

Readings for Today: *Philippians 4: 4 – 9; Psalm 130 (129); Matthew 22: 34 – 40.*

Martin was born in Peru in December 1575, the natural son of a Spanish gentleman and a freed black slave. His father refused to acknowledge Martin as his son, but provided for him and his sister. When he was twelve Martin was apprenticed to a barber surgeon in Lima, and from him learned much about surgery and pharmacy. From his mother he learned about herbal medicines, and he was to benefit from these teachings throughout his life.

When he was sixteen, he was accepted into the Dominican priory in Lima as a lay member of the Third Order, being housed and fed in return for menial work. The local law did not allow 'Indians, blacks and their descendants' to be members of religious orders, so it was not until he was twenty-four that Martin made his profession as a lay brother of the Order of Preachers.

We know about Martin's life in the community from the written testimony submitted during the Process which led to his beatification in 1837. He served his fellow friars as surgeon and infirmarian "*with great generosity, promptness and attention to detail, with being weighed down*". He also cared for the sick of the city and others who were in need, and worked for the setting-up of an orphanage and hospital for foundlings, as well as caring for Africans imported to Lima as slaves. His care for animals led to him being known as 'the Saint Francis of the Americas'. He died on 3rd November 1639, and his body was carried to the grave by distinguished members of Church and State. He was canonised in 1962 – the first person of mixed, black and white, parentage to be recognised by the Church as a saint.

In his homily at the canonisation Pope Saint Paul VI said: "*When we see him raised to the honours of the altar, we admire Martin de Porres with the delight of one who gazes upon a magnificent panorama from the top of a mountain. But it must not be forgotten that humility is the way that leads to these heights 'Humility goes before glory'. The higher the building, the deeper must be the foundations. As Saint Augustine wrote: 'Before the building is raised, it must go down; before putting on the roof, the foundation must be dug'. Martin teaches us the same lesson.*

"May the light of his life guide all people on the path of Christian social justice and of universal love without distinction of colour or race."