

holding slipped out of his hands. He died at the age of 59 around 9:00pm on November 3, 1639.

For a “poor mulatto,” Martín’s funeral was extraordinary; it appeared more like that of a high ranking official than of a humble Dominican friar. Mourners included many religious and friends of the monastery and surrounding monasteries, as well as lay dignitaries and military officials. Martín’s body was carried by four of his closest friends, including the Archbishop of Mexico and the Bishop of Cuzco. He was buried among the priests because he was judged worthy of such an honor. Later that evening, Archbishop Feliciano de la Vega remarked, “Yes, this is the way saints should be honored.”

We may wonder why it took 323 years for his canonization, but God works in his own way, not ours. Perhaps it was delayed to parallel the Second Vatican Council, which would result in vast changes enabling a heightened understanding and appreciation for the spiritual life in the Catholic Church—including the role of the laity. Or perhaps it was to accompany the Civil Rights movement, which was making strides in the United States to bring about awareness of the equality and contributions of Black Americans. Perhaps this is why St. Martín de Porres was canonized; that an ‘illegitimate’ mulatto became a Christian role model who transcended prejudice, labored in the fields of the Lord, and changed the world around him.

Additional quotes of St. Martín:

“Compassion, my dear Brothers, 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.”

“Everything, even sweeping, scraping vegetables, weeding a garden and waiting on the sick could be a prayer, if it were offered to God.”

Sources include: martindeporres.org



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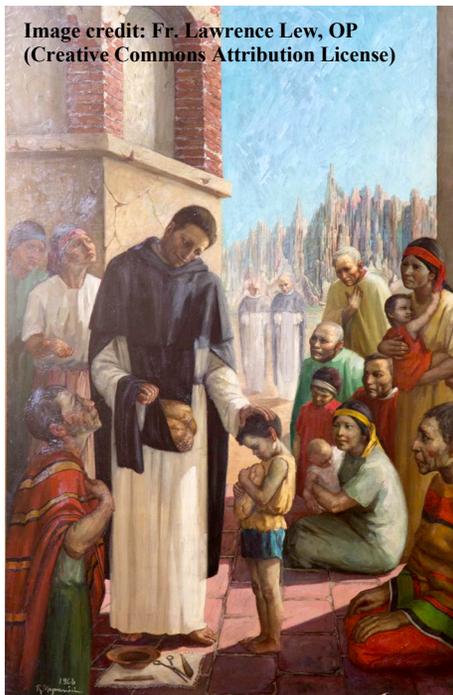


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St. Martín de Porres *Dominican Layman*

Born: Dec. 9, 1579 (Lima, Peru)
Died: Nov. 3, 1639 (Lima)
Canonized: May 6, 1962 by Pope John XXIII
Feast Day: November 3
Patronage: social justice, African Americans, mixed race persons, barbers and hairdressers, public health, public education

Martín de Porres Velázquez was born in Lima, Peru in 1579. He was the ‘illegitimate’ son of Spanish knight Don Juan de Porras y de la Peña and Anna Velázquez, a woman of both African and Native

American heritage. Martín’s father acknowledged him as his son after eight years, but then abandoned the family when his sister was born.

Martín’s burden of growing up in poverty was compounded by bearing the stigma of that time and place stemming from his mulatto, or mixed race, status.

At the age of 12, he became an apprentice to a barber-surgeon. (At the time, barbers also provided medical services.) He learned to cut hair and draw blood for the accepted medical procedure of the day—bleeding a patient—and to prepare and administer medicines.

When he was 15, he began working for the Dominicans (the Order of Preachers founded by St. Dominic) as a servant, then as an almoner who distributed the alms to the poor. These alms were sometimes discovered to have been supplied through miraculous means. After eight years, the head of the monastery was so moved by Martín’s holiness that he decided to ignore contemporary Peruvian laws against mulattoes and allowed Martín to profess vows as a lay Dominican.

Not all the monastery residents accepted him, however. He was ridiculed and debased even by some of his fellow Dominicans, but Martín never retaliated. All the insults and attacks aimed toward him, he in turn offered to God in prayer as a sacrifice.

One of Martín's closest friends was another Dominican, St. Rosa of Lima (canonized in 1671), the first saint of the Americas.

It is said that his "profound and simple humility was based on his knowledge of the greatness of God," and he avoided any form of pride. For example, Martín insisted upon wearing one habit until it disintegrated into mere threads and fibers. He opposed attempts to buy a second one. He also performed severe penance several times a day.

Martín tended to the sick in the monastery infirmary, which he kept well-stocked through creative means. He was thrifty with material goods for his fellow Dominicans, so that he could ensure that necessities remained for the care and comfort of the sick.

When an epidemic struck Lima, beds across the city became filled with patients. Martín busied himself by attending to the sick both inside and outside the monastery. He even brought a sick man into his own room as a temporary holding place. When the Prior scolded him for disobeying previous direction this way, the humble friar replied, "Forgive my error, and please instruct me, for I did not know that the precept of obedience took precedence over that of charity." After this, the Prior allowed Martín to follow his inspirations and perform the works of mercy as he saw fit.

Many recorded instances of his brother monks claim to have found him in the chapel before the Blessed Sacrament, so filled with love for Jesus that he levitated in pure ecstasy. Sometimes witnesses reported that he was surrounded by a brilliant light in prayer.

In other instances, Martín was able to miraculously pass through locked doors to help a sick or dying person or to bilocate to another part of the monastery. He also possessed a gift to be able to foresee if the person in his care would or would not recover. If he tended to them continuously, the patient sensed that they would not recover, because Martín was very patient and caring with the dying. However, if they felt somewhat

"neglected," he would tell them to take heart, because it meant he knew they would be well soon.

Often, Martín is depicted holding a broom, with a mouse and dog at his feet. The dog may symbolize the Dominican Order, or that some called him a 'mulatto dog,' but it is more widely associated with his care for all creatures, including animals.

Once, there seemed to be a mouse "convention" in the wardrobe room of the monastery; mice feasted on the finest garments and sheets, leaving old ones untouched. Some of the monks wanted to poison the rodents, but Martín would not hear of it. He caught a little mouse, he said to it, "Little brother, why are you and your companions doing so much harm to the things belonging to the sick? Look, I shall not kill you, but you are to assemble all your friends and lead them to the far end of the garden. Every day, I will bring you food if you leave the wardrobe alone." After Martín let go of the mouse, there was scurrying from every nook and cranny. Then, a tiny procession started towards the monastery garden. Martín led the mice to their new home. Every day he kept his word, and no mouse ever set a claw or tooth in the monastery wardrobe again.

Word spread about him, and Martín became known outside Lima; groups of laity and clergy came to him seeking spiritual counsel, material aid, prayers, and cures. Although Martín wished to remain obscure, he continued responding to these requests, as he saw it was God's will.

In January 1639, he began experiencing fever, tremors, and agonizing pain. He suffered several bouts of illness throughout the year, and eventually told his fellow monks that this illness would be his last. As he lay dying, he appeared tormented by the devil. The evil one attempted to trick and persuade Martín into believing that he had wasted his life on fruitless works and prayers. Between these periodic battles, however, Martín continued having ecstasies in which there appeared to him the Blessed Mother, St. Dominic, St. Vincent Ferrer, and other saints and angels who gave him courage.

He asked for the Last Sacraments. As the *Salve Regina* was sung and the Creed began in the monastery, the crucifix which Martín had been