



**ST. MARTIN DE PORRES, O.P.  
APOSTLE OF CHARITY  
BORN: DECEMBER, 1579; DIED:  
NOVEMBER 3, 1639; BEATIFIED:  
OCTOBER 29, 1837; CANONIZED: MAY 6,  
1962**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
BLESSING AND DEDICATION  
SHRINE OF ST. MARTIN DE PORRES, OP  
IN MEMORY OF  
FR. NORMAN A. HADDAD, OP,  
DOMINICAN FRIAR, PASTOR, HEALER,  
CONSOLER OF THE SICK, APOSTLE OF  
CHARITY**

**6 FEBRUARY 2018  
ST. DOMINIC CHURCH  
WASHINGTON, DC**

## **INTRODUCTION**

I am indeed grateful for the invitation to be with you this evening to celebrate the blessing and dedication of this important shrine to St. Martin de Porres, OP, an historic moment at St. Dominic Church, in the City of Washington, in the Archdiocese of Washington, and indeed in our global world. This event also permits us to celebrate the ministry of the late Fr. Norman A. Haddad, OP, himself an Apostle of Charity, who brought the healing Face of Jesus as he ministered among the people of Southwest and Southeast Washington for many decades and as a beloved Prior Provincial of the Province of St. Joseph

St. Martin de Porres, a noble Dominican Friar, lived in the seventeenth century, in the same city of Lima, Peru with three other saints, Juan Macias, OP, Rose of Lima, OP and Turibius of Mongrovejo, Archbishop of Lima. Of historical significance, their lives are the cause of great interest in the work of evangelization, not only because of their presence among the poor and the abandoned of Lima, Peru but also because of their importance for life of the Church of South America at that time.

It is beyond the scope of this evening's presentation to offer scholarly insight into this phenomenon: four persons, three of them Dominicans, lived at the same time, in the same city and were collaborators in the work of preaching the Word. Each was later canonized for their heroic virtues. I leave this scholarly work for others more competent in Dominican history to come to an informed understanding of this historic phenomenon in the life of the Church in Peru.

I would like to take a few minutes to review some of the more interesting historical anecdotes about St. Martin de Porres. Some of what I will share with you is factual, some is legend, but all of it is important to understand the vocation and ministry

of St. Martin de Porres and to see how he lived the charism of St. Dominic as a person consecrated to the Word. I would like, then, to follow with an understanding of how the life of St. Martin can help us today to re-focus our own lives as today we work to bring the Gospel Message to those who are searching for healing and hope, those who are far from the faith, but especially the unwanted and unloved in our families, in our communities, and in our global world.

What is most important, however, is a renewed understanding of the ministry of St. Martin, what is relevant to our current understanding of a global world in need of healing and hope, our responsibility for re-affirming the dignity of the human person given the model of St. Martin's life – who is a brother to each of us. I trust this will provide an opportunity for us to engage in a conversation with one another.

### **THE CALL TO DOMINICAN LIFE**

St. Martin, the first mulatto to be beatified by the Church for his virtues, was born in Lima, Peru in December, 1575. He was the natural son of Don Juan de Porres, a Spanish nobleman, and Ana Velazquez, a freed black slave from Panama. In examining his Baptismal Register, it should be noted that his father was listed as unknown. Martin was different. He inherited his mother's features and color that were undesirable physical characteristics among his father's prominent social class. In addition to his physical features and color, Martin was assigned the label of being illegitimate.

His father, however, did not completely abandon his paternal responsibility. He provided for Martin and his sister's education for a short time. Rather than risk being embarrassed by his children's color and physical features, different from his own, Martin and his sister were sent home to their mother at the time their father was appointed governor of Panama. His father arranged for Martin to serve as an apprentice to a barber-surgeon, Dr. Marcelo de Ribera, upon his return to Lima. It was during these years that Martin developed his understanding and skills in treating the sick and caring for them.

At the age of sixteen, Martin, already a member of the Dominican Third Order, was invited to be accepted by the Dominican Friars at the Convent of the Holy Rosary (also known as St. Dominic Priory) as a "donatus," that is, a layman working for the community in return for food and lodging. Once again, he was labeled as different. Contrary to existing Canon Law at that time, which prohibited Indians, blacks and their descendants from joining religious orders, the prior of the Convent of the Holy Rosary, was willing to disregard these laws and admit Martin as a lay brother, a fully professed Friar of the Order. Martin objected, however, to the proposed exception and it was not until 1609, at the age of twenty-four, that he finally professed vows as a Dominican Friar. Certain experiences of discrimination would later serve him well in his ministry as a Brother in the Order.

History does not provide much detail about what initially attracted Martin to Dominican life. Martin was a member of the Dominican Third Order prior to his admission. However, the call to the consecrated life as a Dominican friar is simultaneously gift and mystery. The mystery of the call of two men, Martin de Porres

and Juan Macias as Dominican Brothers, who served in the same city as contemporaries, and who attained sainthood along with Rose of Lima (canonized in 1671) and Turibius of Mongrovejo, the Archbishop of Lima (1726), may not be fully understood this side of the Resurrection.

### **CONSOLER OF THE SICK AND THOSE IN DISTRESS**

Traditionally, the ministries of lay brothers of the Order were largely those of providing services for the community. Rarely did they engage in ministries beyond the confines the priories. Often times these ministries were hidden and unnoticed.

All Friars of the Order assume responsibility for preaching and the salvation of souls. Lay brothers, now referred to as Cooperator Brothers of the Order--exercise the privilege, right and responsibility to do the Holy Preaching but from wide varieties of pulpits; to travel to places wherever evangelization is desperately needed among the poor, the destitute, the abandoned and the unwanted. Preaching from many pulpits, the Dominican brother responds – not merely with words – but with the Word of God that lives in his heart. It is indeed the privilege of the Dominican Brother to announce the Kingdom of God to all those yearning for the message of salvation especially among people in circumstances where their priest brothers have not yet been present.

How did St. Martin give expression to his vocation for preaching and the salvation of souls? How did Martin present to the world through his personal witness as a Dominican Friar? Rather than offering a detailed review of their many miracles, acts of charity and compassion, some of the important themes and activities that will help in understanding the message that St. Martin has for our lives in today's world are worthy of mention.

Martin De Porres' ministry was expressed through a different door of evangelization, that of caring for the sick and the dying of his Dominican community, of those among the despised of the streets of Lima, and of those who had no hope. Assigned as the infirmarian of his Dominican Community, which at the time numbered nearly three hundred friars, Martin applied his skills acquired as a barber-surgeon to the brothers of the community. Caring for his brothers in his community was his first preaching. Martin also cared for those who also came to the door of the Priory seeking help. So concerned, however, was he with how he might find others who need help, Martin would travel the streets of Lima and bring the sick home and into his cell to nurse their wounds. It was on more than one occasion that he was reported to the Prior of the community for bringing the destitute and strangers into the Dominican Community.

Martin's compassion and charity for the sick and the aged, bringing the Gospel of hope and healing to those who were orphaned and homeless in the slums and barrios of Lima, to those suffering from stigmatized illnesses or lifestyles, was his lived expression of the life of St. Dominic as *consoler of the sick and those in distress*. His influence in caring for the poor and the sick of Lima resulted in the establishment of an orphanage and a children's hospital. Martin also had a devotion to all God's creatures especially those

who were suffering. He had a special affection for animals, which is often displayed in Dominican iconography.

It is reported in historical records that Martin De Porres, his Dominican Brother, Juan Macias, and his Dominican Sister, Rose of Lima, were friends who met on occasion. While there is little specific information about how they may have collaborated in the Holy Preaching, we are confident that they were the inheritors of the charism of St. Dominic and that each in his or her own expression of the Holy Preaching were faithful consolers of the sick and those in distress. As Dominicans, the Holy Preaching was a very part of their personhood. Their encounters with one another and with those they touched by bringing the Word of God, including those who had never heard about God, those who had heard and still did not believe, and those who were far from the practice of the faith, was for them an encounter with Christ, an authentic Dominican Moment.

### **THE EUCHARIST AS THE SACRAMENT OF CHARITY**

St. Martin's encounters in caring for others were both enriched and radically dependent on his encounter with Christ in the presence of the Eucharist. Though it was not the custom of the time to receive the Eucharist daily, Martin spent hours each day and oftentimes well into the night in contemplative adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, even when other brothers in the community were fast asleep. This prayer totally enveloped him and brought him into the life and healing ministry of Christ. This radical association with Jesus is often portrayed with him pressing a Cross to his chest.

In this experience of Martin, we come to more fully understand what St. Thomas Aquinas means when he speaks about the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Charity. The late Fr. Thomas Gilby, O.P., a noted Thomistic scholar, in interpreting the words of Aquinas about the effects of the Eucharist, wrote that through the sacrament of the Eucharist, whether it is received or desired, grace is increased and the life of the Spirit is perfected. The Eucharist spiritually strengthens not only the habits of grace and especially the virtue of charity but these virtues are aroused to activity in those who remain close to the Eucharistic Christ.<sup>1</sup> There exists theological warrant to ascribe the effects of the Eucharist as something specific in the life and ministry of Martin de Porres. The Eucharist, as the Sacrament of Charity, enabled Martin's his works of mercy and compassion much as we read about in the life of St. Dominic and his own ministries to the sick and dying, the unwanted and the disenfranchised. In our own time, Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that the "Sacrament of Charity, the Holy Eucharist is the gift that Jesus Christ makes of himself, this revealing to us God's infinite love for every man and woman."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> T. Gilby (Ed). "Holy Communion" in *Summa Theologiae* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1975), Volume 59, pp. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Benedict XVI (2007). *The Sacrament of Charity (Sacramentum Caritatis)*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

## A BROTHER WITH US IN OUR MISSION TODAY

What does the life and ministry of St. Martin de Porres mean for us today? What themes evident in his life of contemplative prayer, preaching, and evangelization have relevance for our global world and for our own response as ministers of the Gospel?

If we have been awaked and informed of systemic changes in our world today, we cannot help but be aware of the plight of the poor, the disenfranchised, the unwanted and the unloved. We find such persons in our families, in the places where we work, in our neighborhoods and cities, and indeed throughout the world. Their numbers are countless. We know too well that the moral compass of life has dramatically shifted away from an absolute moral ethic that promotes and defends human dignity and freedom toward a relativist ethic built on moral relativism, individualism, absolute autonomy, and the commodification of the human person.

When preparing this presentation, I searched for references to human dignity and how this modern notion may have guided the ministry of St. Martin de Porres. I soon realized that the modern term, human dignity, is suitably applied to the needs of the poor and sick. It remains the case that the notion of human dignity, although the concept begins to develop in the sixteenth century, appears in Church documents only in the twentieth century. What is important to observe is that the fundamental ethical principles of human dignity, freedom, equality, and respect for all persons across the continuum of life from conception to natural death, as these values were realized by St. Martin in his ministries of preaching and evangelization in caring for the poor, the sick, and the unloved, find expression today in the vocation and ministry of the Cooperator Brothers in the Order of Preachers. As the Letter of James reminds us, this lived reality always must accompany the Holy Preaching. What Saint Thomas Aquinas explains is that nothing that is good and holy in the Church exists apart from the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity. St. Martin revealed this Eucharistic spirituality in his role as consoler of the sick and of providing unflinching assistance to those in distress. This spirituality must also be our own.

The vocation of consoler of the sick and to those in distress that we find in the life of St. Dominic and which was lived, breathed and embraced by St. Martin de Porres finds its roots clearly in Jesus' own ministry to the sick, to the dying, to those troubled in any way and especially to the despised of his day. Saint Dominic clearly enjoined this mission on his brothers when he spoke his last words to them: *keep charity*. Caring for one another with compassion, affirming and protecting human dignity and freedom, living the virtue of charity and practicing forgiveness toward all, valuing the sacredness of human life of every person, comprise the gift that Martin DePorres embodies. He shared St Dominic's imperative toward charity with those who came to them seeking healing and hope. This gift is deeply embedded in the genetic code of all those brothers and sisters who are called to Dominican life. It is also the genetic code that should appear in those persons who are called to be followers of Christ. Thus they become brothers and sisters to one another.

Our lived response to fulfilling this high mission will not be any easier today than it was in the times of St. Martin. If we are to live out our call of charity, we must remain spiritually grounded in prayer and be relentless in our devotion to the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of Charity. Through various encounters with Jesus, we will have the courage and commitment, as he did, to engage in preaching and evangelization in radical ways – to open new and unknown doors and be unafraid to walk through them. Like Martin de Porres, we too will discover that we are called to live along the lines of human brokenness, to respond to all persons especially those who are unwanted and unloved, to protect and rescue our brothers and sisters who live in families, in communities, and in nations, particularly those who live under oppressive conditions that crucify humanity in its flesh and in its unity.<sup>3</sup> In this encounter, we will experience the privilege and the grace to see, to touch, to nourish, and to care for our brothers and sisters, all of whom reveal the very face of Christ in distressing disguise.

Before I conclude my remarks, permit me to share a few words about Fr. Thomas McGlynn, OP, (5/23/1906-9/03/1977), the artist who created the figure of St. Martin de Porres, that is the centerpiece of our new Shrine. Fr. McGlynn, a Dominican Friar of our Province, was a renowned sculptor and worked in several mediums. His art work was influenced by his own Dominican vocation: preaching and the salvation of souls, his intimate union with Jesus and especially for the needs of the poor, the unloved, and the physically challenged. Each piece of his work captures charity for others, indeed for the world.

In his solicitude for the Church, Christ calls, in each age, persons to take care of His people -- no exceptions -- every one of them. Each of us should be free to respond to the radical call that evangelization evokes; to open our doors to those who seek healing and hope as did St. Martin; to console the sick and the abandoned in their darkest hour wherever they may be; to believe and then to proclaim that every person born into the world is worthy of our respect and of our unlimited love regardless of the reason for their illness or their station in life.

With St. Martin de Porres as our model of the Apostle of Charity, following the lived experiences of Fr. Thomas McGlynn and Fr. Norman Haddad, we are called to evangelize our world as we dare to:

- encounter the woman and her children who are homeless, unwanted and unloved;
- listen to the young man, dying from AIDS, who is without hope;
- embrace the young single mother who must decide whether to carry her unborn child to full term;
- protect the children of our streets who have no bed on which to lay their heads nor mothers to tuck them in at night;
- protect and defend the dignity and freedom of the immigrant who is abandoned and alone;
- rescue the exploited, victims of human trafficking, especially women, and those

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<sup>3</sup> T. Radcliffe, "Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation," (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers, 1999): 242.

- who are forced to live on the fracture lines of our societies;
- respect the dignity of the prisoner who is difficult to love;
  - accompany the physically and mentally challenged along the pathways to hope and healing;
  - protect the person with Alzheimer's dementia who seeks relief from a mind entombed;
  - be free to become vulnerable in the encounter with the dying, knowing that no cure can reverse the course of the disease;
  - go out into the peripheries of human existence, where faith is arid and hopes are foregone, and show the healing face of Jesus, the face of mercy, to the lost, the last and the least among us;
  - rescue our brothers and sisters in our urban centers who are forced by systems of oppression to live on the streets of our cities in deafening anonymity;<sup>4</sup>
  - advocate for care for the dying who fear being abandoned; and
  - care for clinicians who dare to journey with patients when cure is no longer feasible.

The work of healing remains the work of Jesus Himself. We stand on holy ground inasmuch as we have become by Baptism brothers and sisters to one another and – O great mystery of divine grace! -- to Jesus himself. St. Martin de Porres walk with us, as Apostles of Charity, as we do the Lord's work. Amen.

Bro. Ignatius Perkins, OP, PhD, RN

*\*The statue of St. Martin de Porres, OP by Fr. Thomas McGlynn, OP (1906-1977), the centerpiece of the Shrine, is a gift of the Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary, Union City, New Jersey.*

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<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, "Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis", Madison Square Garden; Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cuba, to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, September 25, 2015. Washington: United States Catholic Conference.