



November 3

Commemoration: Martín de Porres, renewer of society, 1639

Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru, of Spanish and Negro parentage. Inheriting his mother's dark color, he was despised by his aristocratic father, and, in early childhood, he was badly neglected. An intelligent boy, he was befriended by a doctor who taught him the art of healing.

Martin learned to pray when he was very young. He had a deep devotion to our Lord's Passion, and continually prayed to know what he could do in gratitude for the immense blessings of the Redemption. Deciding upon the religious life, he applied to the Dominican Convent of the Holy Rosary and was accepted as a servant. He gave himself to the lowliest duties in the house, and, finally, after many years, he was commanded by his superiors to accept the habit of a lay brother; he had considered that this was too great an honor for himself.

The report of Martin's skill as a surgeon and healer soon spread abroad. As much by his prayers as through medical knowledge, he cured the most frightening diseases. Some of his cures were: bringing from near death a priest who had a badly infected leg; curing the fingers of a young student, who had feared that an accident had ruined his hopes for the priesthood; making whole again so many people afflicted with so many diseases that no one could attempt to count them. In addition to the gift of healing, he was endowed with that of bilocation; he was seen in Mexico, Central America, and even Japan, by people who knew him well, whereas he had never been out of Lima since entering the Order. He passed through locked doors by some means that was known only to himself and God; he appeared at the bedside of sufferers without being asked and always soothed the sick even when he did not completely cure them. Even sick animals came to him for healing.

Great as his healing faculty was, Martin is probably best remembered for the legend of the rats. It is told that the prior, who objected to rats, ordered Martin to set out poison for them. Martin did as he was told, but he was very sorry for the rats. He went out into the garden and called softly and out came the rats. He reprimanded them for their bad habits, telling them about the poison. He further assured them that he would feed them every day in the garden, if they would refrain from annoying the prior. This agreed upon, he dismissed the rats and forever after, so the chronicle states, there was no more trouble with rats at Holy Rosary Convent.

One time Martin was on a picnic with the novices, and they overstayed their time, suddenly realizing that, even with expending their best efforts, they could not be home in time for prayers. Martin bade them join hands, and, before they knew what had happened, they were standing in the convent yard, unable to explain how they had covered the several miles in a few seconds.

These and many other startling miracles caused Martin to be called a saint, even during his lifetime. In our own day, the miracles continue. He lived a life of almost constant prayer, and he practiced unbelievable austerities. He worked at hard and menial tasks without ever losing a moment of union with God. His charity, humility, and obedience were extraordinary. Pope John XXIII raised Martin de Porres to the altar of the Church on May the fifth, 1962.