

St Martin and Family Life

By Lindokuhle Maranjane

Do you ever feel the pressure of comparing your family with others and realising that your family does not measure up to what you see? We all have dreams of what our ideal family life would be like. Sometimes these are caused by “model” families that we have seen, or perhaps they are the dreams we had of what our own family should be like.

As for St. Martin de Porres who was born in a tiny hut in Lima, Peru, he himself was never born in a perfect family. He was the son of a Spanish knight and a woman of African descent who had been freed from slavery. After Martin’s younger sister was born, his father abandoned the family, partly because he was embarrassed to be seen with his coloured children who belonged to a lower class in society. Young Martin, one of the most beloved saints of popular devotion throughout the world, was then given the task to taking care of his family.

He was raised by his mother in extreme poverty, on the very lowest rungs of early Spanish colonial society. Sometimes Martin was sent by his mother to buy food from the market, only to often return empty-handed, giving away the food to the poorer people of Lima. His mother would punish him but Martin believed in his heart that



serving the poor was worth the punishment. He would devote the rest of his life of serving the needs of the poor. All he did was directed to serve the poor people of Lima, out of his love of people, he was given a name “Father of the Poor”. St. Martin de Porres is recognised today as the patron saint of social and justice.

Remember that looks can be deceiving and comparisons unfair. As the Bible says: *“We dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise”* (II Corinthians 10:12). As we grow up as children, parents often give examples of others whom they think are more mature. They consider this an opportunity to challenge us to righteousness, but in reality, it is often more of an offence to us. Over the years, parents find a better solution for challenging young people in righteousness—encouraging and blessing them as they see each one taking steps in the right direction.

At one level, St. Martin’s life is a wonderful story of someone who overcame the hardships of family and prejudice and ended up doing a great service to society. Everyone loves a good underdog story, and this is a perfect example – almost a spiritual rags-to-riches story. But if we stop there, we risk seriously misinterpreting the life of St. Martin de Porres. The danger is a common one – we tend to remember what people have done in their lives rather than who they are.

Let’s think about that “ideal” family where that family has no problems and no arguments; where there is only agreement with everything. Many times our observations are just taking a photo of others. We don’t know what they are really like. It can seem that they surely do not experience conflicts. But if we had the opportunity to spend time with them, we may find that one family member struggles with pride, one has a problem with anger, and another tends to be lazy. God has not finished working with them, just as He is still working in our lives. *“He which had begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6). We can trust Him to complete this work. We never fully arrive, but we are a work in progress. It is the same with our families too. They are also a work in progress. Encourage each one to become the best person they can be.

In this way, let’s hold back from trying to become that perfect family, but instead become the family that God intended us to become. Our desire is to please the Lord. Follow the principles and commitments that He has revealed to your family, according to His Word. Observe the positive direction your family members are going in and encourage them in it. Look for the best in family members and praise those qualities. Then we can fulfill the words of St Paul: *“Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things”* (Philippians 4:8).



SOLIDARITY WITH THE POOR

Dona Paulina is a poor woman who has been on the same street corner in Lima, Peru, selling newspapers for more than thirty years. She is a small woman, but strong, with streaks of gray beginning to show in her hair. Her permanently chapped skin tells its own story of hardship. The daughter of Quechua Indians,² Paulina left her mountain village many years ago to begin a new life in a foreign land: the city of Lima. She not only had to find a job that would support her, but she also was forced to begin learning Spanish. Her family and all the people of her Andean village spoke Quechua, so she had never had to learn Spanish. She did not have the luxury of combining her work with going to school; she had never been to school, so she worked to survive, and later to raise her children. The tragic irony is that Doha Paulina cannot even read the newspapers that she sells.

I met Dona Paulina when I was a theology student in Lima in 1985. Our Dominican community bought the daily paper from her, at her little makeshift stand on the street corner. We became



FOCUS: THE FAITH OF DONA PAULINA¹

There is rarely a church in Latin America that does not have a statue of Saint Martin de Porres, usually surrounded by candles — like the ones Martin used during his night vigils as a child. Revered throughout the continent, Martin's message, like that of the much-loved Virgin of Guadalupe, is one of hope, solidarity, and special love for the poor. Devotion to Martin de Porres reaches from Ireland to Vietnam, and is found in many parts of Africa and the United States, as well. His simple life of prayer and compassion is easily understood by those seeking a deeper spiritual life. This final chapter in our fifteen days is a true story and shows how Martin lives today in the faith of the poorest of the poor, revealing to all of us the loving face of God

friends. She affectionately called me "hermanito" (little brother). Her smile, though always marked by a slight shadow of suffering, has always been radiant and full of love. We chatted each morning as my Dominican brothers and I waited for the bus on our way to classes. Ours was the orange #57 bus, and as we boarded it each day, engulfed in its cloud of smoke and fumes, the last thing I'd hear was, "Chao, hermanito! Que le vaya bien!"³ I was headed to quiet classrooms to read and study theology, while she sat there on her wooden stool for fourteen hours a day, burned by the sun, bombarded by noise and breathing in the fumes of hundreds of buses and cars. Then, as now, those fourteen hours earn her about a dollar or two a day.

I have returned to Peru many times over the years, and one of the first things I do when I get to the city is go over and see my friend, Doha Paulina. After almost twenty years now, when she sees me coming down the street, she still waves and smiles as if I were just returning from one of my theology classes. Since meeting Paulina, I have been to dozens of countries and thousands of

cities, while she has sat on this very same corner every single day.

Sometimes it simply boggles my mind. The poor are not only poor economically, but their minds are impoverished by the enslaving lack of possibilities in life. I am reminded of the phrase of the United Negro College Fund, "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." It is so true.

I was in Peru recently to teach a course to young Peruvian Dominicans — and, of course, to visit dear Paulina. For me, to return every few years to Dona Paulina's corner and have a long talk with this woman of such profound faith and holiness grounds me. This woman has been one of the greatest spiritual teachers in my life, though she, like Martin de Porres, would laugh at so outlandish a suggestion. Her life is too transparent and too occupied with survival for such ideas.

During the first of our several conversations during this visit, I asked Dona Paulina about her children. Two of them have been in prison for almost ten years now — yet another heavy pain in her already heavy heart. Each time that I have seen Paulina during these ten years, she has recounted the way she saves up her money, penny by penny, so that she can take the two-day bus ride to the southern town of Puno, in order to spend one day with her sons, only to begin the long, two day trip home: four days of travel, one day of visiting, and five days of missed work. Each trip adds a couple more years to her tired body.

"How are your sons in Puno faring?" I asked on this visit. "Have you been able to travel there lately?"

She looked up at me with a sly smile on her face, which caught me completely by surprise. Typically, she talks about these two Sons with tears in her eyes. "They have both been moved to prisons in Lima now, she said, "so I can visit them more frequently. You know, hermanito, I am getting old and it is very difficult for me to make that trip."

I was elated. At least one small part of her daily suffering was finally relieved. "Thanks be to God!" I exclaimed. "How did that happen?" Her eyes still dancing with delight, she told me the story — almost as if she knew that she had been part of a secret coup d'état. The person behind the coup was, of course, Martin de Porres.

This is what Dona Paulina told me: "I saved up my pennies over many months and then went over there (she pointed to a clinic for the poor where a statue of Saint Martin de Porres stands quietly in a tiny chapel) to have a talk with 'Martincito'.⁴ I put the coins I had saved at his feet and I said to him, 'Martincito, you know that my sons are far away and that I am too old now to travel to see them. So here, I am leaving this money — enough for your bus ticket. I am begging you to go and bring my sons home to Lima.'"

That was it. She did not even ask him to free them from prison. All she asked was that he bring them close to home. She finished her prayers and went back to her newspapers, confident that she had been heard. "And you know what, hermanito? In one week both my sons were transferred to prisons here in Lima."

She smiled a huge smile this time, as tears rolled down my cheeks, and as I thought to myself: What I would give to have this kind of faith.

The LORD said [to Moses]: "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry.... Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them" (Ex 3:7-8).

The Life of St Martin - 15

AFFIRMATION OF LOVE. AFFIRMATION OF LIFE

Martin de Porres is very much alive today in the simple, yet profound faith of the poor. He continues to heal the sick and set free the brokenhearted. In him, we glimpse the face of God. In fact, all the saints remind us that our faith is an incarnate faith, and that by looking into the faces of one another, we see Jesus, the human face of God. As Dona Paulina stood before the statue of Saint Martin, to pray for her two sons, she looked into Martin's compassionate face and trustingly prayed to be heard by the God of unconditional love. Martin smiled on her prayer, and then God answered it.

Paulina knows that God answers prayer. Her prayer this time was not only answered, but the answer came wrapped in love. Once, when asked to define the theology of liberation, Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P., responded with a question, "How to say to the poor, the oppressed, the insignificant person, 'God loves you?'... This is the question for our Christian commitment.... Ultimately, we have no intellectual answers except to be with the poor."⁵ Saint Martin is able to communicate God's love so fully, because his life was lived with the poor. He heard their cries, he cured their wounds, he embraced them with love. This is what my friend, Dona Paulina, showed me so beautifully as we stood there talking that day on her busy street corner in Lima, Peru.

Another great holy person of Latin America, Archbishop Oscar Romero, said in a homily one year before his death, "I simply want to be the builder of a great affirmation, the affirmation of God, who loves us and wants to save us."⁶ Today, Saint Martin de Porres

continues to live out the great affirmation of God, the affirmation of love. He lived it faithfully during his lifetime, and he lives it today in the presence of God, and on behalf of the poor.

He lived it by helping to bring Dona Paulina's sons home to Lima. Now it is our turn to be builders of this great affirmation, as well.

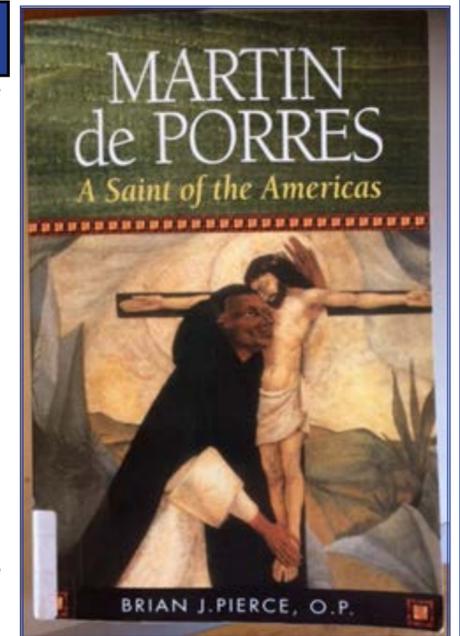
REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What does Dona Paulina's faith say to me? How was Saint Martin an instrument of God's love for her? Do I have any favorite saints? DO I approach them with confidence, trusting that through their love I see the face of God? Dona's prayer was not self-centered. She asked God to allow her to continue bringing the light of Christ's love to her sons. She begged Martin to help her be an apostle of that love. Are my prayers centered on how I might better love others? Who is in need of my prayer and my love today? Spend some time in prayer, holding those for whom you pray in the loving presence of your heart.

NOTES

1. The title *Dona* in Spanish (pronounced *Donya*) is a title of respect, used when speaking to elders and people in authority. The masculine form of the title is *Don*.

2. The Quechua Indians, principally located in the Andean region of Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador, are still today a very large and vibrant indigenous community, their roots stretching back to the pre-conquest period. Many Quechuas have migrated the cities over the years in search of work and fleeing from political violence. For most, Spanish is their second language.



3. "Bye, little brother! Have a good day!"
4. The diminutive suffix "ito" is commonly added to words in Peru as a sign of endearment. So "Martincito" is translated something like "dear little Martin."

5. Gustavo Gutiérrez, O.P., "An Interview With Gustavo Gutiérrez" by Mev Puleo, *St. Anthony Messenger* (February 1989), p. 10.

6. Archbishop Oscar Romero, "The Church Is All of You", edited and translated by James R. Brockman, S.J., (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1984), p. 63. From a homily preached on February 25, 1979

This brings to a conclusion our serialisation of the book *Martin de Porres - A Saint for the Americas*. We hope you have enjoyed reading it. Reproduced by kind permission of author Brian Pierce OP, and Liguori Press.

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with Fr. Chaqa Motanyane, OP



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Email: smartincentre@gmail.com
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LENT

For many Catholics Lent is like a dark cloud hanging over our heads. Even the liturgical colour for Lent is somewhat dreary!

South Africa has gone through a dark period in many ways. There has been load shedding, bribery, corruption and more. Even our beloved Church has been going through dark times. Cardinals, bishops and priests have been defrocked and the scandals have rocked and scarred the Church. All this has made us feel very embarrassed and ashamed. Many have stopped supporting the Church and some have even abandoned the Church.

But negativity will get us nowhere and bring unhappiness. This can be very toxic. Our Holy Father has invited us to make Lent a time of growth and renewal.

By Fr Emil Blaser OP



One suggestion he has made is that we don't gossip about each other. How life-giving that would be!

Another suggestion I would have is that Lent be a time for us personally to return to the Lord. Instead of giving up chocolates, let Lent be a time of re-commitment to our families and communities, a time of speaking well about others, a time to respond to the financial needs of the ministries in the Church, a time to overcome selfishness and greed.

May it be a time of renewal and of making a good confession and starting again. In this way we move away from that dark cloud hanging over society and the Church and discover the love, mercy and forgiveness of God deep within us.

OUR FINANCES

Herewith is an update of our financial situation. We hope it gives you a little insight into how your money has been spent.

ST MARTIN CENTRE BUDGET FOR 2019	
	YEAR
INCOME	187 153,00
EXPENSES	
Personel	111 805,63
Telephone	8 100,00
Bank charges	5 248,06
Pension	7 891,84
UIF	1 578,96
Rent	6 000,00
Transport	17 400,00
Stipend	6 250,00
Web site	1 260,00
Postage	4 500,00
Refreshments	1 500,00
Sundry	0,00
Printing and Stationery	4 180,80
Repository	0,00
Income	187 153,00
Expenses	175 715,29
Excess/Deficit	11 437,71

You will notice that a fair amount of money has been spent on administration and the running of the office. During the course of the year much money was spent on paying the monthly contract on our photostat machine. This has now come to an end and we have a simple printer while all our major printing jobs are done pro bono through Mr John Shalala at JETLINE. We are truly grateful to him as this is a great saving for us. You will notice that a fair amount of money has been spent on providing for our coordinator, Mavis Ngwenya, who has been with us for many years and is now looking forward to retirement. She is always available in the office to receive phone calls, to faithfully pray the St Martin novena for all those who request St Martin's help, take care of mail and any requests that come to the centre. Money has also been used in a very limited way to help some young people with regard to their education.

In the future we would like to boost the income, not so much to cover administration but more especially to assist the poor and needy, and the training of Dominican priests for the future. This is a major expense which we hope that you will respond to. This year three brothers have been ordained priests and two more will be ordained next year.

Many of you have been giving monthly donations to the Saint Martin Centre for many years. I know these are challenging times but I would ask if possible, that you might be able to increase your monthly contributions so that we can respond more generously to Saint Martin's friends.

Thank you for your generosity and may St Martin continue to pray for you and touch your lives in an even more meaningful way. If you could increase your monthly contributions by at least 50%, that would make a tremendous difference.

ST MARTIN CENTRE		2018
INCOME		185 841,09
EXPENDITURE		
Transport	9 634,00	
Donations	11 500,00	
Personnel	88 184,20	
Office Expenses	90 172,52	199 490,72
Net Deficit		-13 649,63
The Balance Sheet is showing the following:- (31/12/2018)		
Standard bank		23 506,07
Petty cash		377,84
Market link		182 320,59
Monies we have to pay out:-		
Dominican		1 000,00
Deaf Ministry		1 850,00

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Acc Name: St Martin Centre

Bank: Standard Bank

Branch: Springs

Branch code: 012142

Acc. No: 020858647

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Mr John Shalala

