



St. Martin de Porres

Dominican Layman, Servant

Born: December 9, 1579 **Died:** November 3, 1639
Canonized: May 6, 1962 **Feast Day:** November 3

Born in Lima, Peru in 1579, he was the illegitimate son of John de Porres, a Spanish knight, and an African free-woman named Anna. His father abandoned the family, and so Martin was brought up in poverty. As a young teenager, he began working with the Dominicans, a religious community founded by St. Dominic; and eventually became a Brother in the community. Martin tended the sick and was given the responsibility for the daily distribution of food to the poor in the town, which oftentimes was supplied through miraculous intervention.

Because of his social status as a person of mixed race, there were many times when he was ridiculed – but Martin remained quiet, never retaliating. He offered all of the insults and attacks toward him as a sacrifice to God. It was said that “his profound and simple humility was based on his knowledge of the greatness of God”.

Martin was a very spiritual man, spending time in prayer, sometimes surrounded by a brilliant light. There are recorded instances of his brother monks who claimed to have found him in the chapel, before the Blessed Sacrament, so filled with love for Jesus that he levitated in pure ecstasy.

Often we see Martin pictured in his Dominican habit holding a broom, with a dog and mouse at his feet. One time there seemed to be a mouse "convention" in the wardrobe room of the monastery, where they feasted on the finest linen garments and sheets, leaving the old ones untouched. Some of the monks wanted to poison the rodents, but Martin would not hear of it. One day he caught a little mouse and held him gently, and said, *Little mouse, why are you and your companions doing so much harm to the things belonging to us? 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 Martin let go of the mouse, the group of mice came out from every nook and cranny and left the monastery towards the garden. And yes, Martin brought the mice food every day, and since then, no mouse was ever seen in the monastery!

Martin became known outside of Lima. Groups of people, including clergy, began coming to him for spiritual counseling and prayers for healing. Although Martin wanted to remain obscure, he visited with them because he saw it as God's will.

In January of 1639 when Martin was sixty, he became very ill with chills, fevers, tremors and agonizing pain. He knew he was dying. He asked for Last Sacraments. As the *Salve Regina* was sung and the Creed recited, the crucifix which Martin had been holding slipped out of his hands at the moment of his death. He died on November 3.

In the Spring of 1962, Pope John XXIII canonized St. Martin de Porres in Rome. We may wonder why there is such a delay, but God works in His own way, not ours. Perhaps it was because the Second Vatican Council was underway, which would result in vast changes enabling a heightened understanding and appreciation for the spiritual life in the Catholic Church. Perhaps it was because the Civil Rights movement was making strides in the United States to bring about an awareness of the equality and contribution of Black Americans. Perhaps this is why St. Martin de Porres was canonized, to serve as a Christian model to show that an illegitimate mulatto, brought to a lowly position in the 16th and 17th century Peruvian society, transcended the prejudice and labored in the fields of the Lord; and changed the world around him.

Here are some words of wisdom from the Saint: *Everything, even sweeping, scraping vegetables, weeding a garden and waiting on the sick could be a prayer, if it were offered to God.*

St. Martin de Porres, pray for us; that we would come to live in Jesus' humility as you did here on this earth; trusting in God's loving will for each moment of our daily lives.