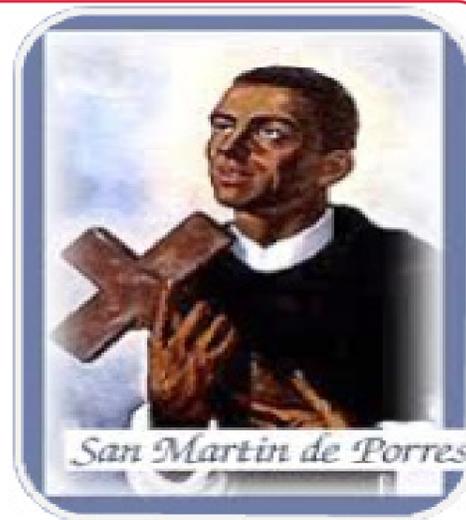


ST MARTIN DE PORRES

MAGAZINE



Martin and his friend Jesus

By Lindokuhle Maranjane

Many of us grow up doubting the love of God because of the relationships we have with others. Broken relationships, hurt from others, or even our own bad choices can cause us to doubt why God would choose to love us.

The question is, why do we doubt God at these times when we experience hurt or pain? Could it be that we misunderstand the meaning of God's love? For example, many of us see God as a protective parent and ourselves as helpless babies who must always be rescued from putting our hands in the fire.

Sometimes well-meaning churches even misguide us into thinking that we need to earn God's love by behaving or acting "good enough". In this respect, God is seen as a strict and punishing God who will only love us if we do what we are told. We must follow the rules, or we will get punished. In fact, both these ideas of God's love are inadequate.

There are no easy answers, but we can find a few clues in the Book of Genesis. When God created humans, He gave us authority over the earth and free will to make our own choices. This freedom included the choice to sin – to question God's wisdom and do things our own way. And even though this always brings harmful consequences, God gave us that option. Is it possible that God could have made humans without the ability to sin? Perhaps, but then to remove the chance of sin is to remove choice all together. We would have been robots, taking orders from God and never thinking, feeling, or choosing for ourselves. And could God really have a relationship with machines that are programmed to serve Him with no other choice? That's why God created humans the way He did. He gave us all creative desire, free will, and responsibility so that we could make our own choices. And most importantly, we have a real ability to experience a relationship with our Creator.

God's love makes us into adults responsible for our choices and not babies always in need of care and protection. God doesn't want us to go through life like infants. He wants us to grow up and be mature. Therefore, we need to see Jesus Christ's love as demonstrated by His greatest act of love when He died on the cross for us. We no longer have to work towards being loved, it is given freely for all.

Martin's understanding of God was different from the ideas of an excessively protective or strict parent. Martin's understanding of God was of a friend who wants the best for us. God sends us help in the person of Jesus to show us how we are to love others. He sends Jesus as our friend who died on the Cross for us (John 15:13). As Jesus says in John's Gospel, "I call you friends since I made known to you all that I heard from my Father" (John 15:15). This is why Martin



wept when he contemplated Christ on the Cross, the love of his friend for him, the willingness of his friend to give his life for him. Martin teaches us that Jesus is our friend who gives his life for us. Jesus taught Martin, and Jesus teaches us, that he isn't an overly-protective or strict parent but rather a friend who goes into danger ahead of us and is our friend and companion when we face similar dangers and challenges. He calls us to trust in Him to place our hope in him and to

believe that He will not abandon us. We need not fear, He is with us. In life, we have to face challenges and hardship but we don't do it alone because Jesus stands by our side as a friend and companion.

With Jesus by his side, Martin's heart was on fire with love and sympathy for humankind. He sought to relieve want and misery in every form among all classes and conditions of life. The example of Martin's life is ample evidence that we can strive for holiness and salvation as Christ Jesus has shown us: first, by loving God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; and second, by loving your neighbour as yourself."

Saint Martin, always obedient and inspired by his divine friend, dealt with his people with that deep love which comes from pure faith and humility of spirit. He loved people because he saw them as God's children, as friends, 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.

Martin felt the suffering of other people and when he reflected on his friend Jesus' terrible suffering on the Cross he was reduced to tears because he could feel and experience other people suffering as Christ suffering on the Cross. He saw them suffering like his friend Jesus. He also excused the faults of others. He forgave the bitterest injuries, convinced that he deserved more severe punishments because 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 helped, as best he could, farm labourers and black people, as well as those who were looked upon at that time as akin to slaves. He saw them as his friends too. Thus, he deserved to be called by the name the people gave him: "Martin of Charity."

Happy New Year to all our friends and supporters!

New Year's Prayer

Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Psalm 23:6

ORDINARY HOLINESS

Martin asked Isabel Garcia for a wax candle, or a stub of one... Afraid of a fire, but mostly wanting to know what was happening, Isabel allowed herself to be tempted by curiosity. Drawing near to the young boy's room, she peered through the cracks in the door. What she saw deeply moved her. Martin was on his knees, quiet, silent, and praying before an image of the Crucified. His dark silhouette was piously outlined against the glow of the candle, and search was this scene of prayerful anointing that it seemed almost impossible for such a young child.

FOCUS: ENERGISED BY GRACE

How does a person begin to pattern his or her own life on a life like Martin's without feeling overwhelmed? As a friend commented recently, "Martin did it all, from ringing bells, to cleaning toilets, to healing the sick, feeding the hungry, and blanketing big hills with herbs for the poor. And on top of all that, he spent half the night in prayer. How can we, ordinary laypeople - husbands and wives, parents and children, friends and co-workers even come close to practising our faith like Martin de Porres?" It is a good question. Certainly, the last thing that Martin would want is for us to feel "overwhelmed" by his life and therefore paralysed in our own following of Christ. How, then, can we be energised by his early life, finding in his story a link with our own story. Let us return for a moment to the beginning of Martin's story.

of the tree budding so quickly? Why does the *out-of-the ordinary* fascinate us so much? Do we think that holiness is out of the ordinary, too? What about Martin's words: "Thanks be to God, within two or three years it will bear fruit for the poor who pass this way." Is it not a miracle when someone does something as thoughtful as plant a fruit tree for the poor of future generations? Is that not the real miracle of love?

Saint Paul said, "If I speak in the tongues of mortals, and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers... and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13: 1-2). Maybe Saint Paul would say this of Martin's fig tree: "If I plant a fig tree on every hilltop in the world, and do not have love, then I am nothing." But if I plant one fig tree so that the poor have something to eat, *that* is a great miracle indeed. It is the miracle of love. It may be a bit less heroic than a fascination with the extraordinary stuff, but is it less important? Is this not what the gospel of Jesus is all about?

Martin's life can seem *overwhelmingly holy* if we get caught up in the exterior signs and miss the real holiness behind the signs: the holiness of love. Perhaps we have complicated the life of the Saints more than is necessary. Maybe we have tried too hard to *look* like them, rather than *love* like them. Martin just went about his life loving one person and one dog at a time. Now *that* does not seem so difficult. It actually seems possible, almost enjoyable.

Maybe Martin actually *enjoyed* being in love with the world! Is that what he is trying to teach us? After all, it is no fun being angry, bitter, and self-centred, even though we spend a lot of time *being* that way. Is this not what is behind the story of Father Pedro Montes de Oca, who yelled at Martin and called him a mulatto dog (and a few other things)? Martin, we remember, left the room laughing, and then went to the kitchen and made

LIGHT OF CHRIST

A wax candle. A stub of a simple wax candle. With that, Martin began his long and beautiful journey to God. Actually, he had already begun the journey - with another candle - though he was not old enough to remember it, it was just a day or two after his birth.

He was carried in the arms of his mother and his godparents to the Church of San Sebastian in Lima for the sacrament of baptism. On that day a candle was lighted and Martin heard these words: "Receive the light of Christ, *lumen Christi*." It was on that day did Martin's beautiful journey began to unfold.

The next 60 years all had something to do with that baptismal candle, which was an extension of the paschal light of Christ. Martin's light was not the blazing prophetic fire of Elijah, John the Baptist, or Joan of Arc. He was not a martyred missionary, remembered for carrying the light of the faith to faraway lands. though he dreamed of such a vocation. He did not build churches or orphanages; he was not a Bishop or a pope and did not found a religious congregation like Dominic, Francis, and Mother Teresa.

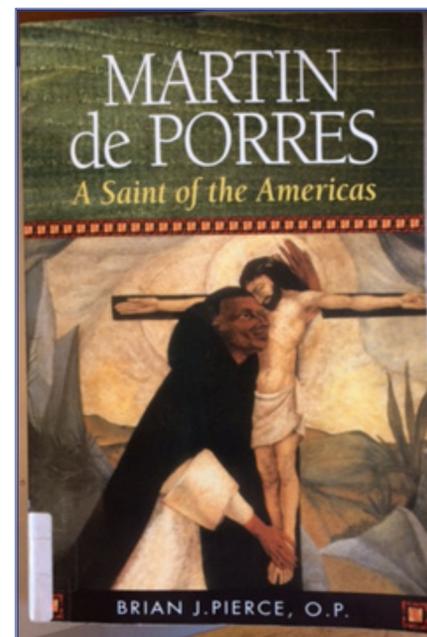
Martin's light was more like a candle, simple, always burning, always shining into some dark corner of our suffering world. Martin's holiness was really quite ordinary.



Part of what "overwhelms" us 400 years after Martin's life is that the stories told about him seem so "big". He worked miracles, communicated with animals and lived on bread and boiled vegetables. We must remember, though, that these stories represent the image of a saintly life in that particular time in history. That is why it is so important to go *into* the stories of Martin's life, to *see* and *hear* the details that are *not* extraordinary. This requires a kind of holy curiosity, a keen eye for

what seems insignificant, what is only hinted at and mentioned in passing. *That* is where we glimpse the masterpiece of Martin's holy life, and *that* is where we will find the tiny candle burning brightly in the midst of darkness.

Let us recall, for a moment, the story of Martin planting the branch of a fig tree on a hill in Amancaes - the same one that Juancho found budding 18 days later. A miracle! Yes, it does seem to be a miracle. Why, though, are we so struck by the miracle



him his favourite salad of capers. What a miracle! Who would have ever thought that making a caper salad could be such a wonderful miracle? Maybe we could all become saints! Imagine a world full of caper salads made by holy people! It could be the beginning of a real revolution.

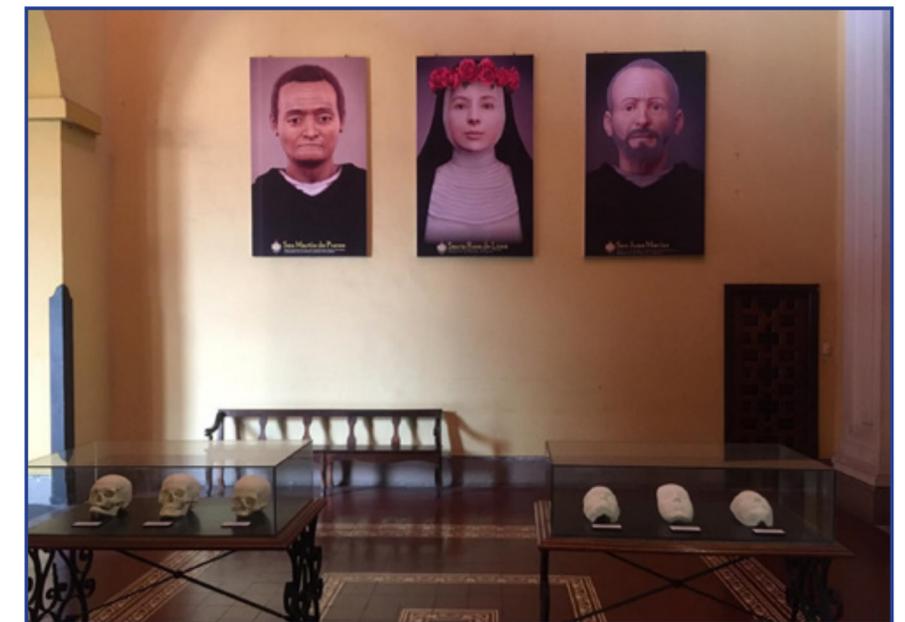
Martin was the kind of saint that reminds us that the miracle happens in the ordinary stuff of every day: sharing a salad and some bread with a friend, brewing a bit of chamomile tea for a stranger who is sick, planting a fig tree for the poor. Nothing too terribly heroic. It brings to mind the bumper sticker which reads: "Practice random acts of kindness." That is what Martin did. He walked through life with his stub of a candle in his hand and heart and practiced random acts of kindness. That is why he is a saint. In the end, maybe being a saint is not so difficult after all. Perhaps it is all really very ordinary - the miracle of loving here and now, today, in this very world in which I live

We're all receive the light of Christ through our baptism, and like Martin, it is this light



The pictures on these pages are from the exhibits at the Convent of Santo Domingo in Lima: From left (clockwise): A painting of St Martin with his broom and the animals; The actual skulls and reconstruction of the faces of St Martin, St Rose of Lima, and St Juan Macias; The remains of St Martin's bed; A reconstruction of St Martin's bedroom, complete with mice!

The Life of St Martin - 14



which guides as along the path of holiness. It need not be a fiery torch of extraordinary saintliness. Martin seemed rather happy with his candle stubs. In the words of the Christopher movement: "It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness." Holiness is God's light shining through a person's ordinary kindness.

Holiness is not a fig tree that blossoms miraculously. It is cutting some flowers from my garden and taking them to my neighbour who is undergoing a new round of chemotherapy. Holiness is not communicating with a dog, a cat, and a mouse in coded animal language, but serving a meal each week at the local soup kitchen or inviting a man who is living with HIV to join the family for dinner. Holiness is not spending entire nights in prayer, but living with a prayerful heart when I am driving to work, or speaking with my teenage children about the dangers of drugs.

Holiness is small things done with love.

Mother Teresa, surrounded by the squalor of the slums of Calcutta, decided to make of her life "something beautiful for God". That is what holiness is. Cooking a pot of soup for a neighbour is something "beautiful for God", as is sharing a gentle smile with a classmate who is sad. Healing is love enfolded; this is what



Martin did so well. He was a healer because he was a lover. And because he was both, he was a saint. Maybe being holy is not so complicated after all.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

How was Martin's saintly life "ordinary" (or do I tend to look only at the extraordinary virtues of the saints)? What are the ordinary things that I do each day (make a list)? How might I love others in these daily activities? Is there someone in particular who needs a miracle of love? When I look out at the world, with all its problems and suffering, is there one act of loving kindness that I can do to help God's miracle become more of a reality? Martin planted a fig tree for the poor. What can I do as one of God's Saints in process?

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The Ministry for the Deaf

Happy New Year to all St Martin Newsletter readers. I pray that this year will be filled with many blessings for you and your families.

In May or June 2017, Father Emil Blaser OP made an appeal through this newsletter to all readers to donate funds towards the work for the Deaf that I am doing in South Africa and Eswatini (previously Swaziland). As a gesture of thanks for the wonderful donations made, I write to explain to you the work that is being done for deaf people in these two countries.

I started out working for the deaf in 2006 when a deaf couple in Springs asked me to say Mass for a group of deaf people at Carmel in Benoni once a month. A deaf priest, Fr John Turner CMM, a Mariannahill priest, had been saying Mass for them but as he was aging it was more difficult for him to get to Johannesburg as frequently as he had in the past. From this community, I learned how to sign the Gospel, then the Mass too. Before long, I was preaching in sign language even though I would have to stop in mid-sign because I had forgotten a sign or didn't know it. It made for wonderful dialogue sermons. In June 2011, Archbishop Tlhagale appointed me Chaplain to the Deaf in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg. A month or two later, I got a call from a Catholic parishioner in Orlando West parish to say that her sister was deaf and had a number of friends who would love to have a signed Mass once a month. I started to say Mass there and now the group meets twice a month as numbers grew.

With deaf Catholics from Cape Town, East London, Mariannahill, Johannesburg, Manzini and Lesotho we started a Southern African organisation for Catholic deaf people. This organisation meets every four years to elect a new executive. Presently, the president is Faith Cronwright from Cape Town. Together we see what can be done for Catholic deaf people in these three countries to ensure that they have access to the sacraments, that they can praise God in sign language and that they can make a contribution to the life of the Church.

My work in Eswatini began after the untimely death of Fr John Turner CMM on 17 June 2013. At the funeral of Fr John, I met Sibusiso Zulu who asked if it would be possible for me to come and help the deaf people in Eswatini. I first went there at the end of August 2014 and used to visit once every 2 or 3 months over the past four years. Then last year when my provincial Fr Stan Muyebe OP offered me the opportunity to come here to work full-time, I jumped at it!

By Mark James OP

In the past four years, I was able to identify the following needs within the Catholic deaf community in Manzini. While most of the deaf people have been baptised, some have not made their first communion or confirmation because of the lack of adequate catechesis since Fr John's death.

1) I have started a weekly class on Saturday mornings for those preparing to receive the sacraments and any interested parties. I hope that those already baptised and confirmed will be able to eventually become catechists.

2) We have regular Masses in Swati Sign Language (SSL) on the second and fourth Sundays of each month. During these Masses, the deaf people do the readings of the Mass as well as sign the songs of the Mass. It is hoped that eventually we will be able to establish a SSL signing choir. More needs to be done to improve the quality of these celebrations.

3) The other weeks of the month we have integrated Masses with the deaf and hearing community together. I am not always available for these Masses and there is a trained interpreter who interprets the Mass, sermon and notices for the deaf people. I would like to see more integration of the deaf people in the Mass. For example, would it not be possible sometimes for a deaf person to sign the reading and the interpreter to voice it for the congregation? It would help the hearing congrega-

tion become familiar with sign language usage in church and see it as normal. Another way to integrate the deaf into the hearing Mass more would be to allow them to occasionally sign a hymn and encourage the congregation to do it too. It would start off with very basic signs at first and get more complicated later when the congregation is more familiar with signing.

4) As chaplain, I see my role as providing the deaf community with the sacraments, giving catechetical instruction until there are trained catechists, train more interpreters and to visit the sick and the homes of the deaf people. I would like there to be some deaf altar servers and perhaps even a deaf member on the PPC.

5) There is also a need to help the deaf people with income generation. A needs assessment needs to be conducted among the deaf community in the diocese of Manzini. Some of my ideas are to respond to the needs for income generation for unemployed deaf people. This year we are hoping to start a deaf project for small business development that could include an agricultural project, a women's sewing group, a drama group which could produce short video clips on HIV/Aids awareness and deaf awareness, as well as catechetical aids. This is ambitious but we ask for your support and prayers to make it successful.

Please remember to pray for the deaf and the disabled in our Church. Martin loved all marginalised people in his day and no doubt would have a special place in his heart for them. „

News from St Martin Centre

We have come to the end of the year. Fr Emil Blaser OP and I, on behalf of all the beneficiaries of the St Martin Centre, would like to sincerely thank you all for the donations we receive from you on a monthly basis, as well as the once-off donations we receive.

Your help has been invaluable to us, and we don't know how we would have managed without your help and support. This year we were challenged by learners with their school needs, especially financially. Some are orphaned, and some struggle due to their families not being able to provide. A lot has been done and that is because of your generosity.

Also to thank you for donations received towards the Dominican trust fund to help with their financial needs, and a donation we received for Fr Mark James OP towards the Deaf Ministry. Please keep your positive attitude alive. Keep it up in your work life, too.

It is Jesus' birthday that we anxiously waited for, because he is the reason for this season, and it's that time once again to remind us that God is always with us, So let us celebrate Christmas with hope in our heart, as our Messiah will always be there to guide us.

Jesus always wanted to spread love and, therefore, I would like to pray to Jesus today that the love in our family and those around us never ends. Hope we all stay happy and healthy, together and forever.

Once again, thank you so much. We sincerely appreciate your kindness and generosity. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Mavis

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