



MISSIONARIES IN ACTION

DOMINICAN MISSION FOUNDATION

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November 2021

Vol. 58 No. 11

Martin de Porres: From Humble Sweeper to Celebrated Saint



Dear Mission Friends:

It was the third time my freshman year (at St. Vincent's in Vallejo) that I had been summoned to the principal's office. "What do you have to say for yourself this time, Mr. Walsh?" But I didn't really know why I was there. I wasn't a bad kid or misbehaving on purpose; I just had a lot of energy and couldn't sit still for very long. Even focusing on Sr. Bertrand's reprimanding was a challenge and I didn't dare look her in the eye, so I always landed upon the large statue standing on a shelf behind her desk. But when I realized the man was carrying a basket with bread, I was further distressed because our "meetings" were never in the middle of class, which would have been preferable, but always at the start of lunch, and I was hungry.

Nevertheless, I developed a compelling curiosity and later a fervent devotion for the man represented by that statue, who I would learn was Blessed Martin de Porres. Years later when it came to submitting the saints I would like for my religious name, my list consisted of Martin de Porres, Martin, and de Porres.

Needless to say, I got the name I wanted. And it was truly a happy coincidence that, for much of my later priestly career, I would hold the position of director of the Dominican Mission Foundation, of which St. Martin de Porres is patron saint, as chosen by the beloved Fr. Joseph Asturias, O.P., our director from 1974 until his death in 1995.

In preparation for All Saints Day on November 1, last month's newsletter discussed sainthood in general and the heroically virtuous words and deeds of many of our Dominican missionaries, for whom St. Martin de Porres has been a role model. In honor of St. Martin's feast day on November 3rd, Mass will be offered at St. Dominic's Church in San Francisco on November 1, 2, and 3, invoking his intercession for your intentions. We invite you to join us in prayer each day by reciting the Triduum on page 3.

Martin was born in Lima, Peru in 1579, son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed African slave. Being of mixed blood and illegitimate, he experienced discrimination and exclusion early-on—his own father abandoned his "half-breed" son and daughter—and Martin began to identify with other poor and oppressed outsiders: Lima's indigenous who had been subjugated by the Spanish conquerors; African slaves doing forced labor in the gold and silver mines; and those of mixed blood like himself.



When still small, he already felt the growing urge to help. It is said that when his mother sent him to the market, he would feel compelled to give the money to beggars, returning home empty-handed. When his mother could no longer support both him and his sister, eight-year-old Martin was sent away to school. At the age of 12, he was apprenticed to a barber, which at that time also meant training as a pharmacist, a physician, and a surgeon. Besides being trained to cut hair, he learned how to bleed a patient, a commonly accepted medical procedure of the day, and how to prepare and administer medicine. Young Martin had also become known for nightly praying on his knees before a crucifix. At fifteen he was admitted to Lima's Dominican Monastery of the Rosary as a Third Order (Lay) Dominican, which was all he could hope for since, at the time, the Order itself did not allow anyone with African or native blood to be professed or ordained.

But because he felt unworthy of anything higher and his only desire was to serve, he was perfectly content, smiling as he swept the floors and cleaned the bathrooms. All work is sacred, he believed, and he was happy with his new post.

It would not be long, however, before his apprentice skills were recognized, and he became the barber for the monastery, followed soon by the medical assistant in their infirmary, eventually seeing to the medical needs of 300 Dominican friars, the monastery's labor force, a nearby convent of sisters, and in time, all the sick and needy of Lima who had heard of his gifts. So when he was just 24, after witnessing his patience, humility, and joyful selflessness for nine years, the Order made an exception and insisted that he profess his vows as a coadjutor brother, ministering as such until his death at 60.

Brother Martin would spend his days begging for alms in order to acquire needed supplies for the poor. He was able to feed about 160 people a day and give away about \$2,000.00 worth of goods a week, an unfathomable sum in those times. He roamed Lima armed with medicine and bandages, food and clothing, visiting hospital wards, prison cells, and hovels, often staying by sick beds through the night. One well-known story recalls him bringing an elderly beggar, his body covered with ulcerated sores, to his own bed to treat and watch over him. When one of the brothers told him he had gone too far, Martin replied, "Compassion, my dear brother, is preferable to cleanliness. Reflect that with a

little soap I can easily clean my bed covers, but even with a torrent of tears I would never wash from my soul the stain that my harshness toward the unfortunate would create."

Brother Martin's ability to heal wounds and cure diseases often moved from the natural world to the supernatural, as miracles began to be reported. Stories were spreading about how he healed a man who had blood poisoning by rubbing his wound with rosemary and making the sign of the cross. Many were healed by simply drinking a glass of water he brought them. [Several reported that he suddenly appeared out of nowhere as soon as they called for help, sometimes in spite of bolted doors; and occasionally he would be sighted at sick beds in faraway countries, though he never traveled outside of Lima!](#)

He is also remembered for building and staffing an orphanage for abandoned children; building hospitals; providing agricultural training for youth; and planting fruit orchards to feed the poor, all through his fundraising skills which were nothing short of miraculous.

In 1962 Pope John XXIII canonized him, proclaiming, "*Saint Martin, always obedient and inspired by his Divine Teacher, dealt with his brothers with that profound love which comes from pure faith and humility of spirit. He loved men because he honestly looked on them as God's children and as his own brothers and sisters. Such was his humility that he loved them even more than himself, and considered them to be better and more righteous than he was. He excused the faults of others, forgiving*

the bitterest injuries, convinced that he deserved much severer punishments on account of his own sins. He tried with all his might to redeem the guilty; lovingly he comforted the sick; he provided food, clothing, and medicine for the poor...he deserved to be called by the name the people gave him: 'Martin of Charity.'" He personified the spirit of true Christian social justice, seeking out diseased beggars and slaves and ostracized indigenous families, treating all with the same dignity that Jesus would have done. There is no Dominican more fitting than St. Martin de Porres to be our Foundation's patron and source of inspiration.

He was certainly my first source. But at the risk of committing the sin of pride, I must say that so many saints were Dominicans and so many Dominicans are saints. I've always been fascinated by the fact that two other Dominican saints from Lima were contemporaries and actually friends of St. Martin: St. Rose and St. Juan Macias! But regardless of when or where they lived, all were stirred to follow in the footsteps of the first Dominican, that compassionate, contemplative, and humble man who selflessly sold his possessions, including his cherished books, to feed the hungry; who patiently argued the truth; who spread his faith through both itinerant preaching and example; and whose manner of living served to teach me to slow down and even stop sometimes, instilling a peace and serenity I might not have otherwise known. Thank you, St. Dominic; thank you, St. Martin; and thank you, Sr. M. Bertrand, O.P.

In Christ's peace,
Fr. Martin de Porres Walsh, O.P.

Prayer to St. Martin de Porres

*O Martin,
whose heart was inflamed with
an ardent love of the poor,
and who knew the wonderful joy
of true humility
and the wisdom of always
submitting to God's holy will,
intercede for those who stand
so much in need of the healing help
of God, and beg
the Divine Physician to give us
health of soul and body.
Grant that we too may be ever truly
humble of heart and full of Christ-
like charity for suffering humanity.
We pray that, by imitating
your holy life and enjoying
your powerful help,
the whole world may be drawn
nearer to Our Lord,
the Savior of the human race.
Amen.*



*“Portrait of
St. Martin
de Porres,”
17th century,
Monastery of
Rosa of
Santa Maria
in Lima.
This portrait
was painted
close to or
very soon
after his
death, and
hence it is
probably the
most true to
his
appearance.*

St. Martin de Porres Triduum

November 1, 2, and 3

First Day: St. Martin, you always had sympathy for the poor and those who were suffering. I need your help and now ask for it with great confidence in your goodness and power. Please remember me, as you adore God. Amen.

(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Closing Prayer.)

Closing Prayer:

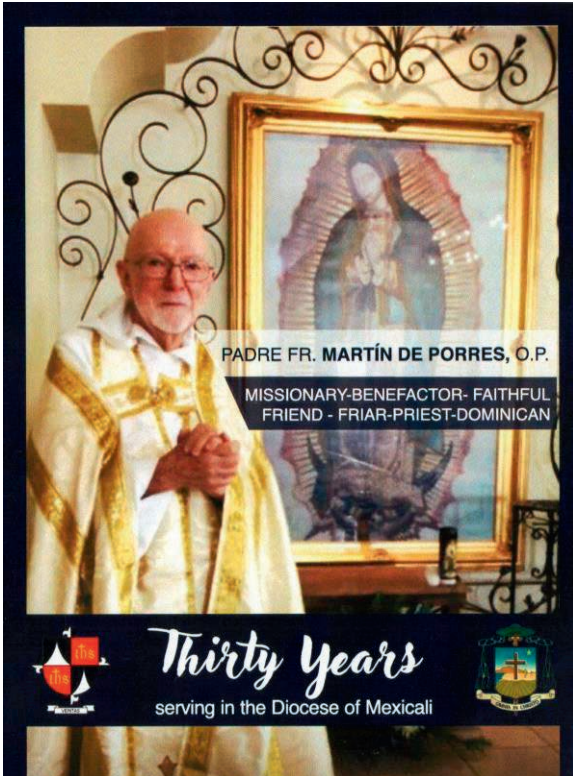
Dear St. Martin, I turn to you in my sorrow and anxiety to seek your friendly protection. Please intercede for me with our merciful Father in heaven so that I may be truly sorry for all my sins and be freed from the evils that shackle me. Ask that I might have something of your spirit of love and self-sacrifice, and so be at all times reconciled to God's holy will. Oh heavenly Father, in the name of your Son and of His blessed Mother, and by the merits of your faithful servant Martin, help me in my trouble and do not forsake me. Amen.

Second Day: St. Martin, we praise God for the manifestation of His love. The favors you received from God encourage us now to seek your intercession and help. We ask you most humbly to befriend and assist us from your place in heaven; but most of all, we beg you to commend us to our beloved Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Closing Prayer.)

Third Day: Brother Martin, when you were here on earth, you spent your life loving God and your neighbor. This we know from the testimony of your own Dominican brethren. Now that you live in the presence of God in paradise, intercede for those who stand so much in need of the healing help of God and beg the Divine Physician to give us health of the soul and body. Amen.

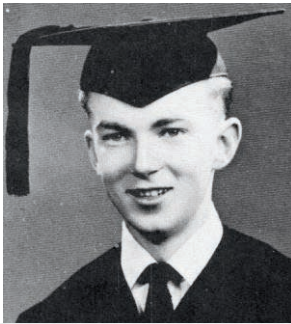
(Your petitions, followed by Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and Closing Prayer.)



Dear Mission Friends:

It was with heavy heart that I recently received the notice of being transferred from our mission in Mexicali, Mexico to our St. Dominic's priory and parish in San Francisco. I had served a total of 30 years there, interrupted only by an appointment as pastor of St. Dominic's from 1987 to 1995. I am grateful that the sadness in my heart has been lifted by the loving welcome I have received here from my Dominican brothers and sisters and the parishioners of St. Dominic's Church. I will now be present in San Francisco to carry out the ministry of the Dominican Mission Office in person, with the continued assistance of Nancy Keating and Lesley Warnshuis, and look forward to filling my days with any other duties to which I am assigned. I still have much of that old energy (see my yearbook picture and below, which Lesley insisted on including, against my better wishes) and I don't intend to slow down if I can help it. But I think Sr. Bertrand would be pleased with how I've channeled it, thanks, indirectly, to her. Please remember me in your prayers as I begin this bittersweet transition from Mexicali to San Francisco.

*In Christ's peace,
Fr. Martín*



JOHN VINCENT WALSH
Effervescent is the word for Jack . . .

Dear Friends:

Thanksgiving Day has expanded well beyond the gratitude for bountiful harvests into all the blessings of life, and is celebrated by peoples of many faiths, nationalities, and occupations. Those in our mission areas are inexpressibly grateful for improved nutrition, health and medical care; for the benefits of education and technical training; for methods of defense and resistance against injustice, abuse, and exploitation; and for spiritual guidance. They are particularly grateful for the love, concern, kindness, and support provided by you, their unknown benefactors, who have made, and continue to make, all of this available to them. And they have a special heartfelt gratitude for the missionary priests, brothers, and sisters who devote their lives to serving them...We here at the Mission Office are grateful as well—to every one of you for providing the foundation upon which we depend. The simple phrase "Thank you" is insufficient...therefore we turn to Our Lord in prayer to see the gratitude in our hearts and convey it to you from the bounty of His love—that you may have health, peace and happiness each day of your lives."

*~Fr. Joseph Asturias, O.P.
from Missionaries in Action. Nov. 1993*

