

St. Martin de Porres
November 3



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1579–1639 • Peru

Martin was the son of Juan de Porres, a Spanish nobleman, and Ana Velasquez, a freed black slave from Panama. When Martin was two, after the birth of his little sister, Juana, their father abandoned them. The family grew up in poverty, with Martin and Juana's mother working as a laundress.

As Martin grew older, people mocked him for being of mixed race. But even at the young age of eight, Martin remembered the priest at Mass saying, "We were all made in God's image and likeness." He would tell Juana that God was concerned about the color of people's souls, not the color of their skin.

He became an apprentice to a barber-surgeon (someone who practiced medicine as well as cut hair) and learned to care for the sick. One day, when Martin was alone in the barber-surgeon's office, a man was carried in with a deep cut in his head. The people who carried him in wanted the barber-surgeon, not a twelve-year-old boy. But to everyone's amazement, Martin bandaged the wound, and the man was able to walk home.

Martin spent many hours at night praying before a crucifix that hung above his bed. He knew he wanted to give his whole life to God. So when Martin was fifteen, he went to live with the Dominicans in Lima at the convent of Santo Domingo. One night, he was praying in front of the Blessed Sacrament when the step he was kneeling on caught fire. Despite all of the chaos the fire caused, Martin did not even notice and continued kneeling in prayer.

The Dominicans gave Martin the duties of caring for the sick and the clothes room. When Martin was twenty-four, the Dominicans made him a religious brother, and he took charge of the infirmary. Later on, he founded a residence for orphans and abandoned children.

When an epidemic struck Lima, the young novices (those who had just entered the order) were locked in a separate part of the convent to prevent the spreading of disease. Martin miraculously passed through the locked doors to take care of the sick. Martin performed many other miracles: he could heal others instantly, and he could be in two places at once. Light would fill the room when he prayed, and his ecstasies would lift him into the air. When Martin turned sixty, he fell ill and endured terrible pain. He suffered for almost a year and then died a holy death. He was so famous for his miracles that crowds flocked to his body and took pieces of his habit for relics. St. Martin de Porres, help me to remember that everyone is made in God's image and likeness!