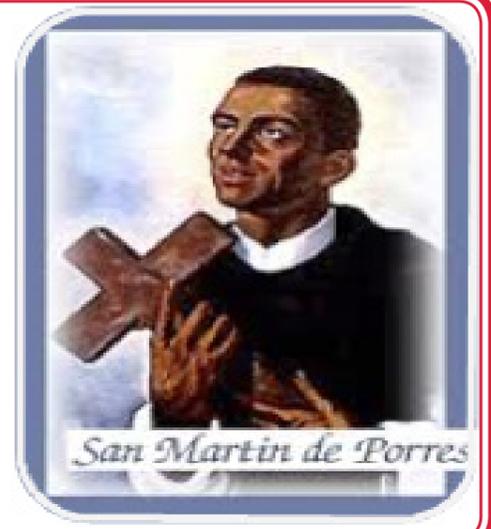


ST MARTIN DE PORRES

MAGAZINE



Once again Christmas is upon us and we await the New Year. Most people look forward to a message of hope. Pope Francis always speaks in a language that people can relate to. Here are his thoughts about Christmas.

“The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of all men.” (Tit 2:11). The words of the apostle Paul reveal the mystery of this holy night: the grace of God has appeared, his gift is free; in the Child given unto us the love of God is made visible.

The shepherds simply discover that “unto us a Child is born” (Is 9:5) and they understand that all this glory, all this joy, all this light converges to one single point, that sign which the angel indicated to them: “you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger” (Lk 2:12). This is the enduring sign to find Jesus. Not just then, but also today. If we want to celebrate Christmas authentically, we need to contemplate this sign: the fragile simplicity of a small newborn, the uniqueness of where he lies, the tender affection of the swaddling clothes. God is there.

In order to discover him, we need to go there, where he is: we need to bow down, humble ourselves, make ourselves small. The Child who is born challenges us: he calls us to leave behind fleeting illusions and go to the essence, to renounce our insatiable claims, to abandon our endless dissatisfaction and sadness for something we will never have. It will help us to leave these things behind in order to rediscover in the simplicity of the God-child, peace, joy and the meaning of life.

Let us allow the Child in the manger to challenge us, but let us also allow ourselves to be challenged by the children of today’s world, who are not lying in a cot caressed with the affection of a mother and father, but rather suffer the squalid “mangers that devour dignity”: hiding underground to escape bombardment, on the pavements of a large city, at the bottom of the boat overladen with immigrants. Let us allow ourselves to be challenged by the children who are not allowed

to be born, by those who cry because no one satiates their hunger, by those who do have not toys in their hands, but rather weapons.

The mystery of Christmas, which is light and joy, questions and unsettles us, because it is at once both a mystery of hope and of sadness. It bears within itself the taste of sadness, in as much as love is not received, and life discarded. This happened to Joseph and Mary, who found the doors closed, placed Jesus in a manger, “because there was no place for them in the inn”. Jesus was born rejected by some and regarded by many others with indifference. Today also the same indifference can exist, when Christmas becomes a feast where the protagonists are ourselves, rather than Jesus; when the lights of commerce cast the light of God into the shadows; when we are concerned for gifts but cold towards those who are marginalised.

The shepherds grasped this on that night. They were among the marginalised of those times. But no one is marginalised in the sight of God and it was precisely they who were invited to the Nativity. Those who felt sure of themselves, self-sufficient, were at home with their possessions; the shepherds instead “went with haste”. Let us allow ourselves also to be challenged and convened tonight by Jesus. Let us go to him with trust, from that area in us we feel to be marginalised, from our own limitations. Let us touch the tenderness which saves. Let us draw close to God who draws close to us, let us pause to look upon the crib, and imagine the birth of Jesus: light, peace, utmost poverty, and rejection. Let us enter into the real Nativity with the shepherds, taking to Jesus all that we are, our alienation, our unhealed wounds. Then, in Jesus we will enjoy the flavour of the true spirit of Christmas: the beauty of being loved by God. With Mary and Joseph we pause before the manger, before Jesus who is born as bread for my life. Contemplating his humble and infinite love, let us say to him: thank you, thank you because you have done all this for me.

Pope Francis: Extracts: Christmas 2016

This is a time when many people feel that they need to pay a visit to the church. Churches are usually full on Christmas day. But it is also a time of merrymaking and holidaying, with people enjoying a well-earned rest after an exhausting year. An enormous amount of money, even in these difficult economic times, is lavishly spent on travel, luxuries and gifts.

It is appropriate that we be reminded of those who are struggling in one way or another. Many gifted young students are facing the New Year wondering how they are going to support themselves. There is the continued call that fees-must-fall and that

Christmas & New Year

Fr Emil Blaser

education should be free. Many would like to embark on a course of education but are unable to due to financial constraints. Others are struggling to find employment so as to support an ailing parent and a young brother or sister at school.

Some have simply given up.

We, at St Martin centre are keen to help people in difficult situations. We ask you please in this festive season to think about people who are less fortunate than you are. Please send us your contributions so that we can help those who look to St Martin for help. Remember, every little bit helps. Remember this especially when you are about to buy a bottle of your favourite fragrance for up to R1000 or more! Or when you are about to buy your child another electronic toy which will find itself in a neglected box in a short time! God will bless your thoughtfulness and generosity!

A Blessed Christmas to all!

The Garden of God

Every living being was, for Martin, a manifestation of the grandeur and beauty of God. If the animals were his friends, then the earth, with its many trees and plants, was his playground. Martin loved the fecundity of the earth, its fertility and plentifulness. It all spoke to him of the gratuitousness of God.

The cloister garden of both Santo Domingo Priory and the neighbouring Priory of La Recoleta were places where Martin could be alone and creative, witnessing the miracles of nature and God's goodness. The many medicinal plants which Martin grew in the gardens were all part of his own clandestine, non-governmental drug-prescription programme: God's free medicine for the poor!

"The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there God put the human whom he had formed from the dust of the ground. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flows out of Eden to water the garden" (Genesis 2:8-10).

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life ... flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations" (Rev 22:1-2).

SYMBOL OF LIFE AND DEATH

The two quotes above stand like bookends on either end of the Judaeo-Christian Scriptures. Our story of salvation begins and ends in the garden teeming with life. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is crucified and rises from the dead in the garden (19:41; 20:15). The garden is the symbol of life and death and life again. *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24).*



This picture is a fresco from the Martin de Porrès "House of Hospitality" - a "free restaurant" for the homeless in San Francisco

Martin felt right at home in God's garden.

Every year, during the month of July, Martin and his friend Juan, hiked up into the hills north of Lima, to an area called Los Amancaes. They always went following the celebrations commemorating the feast of St John the Baptist. For Martin it was a chance to get away with some much-needed solitude and see the last of the golden amancaes. It was up in the hills that Martin communed with the earth and all her beauty. Like St Francis, Martin was in love with creation, but in a way similar to his passion for the animals, Martin's love for the earth was deeply connected with his love for the poor.



On one of the treks up into the hills of Amancaes, Martin instructed Juan to join him in sowing manzanilla (chamomile) seeds in the hoof prints that the cattle had left in the wet ground. Juan commented that it seemed rather futile to sow seeds there, as the cattle would simply eat the plants once they began to grow. According to Juan, Martin began laughing, and responded that this would be a good way of pruning the plants so that

they would grow even stronger. Juan again tried to dissuade Martin, but this time Martin told his friend that it was his job to return every few days to check on the plants and to keep the cattle away. Says Juan in his testimony, "three days later I went back to that place and found it surrounded by cattle. The plants were thriving - as if they had been growing there for more than a year."

On another occasion, while they were walking in the same hills, Martin cut off a branch of a fig tree and carried it to the top of the hill, where he dug a hole and planted it. Two weeks later he and Juan returned to the spot. "Father," remarked Juan, "the fig tree you planted 18 days ago is already adding," to which Martin responded, "thanks be to God, within two or three years it will bear fruit for the poor who pass by this way." For Martin, the earth was God's garden of plenty. It belonged to everyone - even the cattle, but especially to the poor.

Martin's love for creation has much to teach us in an age in which we live stressed with work, making money, being successful. In this frenzied rhythm of life, we so easily lose sight of the fact that God is providing for our needs, caring for us with a gardener's love. So what if the cows eat the manzanilla, Martin said with his light-hearted humour, we will have healthier cows and stronger plants!

"Do not worry about your life,"

(says Jesus)... "Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his glory was clothed like one of these ... Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:25-33)

Martin worked hard, but he knew that he was not in control of the fruits of his labour. This was up to the Lord of the harvest. As the Psalmist says, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it / the world and those who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). Because of this deep trust in Divine Providence, Martin never abused God's creation to further his own greed or power. There was no need to fence in his own private property, leading the cattle excluded from the garden of God's goodness. How different our times have become! Nations battle to protect their borders, building fences and walls for self enslavement. Wars are being waged to control the world's oil reserves. Why so much greed? Where is our trust in God and one another? Have we lost sight of the gratuitousness of life?

A few years ago a Dominican friar was visiting a community of Mayan Indians in the northern part of Guatemala. The land in this area was lush and green, covered with fields of corn and beans. Surrounding the huts in the village were mango, papaya, banana, and orange trees, not to mention the colourful flowers growing everywhere. The friar, who had been a worker priest in Spain and was familiar with different experiments in cooperative farming, was impressed not only with the beauty of the land but also with what appeared to be a high level of production.

In a conversation with one of the leaders later in the day, the friar asked, "Is the land here in your village divided up and owned privately or do you own it communally through a cooperative?" He was hoping that the farmer would affirm that the latter was the case. The in-

The Life of St Martin - 8

digenous peasant looked at the friar with a confused look on his face, and after a rather long pause, replied, "Own the land? How can someone own his own mother?"

"Blessed are the meek," said Jesus "for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5).

We have become accustomed to a way of life that is far from the design of our Creator. Millions of acres of Brazilian rainforests have been sold and cut down - as if we were dealing with onions or tomatoes in a market. Agribusinesses and mega landowners have run the poor and middle classes off of the land. Factories pollute our waterways, depleted uranium is used to fight our wars, and asthmatic children are suffocating in our cities.

The hills surrounding Lima today are barren deserts. Not a blade of grass can be seen anywhere. There are no more yellow amancaes to signal the coming of the feast of St John the Baptist. And as the flowers wither and the fields dry, so do the poor. When Martin planted his fig tree on the top of the hill, he did so thinking of coming generations: "Thanks be

to God, within two or three years it will bear fruit for the poor who pass by this way."

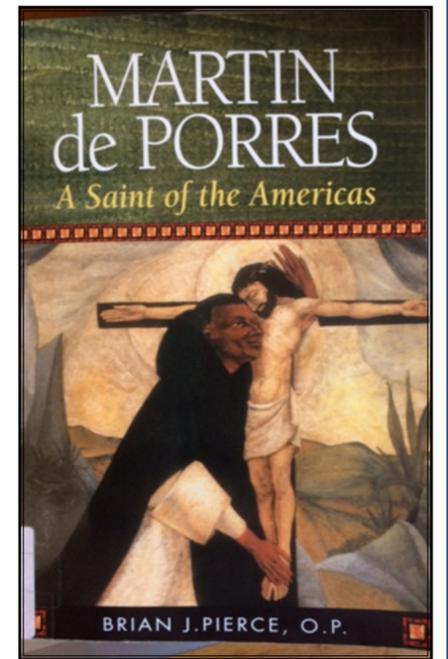
The poor continue to pass by that very spot, but the fig tree is gone. We need more Martins who are courageous enough to fall in love with the earth again.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Am I aware of the daily destruction and sale of the earth by the forces of greed in our world? What can I do to protect God's creation? Looking back at Martin's life, how did he connect his love for the earth with his love for the poor? Am I aware of how pharmaceutical companies have led us into forgetting the medicinal herbs and the natural remedies of our grandparents? And I willing to reclaim that ancient wisdom? Read a few lines from Psalm 104 each day this week, reflecting on their significance in our world today. Sow a garden or pot a plant and tend it as a reminder of God's gratuitous love for us.

To be continued.

FOCUS: LOVE FOR ALL CREATION



St Martin Centre Snippets

Touching lives

Each month very ordinary clients of St Martin de Porrès centre forward contributions to assist the poor in some way. Generally speaking we have reached out to people towards the end of the year.

We are happy to say that we have helped people with small contributions towards education, we have helped some in dire situations where their human rights have been abused, and we have also reached out to assist in the feeding of orphans and needy children, as well as helping in the ministry to the deaf. We hope also to make a contribution towards the education of Dominican students for the priesthood.

Naturally, what we can do is very limited as this depends on the contributions received. We do hope that in this festive season the clients of St Martin will open their hearts so that we can respond ever more generously to those who are struggling in one way or another.

One needy person responded saying: "Thank you so much, Father, you are God-sent!". We know that this is the sentiment of all those we are able to help.

Thank you all our generous and compassionate donors.

New shrine

Each day, our dedicated worker at the St Martin Centre, Mavis Ngwenya, has prayed before a make-shift shrine of St Martin for all the intentions sent into the Centre. Also, each day our director, Fr Emil Blaser OP, remembers at mass the intentions of all those who write in to the Centre. Your intentions are



Caroline Mthembu, Fr Emil and Mavis Ngwenya at the new shrine

never forgotten and are placed daily before our beloved St Martin.

A new shrine has been erected in the corner of our office with St Martin now overseeing all that is done in his name. All written petitions are placed in a container at the foot of the shrine. It is here that Mavis prays for you and your intentions every day. And if you visit our office, it is the shrine that will loudly greet you.

Zimbabwe

In recent weeks Zimbabwe has been in focus with the resignation of Robert Mugabe. In all the media we have witnessed the jubilation of the people of that beautiful country who have suffered so much over the last number of years. It seems that there is a new beginning with hope for an oppressed people.

There are millions of Zimbabweans in South Africa and many of them have enriched our country in different ways. One of our Dominican brothers, Dominic Chihota, started a project in the backwoods of Springs, in a place called Vischkuil. Here, on a daily basis the project feeds hundreds of our needy children and helps them in their education.

Much of the money needed is sourced from generous agencies, with a little contribution from government coffers. Other Zimbabweans, have become priests and are serving in some of our parishes. Many are working in media, education and business and in so many ways have, and continue to enrich our country. Sad as the situation might be in Zimbabwe with families broken and separated due to the dire economic situation, may we always be grateful to those Zimbabweans who have enriched us in so many ways.

Let us continue to pray for the rebuilding of what was once the breadbasket of Africa.

The rosary

St Martin was devoted to praying the rosary each day. Legend has it that St Dominic received the rosary from our blessed Lady, and down through the ages people have prayed and continue to pray this simple and profound prayer. Saints and scholars pray the rosary. Pope Francis and other bishops, priests and religious pray the rosary. Very ordinary and simple people find the rosary a meaningful form of prayer. Some find it difficult to pray. However, millions of people love the rosary and pray it every day - some several times a day.

Make it your priority. Pray the rosary upon waking in the morning or before going to bed at night. Let it help you to enter into a time of profound prayer and into a deepening of your love for our blessed Lady and Jesus. Our blessed Lady has always asked us to pray the rosary. Know that as you pray the rosary there are thousands praying it at the same time! May you find in this prayer a deep union with God and a closeness to Mary.

The Dominicans

Accommodating the “heart” & the “brain”, the “broom” & the “book”

On November 3, the Church honours one saint of the Order of Friars Preachers: Martin de Porrès. This Brother of colour was neither a “gifted writer” that spread science, nor a “voice” that thundered from the pulpits of the Cathedrals of his native Peru speaking of God to people.

Martin de Porrès was a heart that could only preach by the example of charity in the streets of Lima, and with humility, at the feet of his brothers at the Convent. His history and the way he lived among the doctors and preachers in Dominic’s house invites us to reconsider, from a certain angle, our belonging to the Order. There is, indeed, a way of seeing the Dominican who can make one forget, if one does not take care, that one becomes an apostle, a servant of God and people in the Church, on the call of Christ, regardless of diplomas (a minimum, it is true, is required) or origins...

Among the disciples of the Lord, there were fishermen and tax collectors, people of diverse (albeit all Jewish) origins.

Times have changed and the Apostolic mission which is incumbent upon Preachers, requests more than the simple abundance of the heart.

Times have changed; or better said, times change! The message entrusted to us to announce to the world has nevertheless remained the same in its essence: a crucified Messiah, always alive! This is the meaning



Saint Martin de Porrès, OP

By Fr Georges Alahou OP

of the two letters OP added to our name. In the beginning of the Order, the abbreviation OP used by Dominicans was defined in Latin as Ordo Praedicatorum sive Ordo Doctorum, which means Order of Preachers or Order of Doctors. And that sticks to their skin!

For many, being a Dominican Brother is the business of those who “can be counted among the scholars” and have “easy speech”. Names are not lacking in the history of the Order and the Church to confirm and to reinforce this view of the Dominicans.

In the Order of the Friars Preachers, it is Saint Albert the Great, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Las Casas, Lacordaire, Schillebeeckx, Congar and those who, even today, according to the graces received, put their pen and their voice at the service of this which was from the beginning and will remain the *raison d’être* of the Order in the Church: preaching for the salvation of men! However, Saint Dominic did not establish an Order of “brains” or “doctors”, in the sense that one often hears the word doctor (Master, Teacher, Professor, etc.). He wanted an Order of Preachers, brothers who, living the gospel in their community (the “*Santa praedicatio*”= “Holy preaching”), work for His incarnation in the world.

To fulfil this mission, priestly ordination is not obligatory for all brothers. Both Brothers who were dedicated to the service of the community, and priests found their way into the Order: Brother Thomas Aquinas (priest) was elevated to the rank of a saint and called “angelic doctor” for his science (the Dominican of the “brain”); Brother Martin de Porrès – a co-operator or helper – was also elevated to the rank of a saint and called “apostle of charity” because he had a heart open to the misery of his neighbour (the Dominican of the “heart”). Pen in hand (like Saint Thomas and those who have received the same grace to produce intellectual work from the Divine Master) or a broom in hand (like Saint Martin and those who know how to make their heart: sanctuary, uni-



Saint Thomas Aquinas, OP

versity and hospital), the most important aspect for the Dominican is to be a brother in the service of God and neighbour. The call to follow Christ is seen in the Order of Saint Dominic in a community where all are called “brothers”.

Being a so-called brother is not a title to be acquired or a degree that is given on the basis of an impressive curriculum vitae. It is rather a type of life - the life of the Apostle. It is a life for which the Order, in its wisdom, has deemed it important to ask anyone who wants to sign a blank check in the name of mercy, men to bear its own weaknesses and those of others; those of today who welcome him and those of tomorrow that he will welcome in his turn.

On receiving the habit of the order, a brother is asked: “What do you ask?” and he responds — “The mercy of God and that of the brothers”.

This is the rite of entry into the Order of Preachers. This rite, Martin of Porrès has accomplished; he made mercy, his personal motto and his heart, an asylum for the poor and the little ones in whom he saw and loved God. Where love and charity are, God is present! Where a poor man is, God asks that the heart reveals Him to be a God close to the small, the weak, the helpless of this world! The evocation of the name of Saint Martin de Porres is a call to descend to the level of the heart.

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