

166// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. MARTIN

Martin was born in the castle of Sabaria in the country of Pannonia, but he was nourished in Italy at Pavia with his father, which was master and tribune of the knights under Constantian and Julian Cæsar. And Martin rode with him, but not with his will. For from his young infancy he was inspired divinely of God, and when he was twelve years old he fled to the church against the will of all his kin, and required to be made new in the faith. And from thence he would have entered into desert, if infirmity of malady had not let him. And as the emperors had ordained that the sons of ancient knights should ride instead of their fathers, and Martin, which was fifteen years old, was commanded to do the same, and was made knight, and was content with one servant, and yet oftentimes Martin would serve him and draw off his boots.

THE POOR MAN ALL NAKED

In a winter time as Martin passed by the gate of Amiens, he met a poor man all naked, to whom no man gave any alms. Then Martin drew out his sword and carved his mantle therewith in two pieces in the middle, and gave that one half to the poor man, for he had nothing else to give to him, and he clad himself with that other half.

THE DREAM OF ST. MARTIN

The next night following, he saw our Lord Jesu Christ in heaven clothed with that part that he had given to the poor man, and said to the angels that were about him: Martin, yet new in the faith, hath covered me with this vesture. Of which thing this holy man was not enhanced in vain glory, but he knew thereby the bounty of God.

HE IS BAPTIZED

And when he was eighteen years of age he did do baptize himself, and promised that he should renounce the dignity to be judge of the knights, and also the world, if his time of his provostry were accomplished.

Martin is as much to say as holding Mars, that is the God of battle, against vices and sins. Or Martin is said as one of the martyrs, for he was a martyr by his will, and by mortifying of his flesh. Or Martin is expounded thus: As despising, provoking, or seignioring [mastering]. He despised the devil his enemy, he provoked the name of our Lord to mercy, and he seigniored over his flesh by continual abstinence in making it lean. Over which flesh reason or courage should dominate, as St. Denis saith in an epistle to Demophile: Like as a lord domineth over his servant, or a father his son, or an old man a young wanton, so should reason dominate the flesh. Severus, which otherwise was called Sulpicius, disciple of St. Martin, wrote his life. Which Severus, Gerandius remembereth, and numbereth among the noble men.

“PROTECTED AND KEPT BY THE SIGN OF THE CROSS”

Then held he yet chivalry two years. And in the meanwhile the barbarians entered among the Frenchmen, and Julian Cæsar, which should have fought against them, gave great morey unto the knights. And Martin willing no more to fight, refused his gift, but said to Cæsar: I am a knight of Jesu Christ, it appertaineth not to me for to fight.

Then Julian was wroth, and said that it was not for the grace of religion that he renounced chivalry, but for fear and dread of the present battle following. To whom Martin, not being afeard, said to him: Because that thou holdest it for cowardice, and that I have not done it for good faith, I shall be to-morn all unarmed tofore the battle, and shall be protected and kept by the sign of the cross, and not by shield ne by helm, and shall pass through the battles of the enemies surely.

And then he was commanded to be kept for to be on the morn all unarmed against the enemies. But on the morn the enemies sent messengers that they would yield them and their goods, whereof it is no doubt but that by the merits of this holy man that this victory was had without shedding of blood.

ST. MARTIN AND THE THIEVES

And then forthon he left chivalry and went to St. Hilary, bishop of Poitiers and he made him acolyte. And he was warned of our Lord in his sleep that he should yet visit his father and mother which yet were paynims, and also that he should suffer many tribulations. For as he went over the mountains he fell among thieves. And when one of the thieves had lifted up an axe for to have smitten him in the head, he bare the stroke with his right hand, and then that other took his hands and bound them behind him at his back, and delivered him to another to hold him. And it was asked of him if he were afraid or doubted. To whom Martin answered that he was never tofore so sure, for he knew well that the mercy of God was ready and would come in temptations, and then began to preach to the thief and converted him to the faith of Jesu Christ; and then the thief brought Martin forth on his way, and afterward lived a good life.

VISIT TO HIS PARENTS

And when he was past Milan, the devil appeared to him in a man's likeness, and demanded him whither he went. And he said: Thither whereas our Lord would that he should go.

And the devil said to him: Wheresoever thou goest the devil shall always be against thee.

And Martin answered to him: Our Lord is mine helper, and therefore I doubt nothing that may be done to me, and then anon the fiend vanished away. Then he went home and converted his mother, but his father abode still in his error.

ST. MARTIN IS EXILED BY THE ARIAN HERETICS

And when the heresy Arian grew in the world, he was beaten openly and put out of the city, and came to Milan, and did do make there a monastery, but he was cast out of the Arians, and went with one priest only into the isle of Gallinaria and there took for his meat, herbs. And among others he took a herb envenomed, which was named hellebore. And when he felt that he should die and was in peril, he chased away the pain and peril of the venom by the virtue of prayer.

TWO DEAD MEN RECALLED TO LIFE

And then he heard that the blessed Hilary returned from his exile, and went to meet him, and ordained a monastery by Poitiers.

And there was one renewed in the faith which he had in keeping. And when he went a little out and came again, he found him dead without baptism. And then he went into his cell and brought the corpse thither, and there kneeled by the corpse, and by his orisons he remised him in his life again. And as that same [man] rehearseth oft, that when the sentence was given against him, he was put in a dark place, and two angels said to the Judge: “This is he for whom Martin is pledge,” and then he [the Judge] commanded that he should be removed unto his body, and so was yielded alive to Martin.

And also he re-established the life to another that was hanged.

CHOSEN BISHOP BY THE PEOPLE OF TOURS

And truly, when the people of Tours had no bishop, they required strongly him to be their bishop, and he refused it. But there was one which was to him contrary because he was of evil habit and despicable of cheer, and one there was among the other which was named Defensor. And when the lector was not present, another took the psalter and read the first psalm that he found, in which psalm was written this verse: *Ex ore infantium*, “God, thou hast performed the laud by the mouth of children and young suckers, and for thine enemies thou shalt destroy the enemy defensor.” And thus that Defensor was chased out of the town by all the people.

And then he was ordained bishop. And because he might not suffer the tumult ne noise of the people, he established a monastery at two leagues from the city, and there lived in great abstinence with four score disciples, of whom divers cities chose of them to be their bishops.

ST. MARTIN EXPOSES THE FALSE MARTYR

And there was a corpse in a chapel which was worshipped as a martyr, and St. Martin could find nothing of his life ne of his merits. He came on a day on the sepulchre of him, and prayed unto our Lord that he would show to him what he was, and of what merit. And then he turned him on the left side and saw there a right obscure and a dark shadow. Then St. Martin conjured him, and demanded him what he was. And he said to him that he was a thief, and that

for his wickedness was slain. Anon then St. Martin commanded that the altar should be destroyed.

ST. MARTIN HAS HIS WAY WITH THE EMPEROR VALENTINIAN

It is read in the *Dialogue* of Severus and Gallus, disciples of St. Martin, that there be many things left out in the life of St. Martin which be accomplished in the said *Dialogue*. So on a time St. Martin went to Valentinian the emperor for a certain necessity, and the emperor knew well that he would require such thing as he would not give to him, and Martin came twice to have entered, but he might not enter. Then he wrapped him in hair and cast ashes on him, and made his flesh lean of a whole week by fastings, and did great abstinence, and then the angel warned him to go to the palace and no man should gainsay him. And then he went to the emperor, and when he saw him he was angry because he was let come in, and would not arise against him till that the fire entered into his chamber, and felt the fire behind him. Then he arose all angry and confessed that he had felt the virtue divine, and began to embrace St. Martin, and granted to him all that he desired, and offered to him many gifts, but he refused and took none.

A CHILD RECALLED TO LIFE

And in this *Dialogue* it is read how he raised the third dead person. For when a youngling was dead, his mother prayed St. Martin, with weeping tears, for to raise him to life. And he kneeled down and made his prayer, and the child arose tofore them all. And all the paynims [pagans] that saw this converted them to the faith of Jesu Christ.

ST. MARTIN'S POWER OVER THE NATURAL WORLD

And all things obeyed to this holy man, as well things not sensible as vegetative, and not reasonable, as things insensible, as the fire and water.

For when he had commanded to set fire in a temple, the flame was brought with the wind upon a house that was joining. And he mounted upon the house and set himself against the fire, and anon the flame returned against the might of the wind, so that there was seen the fighting of the elements.

And when a ship should have perished in the sea, there was therein a merchant which was not Christian, and escried and said: "God of St. Martin help us!" And anon the tempest ceased, and the sea became all still and even.

And also to him obeyed things vegetative as trees, for he destroyed in a place right old trees. And there was a tree of a pine, which was dedicated to the devil, he would have razed down that tree, and the villains [peasants] and paynims withsaid him so that one of them said to him: If thou hast affiance in thy God, we shall hew down this tree, and thou shalt receive it. And if thy God be with thee as thou sayest, thou shalt escape. And he granted it, and then the tree was hewn and bounden for to fall upon him. And when it should fall he made the sign of the cross against it, and it fell on that other side and slew almost all the villains that were there, and then the others were converted to the faith when they had seen this miracle.

And many beasts not reasonable obeyed to him, like as it is said in the *Dialogue*: Hounds followed a hare, and he commanded them to leave to follow him, and anon they tarried, and abode still, like as they had been overcome. A serpent passed over a river, and St. Martin said to the serpent, "I command thee in the name of God that thou return anon." And the serpent returned by the words of St. Martin, and went to that other side, and then St. Martin said, all weeping, "The serpents understand me well, and the men will not hear me."

On a time as a hound barked on one of the disciples of St. Martin, the disciple returned and said to the hound: I command thee in the name of St. Martin that thou hold thy peace, and anon the hound was all still as his tongue had been cut off.

EXAMPLES OF ST. MARTIN'S HUMILITY, DIGNITY, PITY, AND PRAYERFULNESS

He Kisses The Foul Leper

The blessed St. Martin was of great humility; for he met at Paris a foul leper, horrible to all men, and he kissed him and blessed him, and anon he was all whole. When he was secretly in the revestiary he had no chair, ne no man never saw him in the church sit, but in his cell he sat upon a threefoot stool.

He is Visited By Apostles and Saints

He was of much great dignity, for he was like unto the apostles, and that was by the grace of the Holy Ghost that descended in him in the likeness of fire, like as he descended in the apostles, and the apostles visited him, as he had been seen one of them.

And as it is read in the *Dialogue* that, he sat on a time alone in his cell, and Severus and Gallus abode him without the gates, the which were smitten suddenly with great fear, for they heard divers people speak together within the cell, and then they told it to St. Martin. And St. Martin said: I will tell it to you, but I pray you to tell it to nobody, Agnes, Thecla and Mary came to me.

And he confessed that they had oft visited him, and also Peter and Paul were come oft and visited him.

A Snub for the Emperor

And he was of great humility, for when the emperor Maximian had on a time bidden him to a feast, the drink was brought to Martin for to drink, and each man weened that he would have given after to the king, but he gave it to his priest, for he wist well that there was none worthy to drink tofore the priest, and judged in himself that it was not a thing worthy if he had given it to the king or his neighbours tofore the priest.

His Patience

He was of much great patience, for he kept so great patience that he that was sovereign priest was oft-time hurt of his clerks without punishing them, ne therefore put he them not out of charity. Never man saw him angry, ne never man saw him weep, ne laugh, ne never was in his mouth but Jesu Christ, ne in his heart but pity, peace and mercy.

It is read in the same *Dialogue* that St. Martin was clad with a sharp clothing, blue, and with a great coarse mantle hanging here and there upon him, and rode upon his ass. And horses that came against him were afeard of him in such wise that they that rode on them fell down to the earth. And then they took Martin and beat him grievously.

And he, saying nothing, suffered gladly the strokes. And they enforced them to beat him the more, and him seemed that he felt no harm, ne set not by the strokes, ne was not moved ne angry with them.

And then they returned to their horses, whom they found lying fast to the ground, and they might no more move them than a rock till they returned to St. Martin, and confessed their sin and trespass that they had so done by ignorance, and prayed him to pardon them and to give them licence to depart. And so he did, and then the beasts arose and went forth their way a good pace.

His Great Business in Prayers

He was of great business in prayers, for there was never hour ne moment, as it is said in his legend, but that he prayed or else went to his lesson. For he never ceased but he read or prayed in his courage. For like as it is custom to the smiths that work in iron, that otherwhile when they smite the iron, for to allege and ease them of their labour, they smite on the stithie or anvil, in like wise St. Martin always when he laboured or did anything he prayed continually. He was always of great cruelty toward himself, and hard and sharp.

He Refuses the Bed of Straw

Severus saith in an epistle unto Eusebius, that on a time when he came into a place of his diocese, the clerks had made ready for him a bed full of straw. And when he lay thereon, he doubted that it was softer than it was which he was wonted to lie on, for he was accustomed to lie on the bare ground, and but one coverlet of hair upon his bed. And then he, being angry, arose and threw away the straw, and laid him down on the bare ground. And about mid-night all that straw was set afire. Martin arose and supposed to have escaped and might not, for he was so environed with fire that his clothes burned. And then he returned to his prayers accustomed, and made the sign of the cross, and abode in the middle of the fire without any touching of it, and felt the flames well-smelling and sweetly, which he had tofore found evil burning. And then the monks were all moved, and ran thither, and found St. Martin in the middle of the flames without hurt. And they had supposed that he had been all destroyed and burnt with the fire.

His Pity for the Penitent and for the Poor

He was much piteous against them that would be repentant and be penitent; them would he receive into the bosom of pity. And when the devil reproved this holy man St. Martin because he received to penance them that had once fallen, and St. Martin answered to him: If thou, most cursed wretch, wouldst leave to torment the people and repent thee of thy cursed deeds, I would trust so much in our Lord that he would give to thee his mercy.

He was much piteous unto the poor people. It is read in the said *Dialogue* that the blessed St. Martin went on a time to the church, and a poor man followed him, and St. Martin commanded his archdeacon that he should go clothe this poor man. And when he saw he tarried over long to clothe him, he entered into the sacristy and did off his own coat, and gave it to the poor man, and commanded that he should go his way anon.

And when the archdeacon warned him to go to do the service, Martin said that he might not go till the poor man were clothed, and meant himself. But he [the archdeacon] understood him not. For he saw him clothed and covered with his cope, and wist not that he was naked under, and therefore he rought [heeded] not of the poor man.

And then he [Martin] said to him: Why bring ye nothing for the poor man? Bring ye me then a vesture and let me be clothed for the poor man.

And then he [the archdeacon] being constrained went to the market and bought a vile coat and a short for five pence, which was worth nought, and came and angrily threw it down at his feet. And St. Martin took it up, and clad him withal secretly, and the sleeves came to his elbows and the length was but to his knees, and so went to sing the mass. And as he sang mass a great light of fire descended upon his head, and was seen of many that were there, and therefore he is said like and equal to the apostles.

And to this miracle addeth Master John Beleth that, when he lifted up his hands at the mass, as it is of custom, the sleeves of the alb slid down unto his elbows. For his arms were not great ne fleshly, and the sleeves of his coat came but to his elbows, so that his arms abode all naked. Then were brought to him by miracle sleeves of gold and full of precious stones, of angels, which covered his arms convenably.

He saw on a time a sheep shorn and said: This hath accomplished the commandment of the gospel, for he had two coats, and hath given to him that had none, and thus, said he, ye ought to do.

Power to Chase Away the Devils

He was of great power to chase away the devils, for he put them out oftentimes from divers people. It is read in the same *Dialogue* that a cow was tormented of the devil and was wood [mad] and confounded much people. And as St. Martin and his fellowship should make a voyage this wood cow ran against them. And St. Martin lifted up his hand and commanded her to tarry, and she abode still without moving. Then St. Martin saw the devil which sat upon the back of the cow,

and blamed him, and said to him: Depart thou from this mortal beast, and leave to torment this beast that noyeth nothing.

And anon he [the devil] departed. And the cow kneeled down to the feet of this holy man, and at his commandment she returned to her company full meekly.

He was of much great subtlety for to know the devils, they could not be hid from him, for in what place they put themselves in, he saw them. For sometime they showed them to him in the form of Juplter or of Mercury, and otherwhile they transfigured them in likeness of Venus or of Minerva, whom every each he knew, and blamed them by name.

It happed on a day that the devil appeared to him in the form of a king, in purple, and a crown on his head, with hosen and shoes gilt, with an amiable mouth and glad cheer and visage. And when they were both still a while, the devil said: Martin, know thou whom thou worshippest? I am Christ that am descended into earth, and will first show me to thee.

And as St. Martin all admarvelled, said nothing, yet the devil said to him: Wherefore doubttest thou, Martin, to believe me when thou seest that I am Christ?

And then Martin, blessed of the Holy Ghost, said: Our Lord Jesu Christ saith not that he shall come in purple ne with a crown resplendent. I shall never believe that Jesu Christ shall come but if it be in habit and form such as he suffered death in, and that the sign of the cross be borne tofore him.

And with that word he vanished away, and all the hall was filled with stench.

THE END OF ST. MARTIN'S LIFE

St. Martin knew his death long time tofore his departing, the which he showed to his brethren.

The Lesson of the Water Birds

And whiles he visited the diocese of Toul [Candes, near Tours] for cause to appease discord that was there. And as he went he saw in a water birds that plunged in the water, which awaited and espied fishes and ate them, and then he said: In this manner devils espy fools. They espy them that be not ware; they take them that know not, but be ignorant, and devour them that be taken. And they may not be fulfilled ne satiate with them that they devour.

And then he commanded them to leave the water, and that they should go into desert countries, and they assembled them and went into the woods and mountains.

St. Martin's Death

And then he abode a little in that diocese, and began to wax feeble in his body and said to his disciples that he should depart and be dissolved. Then they all weeping said: Father, wherefore

leavest thou us, or to whom shalt thou leave us all desolate and discomforted? The ravishing wolves shall assail thy flock, and beasts.

And he then, moved with their weepings, wept also, and prayed, saying: Lord if I be yet necessary to thy people I refuse nothing the labour, thy will be fulfilled.

He doubted what he might best do, for he would not gladly leave them, ne he would not long be departed from Jesu Christ. And when he had a little while been tormented with the fevers and his disciples prayed him, whereas he lay in the ashes, dust and hair, that they might lay some straw in his couch where he lay, he said: It appertaineth not but that a Christian man should die in hair and in ashes, and if I should give to you another ensample I myself should sin.

And he had his hands and his eyes towards the heaven, and his spirit was not loosed from prayer. And as he lay towards his brethren, he prayed that they would remove a little his body, and he said: Brethren, let me behold more the heaven than the earth, so that the spirit may address him to our Lord.

And this saying he saw the devil that was there, and St. Martin said to him: Wherefore standest thou here, thou cruel beast? Thou shalt find in me nothing sinful ne mortal, the bosom of Abraham shall receive me.

And with this word he rendered and gave up unto our Lord his spirit, in the year of our Lord three hundred four score and eighteen, and the year of his life eighty-one. And his cheer shone as it had been glorified, and the voice of angels was heard singing of many that were there.

His Body is Returned to Tours

And they of Poitiers assembled at his death as well as they of Tours and there was great altercation. For the Poictevins said, "He is our monk, we require to have him," and the others said, "He was taken from you and given to us." And at midnight all the Poictevins slept, and they of Tours put him out of the window, and was borne with great joy and had over the water of Loire by a boat unto the city of Tours.

Severus Hears the Angels Sing

And as Severus, bishop of Cologne, on a Sunday after Matins, visited and went about the holy places, the same hour that St. Martin departed out of this world, he heard the angels singing in heaven. Then he called his archdeacon and demanded him if he heard anything, and he said: Nay. And the bishop bade him to hearken diligently, and he began to stretch forth his neck and address his ears and leaned upon his staff. Then the bishop put himself to prayer for him. Then he said that he heard voices in heaven, to whom the bishop said: It is my Lord, St. Martin, which is departed out of the world, and the angels bear him now into heaven. And the devils were at his passing, but they found nothing in him and went away all confused.

And the archdeacon marked the day and the hour, and knew verily after, that St. Martin passed out of this world that same time. And Severus, the monk which wrote his life, as he slept

a little after Matins, like as he witnesseth in his epistle, St. Martin appeared to him clad in an alb, his cheer clear, the eyes sparkling, his hair purple, holding a book in his right hand, which the said Severus had written of his life, and when he had given him his blessing, he saw him mount up into heaven. And as he coveted for to have gone with him, he awoke, and anon the messengers came, which said that that same time St. Martin departed out of this world.

St. Ambrose in a Vision Says the Office for the Dead

And in the same day St. Ambrose, bishop of Milan, sang mass, and slept upon the altar between the lesson of the prophecy and the epistle, and none durst wake him, and the subdeacon durst not read the epistle without his leave. And when he had slept the space of three hours they awoke him, and said: Sire, the hour is passed and the people be weary for to abide, wherefore command that the clerk read the epistle.

And he said to them: Be not angry. Martin my brother is passed unto God, and I have done the office of his departing and burying, and I could no sooner accomplish ne make an end of the last orison because ye hasted me so sore.

Then they marked the day and the hour, and they found that St. Martin was then passed out of this world and gone to heaven.

MIRACLES OF ST. MARTIN

Master John Beleth saith that kings of France were wont to bear his cope [*cappa*] in battle, and because they kept this cope they were called chaplains [*cappelani*].

And after his death three score and four years, when St. Perpetua had enlarged his church, and would transport the body of St. Martin therein, they were in fastings and vigils once, twice, thrice, and they might not move the sepulchre. And as they would have lifted it, a right fair old man appeared to them and said: Wherefore tarry ye, see ye not that St. Martin is all ready to help you if ye set to your hands with him?

And then anon they lifted up the sepulchre and brought it to the place whereas he is now worshipped, and then anon this old man vanished away.

This translation [transportation] was made in the month of July. And it is said that there were then two fellows, one lame and that other was blind, the lame taught the blind man the way, and the blind bare the lame man, and thus gat they much money by truandise [knavery], and they heard say that many sick men were healed when the body of St. Martin was borne out of the church on procession. And they were afraid lest the body should be brought tofore their house, and that peradventure they might be healed, which in no wise they would not be, for if they were healed, they should not get so much money by truandise as they did. And therefore they fled from that place and went to another church whereas they supposed that the body should not come. And as they fled they encountered and met the holy body suddenly, unpurveyed [unawares]. And because God giveth many benefits to men not desired, and that would not have them, they were both healed against their will, and were right sorry therefor.

And St. Ambrose saith thus of St. Martin:

He destroyed the temple of the cursed error, he raised the banners of pity, he raised dead men, he cast devils out of bodies in which they were, and alleged [comforted] by remedy of health them that travailed in divers maladies and sicknesses. And he was found so perfect that he clad Jesu Christ instead of a poor man, and the vesture that the poor man had taken, the Lord of all the world clad him withal. That was a good largess that divinity covered. O glorious vesture and inestimable gift, that clothed and covered both the knight and the king. This was a gift that no man may praise, of which he deserved to clothe the deity. Lord, thou gavest to him worthily the the reward of thy confession, thou puttedst under him worthily the cruelty of the Arians, and he worthily for the love of martyrdom never dreaded the torments of the persecutors. What shall he receive for the oblation of his body, that for the quantity of a little vesture, which was but half a mantle, deserved to clothe and cover God and also to see him? And he gave such great medicine to them that trusted in God that some he healed by his prayers and others by his commandments.

Then let us pray to St. Martin, et cetera.

The [iconography of Saint Martin](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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