

MARTIN OF TOURS

THE LESSON: WILLING TO SHARE GOD'S BLESSINGS

*“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”
(Genesis 1:31)*

At the same time as the monastic movement was forming in the desert, many theologians of the faith were fighting to define and defend Christian doctrine, particularly in response to popular pagan philosophies and false teachings of that day. Some of these pervasive philosophies (such as gnosticism) said that the material world, the human body, and human emotions were all evil. This false view of creation had a strong influence, and Christian teachers had to work hard to remind believers of the goodness of God's creation.

Those who fled to the desert sought to live simple, disciplined lives focused on godly obedience, but it was not uncommon for harsh ascetic practices to creep in. Yet while some monks did get caught up in withholding good things from themselves to an extent that today might seem shocking, others managed to keep the focus on a right view of material things: God's blessings to be shared freely.

*“Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none,
and whoever has food is to do likewise.”
(Luke 3:11)*

Martin was born in the early fourth century in Sabaria (modern-day Hungary). As a teenager, he was pressed into joining the army by his father. From a young age, and against the will of his unbelieving parents, Martin decided to become a Christian and looked forward to the day when he would be baptized. It was many years before he was able to leave the army and pursue a life devoted to his faith.

During this time a famous incident occurred. Martin came upon a beggar while he was in the city of Amiens in northern France. He stopped, cut his cloak in half and gave half of it to the man. But that's not the end of the story, because Martin stayed and spoke with the man, sharing the Gospel with him. This story, which was related to Martin's biographer by the beggar himself, goes on to tell that the beggar became a Christian and was later seen leading a devout life. Following this incident, Martin had a dream in which Jesus appeared wearing the half cloak he'd given away and telling his angels, “Martin, still just a catechumen, has clothed me in this garment”.

*“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God
so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”
(1 Peter 5:6)*

After his baptism, Martin spent some time under the teaching of Hilary of Poitiers, and then moved outside of the city of Tours (France) where he became a solitary monk. He was soon joined by disciples seeking his instruction, and some years later was asked to become bishop of Tours.

Maintaining a monastic lifestyle while fulfilling the duties of a bishop was no easy feat, but it was a priority for Martin, and one that he maintained in one form or another throughout his ministry. Many miracles were attributed to Martin, and he is also remembered as a missionary who established monasteries throughout the villages of France as a means of spreading the Gospel. Martin's biographer and friend, Sulpicius Severus, wrote of him, “Never was there any word on his lips but Christ, and never was there a feeling in his heart except piety, peace, and tender mercy”. Martin died of a fever at the age of 80, surrounded by his community.

(SOURCE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: DAVID FARMER, “OXFORD DICTIONARY OF SAINTS” | JUSTO GONZÁLEZ, “THE STORY OF CHRISTIANITY, VOLUME 1” | Sulpitius Severus, “THE LIFE OF SAINT MARTIN”, TRANS. ALEXANDER ROBERTS | GERARD SAMPSON, “LAYMAN'S BOOK OF SAINTS”.)

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AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON'T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE "FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES", WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON'T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

Review today's lesson. Choose a line of scripture or a phrase from the story of Martin that you find edifying, inspiring or instructive:

Throughout this week, spend some time prayerfully reflecting on the phrase you've chosen. Decide on one concrete action you can take this week based on your reflections.

- AND/OR -

Take some time to pray through the following collect.

O God, our heavenly Father, who by thy Son Jesus Christ didst call thy blessed Apostles and send them forth to preach thy Gospel of salvation unto all the nations: We bless thy holy Name for thy servant Martin, and we pray thee, according to thy holy Word, to send forth many labourers into thy harvest; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

(SUPPLEMENTARY COLLECT OF A MISSIONARY, P. 314)