

Saint of the Month for November 2014

(A monthly series compiled by Tom Quinlan)

Saint Martin de Porres, Religious
Monday, November 3

Saint Martin was born in 1579 in Lima, Peru. His father was a Spanish knight, John de Porres (Porrás), and his mother was a freed slave from Panama, named Anna at baptism. Young Martin inherited the features of his mother and her dark skin color, which was troublesome to his noble father. In those days such children were called “half-caste” and “mulatto.”

His father acknowledged Martin and his sister as his children, but left Martin in the care of his mother. When he was twelve Martin was apprenticed to a barber-surgeon. (We must remember that barbers did some surgery as well as hair cutting and shaving for many centuries after Martin!)

Three years later Martin, who had acquired the habit of a third order Dominican, was admitted to the Rosary convent in Lima, and eventually became a professed lay brother.

He was assigned many tasks at his new home, including barber, surgeon, laundry man, infirmarian, and more. He seems to have handled more work than appeared possible, but carried it all out with great care and promptness without being weighed down.

Martin expanded his work to include caring for the sick in Lima, and helped establish an orphanage and foundling-hospital with other charitable institutions attached. He was given the duty of distributing daily food gifts to the poor, and took care of African slaves brought to Peru.

Like St. Francis of Assisi, he took care of animals, including rats and mice (!), feeding them in his backyard, and kept a “cats’ and dogs’ home” at his sister’s house.

Martin often had work cleaning his convent, and in religious art is sometimes depicted with a broom and the mice, with whom he seemed able to communicate.

In general, Martin kept very busy with many duties, with wide interest in multiple charities, and with prayer. He had a special devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, and spent much time fasting and doing penance. He was a close friend of Saint Rose of Lima. Martin died on November 3, 1639, and was taken to his grave by prelates and noblemen, some of whom probably steered clear of this mixed-race man during his life. He was beatified in 1837 and canonized in 1962. He is the patron of social justice.

The commemoration is given the rank of Optional Memorial. (**Daily Roman Missal, Third Edition** (Scepter Publishers); **Magnificat**, November 2014; **Butler’s Lives of the Saints, 2nd Edition** (Ave Maria Press))

Collect from the Mass of Saint Martin de Porres:
O God, who led Saint Martin de Porres

by the path of humility to heavenly glory,
grant that we may so follow his radiant example in this life
as to merit to be exalted with him in heaven.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. (**Roman Missal, Third Edition**)

I chose Martin this month because he is one of a host of saints that haven't held high position in civil or religious life, but who made a big impact on those whom they cared for. We remembered on All Saints Day that the number of saints who are not canonized must be ever so much larger than the multiple thousands who have been canonized by the Church; the saintly qualities of many were probably noticed by only a few people, and for some saints, by no one except God. Saint Martin de Porres, pray for us!