg (NL), consists of the reconstructed birth house of Peter Donders, the well, the chapel, and the park with the Stations of the Cross, and the Peerke Donders Paviljoen - Museum for Charity. It is administered by the Foundation Petrus Donders Tilburg: www.peerkedonders.nl/.



In the church museum in the bishop's palace at Paramaribo, Henck Arronstraat 14, Suriname, there is a permanent exhibition about Peter Donders: www.bisdomparamaribo.org/instellingen/kerkelijk-museum.



His tomb is located in the cathedral-basilica in Paramaribo, Henck Arronstraat 22-24: www.kathedraalsuriname.org/nl/petrus-donders.



At the place of pilgrimage Batavia there is also a permanent exhibition about Peter Donders. Stations of the Cross guide the visitor along the church and end at the first grave of Peter Donders. Batavia is administered by the Foundation Devotie Petrus Donders which organises the pilgrimages there from Paramaribo: www.bataviasuriname.com/site/.

You can find more information about Redemptorists at: www.cssr.news/.

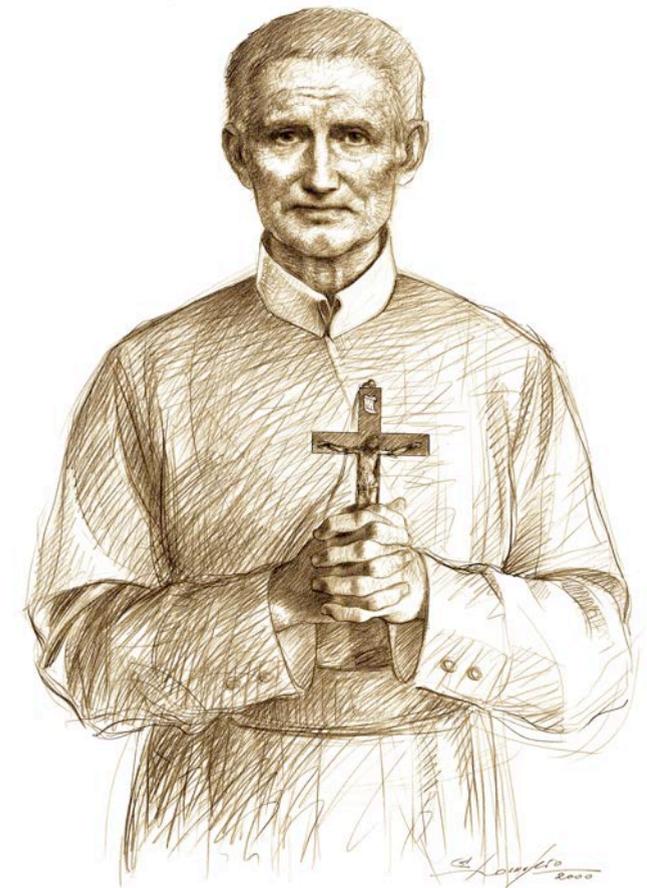


To contact the vice-postulator in the Netherlands, write to vicepostulator@peerkedonders.nl or Lusthoflaan 29, NL - 2316 HX Leiden.

To contact the vice-postulator in Suriname, write to bawejossie@gmail.com.

A list of publications on Peter Donders is available at: www.meertens.knaw.nl/bedevaart/bol/plaats/761.

Devotional articles can be bought at the Peerke Donders Paviljoen at Tilburg, and in the cathedral-basilica at Paramaribo.



Blessed Peter Donders C.Ss.R.

* 27 October 1809 Tilburg (NL)
† 14 January 1887 Batavia (SR)

14 May 1913 declared venerable
23 May 1982 beatification

“Here he has the name of a Saint. Praying, mortifying the flesh, giving alms is his pleasure. [...] His nature is very lively – of imperturbable mood – benign in communication with his confreres.”

Mgr. Swinkels about Peter Donders, 19/02/1867

Peter Donders

In 1809 Petrus Norbertus Donders was born the son of a simple Tilburg home weaver. Already as a young child he wanted to become a priest, but his parents were not wealthy enough to send their son to the seminary. With the help of the pastor of the Goirkese church, Peter Donders received an opportunity to become a working student. After six arduous years he was admitted to the major seminary.

He wanted to become a missionary, but was not admitted to a missionary religious institute. He was the only one of the students then attending the major seminary who responded to the call of mgr. Grooff to reinforce the mission in Suriname. There he arrived in 1842. After some years at Paramaribo, in 1856, he was assigned to the leper colony Batavia. In caring for the slaves and the lepers, he did not discriminate by status or class. He reached out to all people with a helping hand.

After the mission in Suriname in 1865 had been entrusted to the Redemptorists, Peter Donders and the only other priest left in 1866 joined this Congregation. A confrere arrived at Batavia. From then on Peter Donders also travelled by boat into the bush to convert the indigenous people. With a short interruption, he did this work until his death in 1887.

After the initiation of the process for beatification in 1900, the remains of Peter Donders were transferred to Paramaribo. Since 2010 the relics are buried there in a new tomb in de cathedral-basilica.



Tomb of Peter Donders

Beatification

Already in his lifetime Peter Donders left a deep impression with his devotion and perseverance, with the result that directly after his death his superior ordered the preservation of a part of the sleeve of his habit, because Peter Donders was certain to be canonised at some point. In 1900, the process for this was initiated. Thirteen years later this resulted in the bestowal of the title of “venerable”. On 25 March 1945 the Holy See confirmed that Peter Donders had lived a life of “heroic virtue”. In those times, two miracles were still required for beatification. Notwithstanding that there had been many reports of graces received, only in third instance was the first miracle attributed to the intercession of Peter Donders, which had happened already in 1929, recognised as such by the Church. Thanks to the dispensation of the requirement for a second miracle by Pope John Paul II in 1980, the beatification was able to take place on 23 May 1982 at Rome.

Devotion

In Tilburg as well as in Suriname Peter Donders has already been the subject of much veneration since his death. His birth house has been reconstructed, and was opened on 14 January 1931. The well out of which the water was taken for the compresses for the miraculously cure of Lowieke Westland, is located next to the chapel in Suriname style, which was blessed on 28 October 1923. Nowadays a weekly service is still held there.

On occasion of the 200th anniversary of Peter Donders, on 27 October 2009, a museum pavilion was opened in the adjacent park with Stations of the Cross. A permanent exhibition tells the life and work of Peter Donders. The sanctuary is administered by the Foundation Petrus Donders Tilburg.

In Suriname, the Foundation Devotie Petrus Donders administers the place of pilgrimage Batavia and organises monthly pilgrimages there from Paramaribo. Also, it ministers the monthly Peter Donders veneration in de cathedral. Since he being declared venerable, Peter Donders is considered the Apostle of the Lepers.

However, during the Second World War, the emphasis of the devotion shifted locally: Peter Donders was invoked have pass the bombs pass beyond Tilburg. The trust of the population in him was confirmed, when Tilburg was liberated on 27 October 1944, the anniversary of Peter Donders.

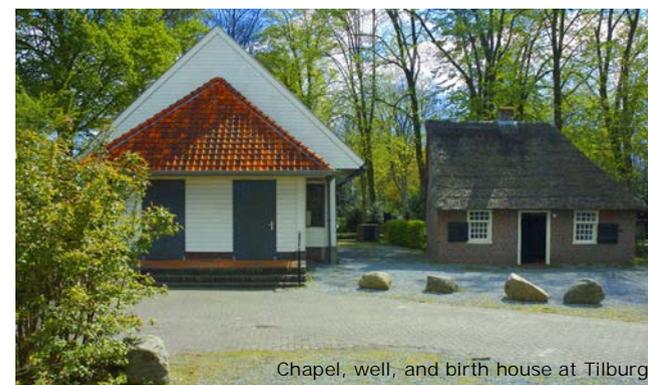
Today, especially in a Netherlands more or less free of leprosy, devotions pay special attention to the charity of Peter Donders in general. He did not discriminate by origin, status, class, religion or race, and nowadays he can still be considered an exemplary practitioner of the seven works of mercy.

To our the present multi-cultural society he is an example of tolerance.

Canonisation

In spite of the many notifications of possibly inexplicable healings received after his beatification in 1982, it has to date not proved possible to initiate a second process for the acknowledgement of a miracle.

Meanwhile the fame of Peter Donders is still growing, not just, because the Redemptorists all over the world pay attention to “their” Blessed confrere, but also thanks to the work of the civil law Peter Donders Foundation to eradicate leprosy in Southeast Asia. Along with this, devotion to Peter Donders is being promoted by the Tilburg commission Devotion, the vice-postulator in the Netherlands, the vice-postulator in Suriname, the Foundation Devotie Petrus Donders there, and the Foundation Petrus Donders Tilburg.



Chapel, well, and birth house at Tilburg