

Martin 11 November
Bishop of Tours, 397 — Memorial

Today the Church honours Martin, a fourth-century bishop of Tours who was "filled with power from on high" — and used it to serve the poor and strengthen the faithful in their witness to Christ.

Martin was a soldier by profession, but renounced military life when he accepted the gospel and became a catechu'men, which is the Church's name for someone preparing for baptism. There is a story which shows that he already understood what his new life required of him. He was riding into Amiens when he met a beggar who was almost naked, and he cut his soldier's cloak in half in order to clothe the man. The following night he had a dream in which he saw Christ himself wrapped in half of a soldier's cloak and saying, "Martin, a mere catechumen, covered me with his garment."

After his baptism Martin spent several years wandering, then settled near Poitiers and built himself a little shelter where he lived and prayed as a monk. Other Christians in quest of perfection began to gather around him, and he eventually organized the first monastic community in France.

In the year 372 he was elected bishop of Tours, but he continued to live as a monk, dwelling in a bare cell and holding no property for himself, even as he cared for the people of his diocese. He also launched a continuing mission to the pagan countryfolk in his district, and took an active part in the wider life of the Church.

Even before his death in the year 397 Martin became the subject of a biography which concentrated on his miraculous powers and ensured his fame as a wonder-worker down through the Middle Ages. Today we do not forget the powers that God bestowed on him, but prefer to remember how he used them — for the peace of the Church, for the spread of the gospel, for leading the faithful in the way of holiness, and for mercy to the poor.

See Readings, page 724.

Sentence

Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise. *Luke 3.11*

Collect

Lord God of hosts,
you clothed your servant Martin
with the spirit of sacrifice,
and set him in the midst of your Church
as a guide in the path of holiness.
Give us grace to follow the light of his example,
that we may be clothed with your righteousness
in the dwellings of peace;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Readings

Isaiah 58.6-9 Psalm 16.5-11

Refrain I have set the Lord always before me.

Matthew 25.34-40

Prayer over the Gifts

God of peace,
grant that we may follow
the example of your holy servant Martin
by putting our works at the service of your praise
and by offering our lives in thanksgiving for your love.
We ask this in the Name of Jesus Christ the Lord.

Preface of a Saint

Prayer after Communion

Merciful God,
you count no service complete
unless it includes the oppressed.
Grant us so to honour
the remembrance of your holy servant Martin,
that we may share what you have given us
with all whom we behold in need.
We ask this through Jesus Christ the Lord.