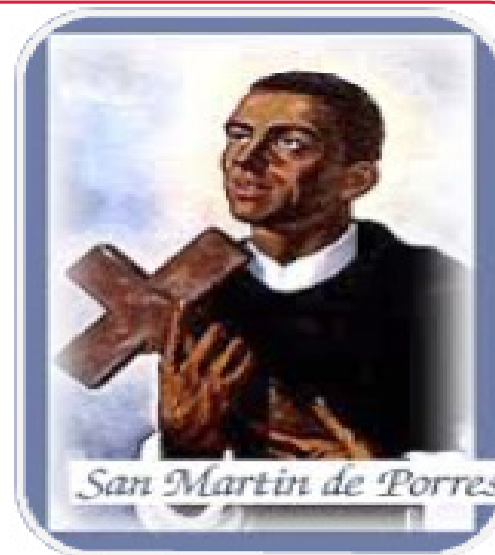


# ST MARTIN DE PORRES

## MAGAZINE



# HE IS RISEN - ALLELUIA!

By Emil Blaser OP

**L**ike the seasons in nature, the Church also rolls out its seasons and we have once again just celebrated Easter when the central proclamation is "He is risen alleluia"!

We know so well the story of how Jesus suffered, died and was placed in the tomb from which he rose on that first Easter Sunday. It was Mary Magdalen who made her way to the tomb on that Easter morning and then ran to inform the apostles. She was the first to discover that He had risen from out of tomb. At first she did not recognise him until He called her name. And the rest is history.

The story of the resurrection of Jesus is one that goes back 2000 years. We are always looking back to that time. Now while this is right we can so easily escape from our present reality and live in the past. The resurrection of Jesus is an eternal reality which means that we need to experience the risen Christ in our times. Jesus is emerging from the tomb in our own times when new life bursts forth from situations of death.

Christ is truly present in the church and he continues to give new life and healing to people who are entombed in death. Unfortunately, some churches and preachers focus on the miraculous, the sort of "get up and walk" message. And there are thousands of people in need of miraculous healing and are disappointed when this does not happen. The message of these preachers is out of focus! The truth is that many people are entombed in pain and suffering and Christ needs to rise in them. One needs only to open one's eyes to see death all around us, to see people entombed in loneliness, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, crime, unemployment, sexual exploitation and aimless wandering about. We see instances of this in people sitting on pavements or being caught on camera. But we also find entombed people in the workplace and in our families where women are abused or where people are too afraid to talk about their painful memories or present suffering.



It is from out of these painful and hopeless situations that Christ must rise. All these people are made in the image and the likeness of God and have a worth and a unique contribution to make in life. The quotations of Pope Francis in this newsletter from his apostolic exhortation, "The joy of the Gospel", highlights this reality and challenges us to do something about it. The example of St Martin from out of his experience of rejection and rising to holiness is an encouragement to all our present day entombed people, never to lose hope.

We would like to see groups being formed in our parishes, inspired by the example of St Martin, which would lovingly welcome these "dead and entombed people" into their midst primarily to listen to them and their problems which is already a wonderful healing experience. From here they could be guided to opportunities which would give them hope and life. These groups should be like Mary Magdalen who go to the tombs and roll away the stone to allow the beauty of people to emerge.

We invite you to contact St Martin Centre about what you might be able to do in your situation.

### *Have Blessed Easter!*

*We wish you the joy of Easter and pray that you and those in need of healing may always experience the truth that "He is risen". This is an experience we all need to have.*

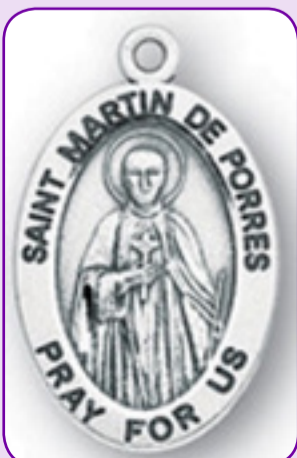
## Prayer to St Martin de Porres

To you Saint Martin de Porres we prayerfully lift up our hearts filled with serene confidence and devotion.

Mindful of your unbounded and helpful charity to all levels of society and also of your meekness and humility of heart, we offer our petitions to you.

Pour out upon our families the precious gifts of your solicitous and generous intercession; show to the people of every race and every colour the paths of unity and of justice; implore from our Father in heaven the coming of his kingdom, so that through mutual benevolence in God people may increase the fruits of grace and merit the rewards of eternal life.

St Martin, pray for us. Amen.



# ROOM FOR ALL

One of the Friars from Martin's Priory walked into a room near the kitchen to find a strange sight. At Martin's feet were a dog and a cat eating peacefully from the same bowl of soup. Suddenly a little mouse stuck his head out from a hole in the wall. Martin, without hesitation, spoke to the mouse, "Don't be afraid, little one. If you are hungry, come and eat with the others." The mouse hesitated but then scampered to the bowl of soup from which the dog and cat were eating. The friar who was watching all this could not speak. Here before his eyes, at the feet of a mulatto St Martin, a dog, a cat, and a mouse were eating from the same bowl of soup, natural enemies eating peacefully side-by-side.



words, "You are from a different tribe; I can't help you." He then used a harsh phrase: "It is not fair to take the children's food (the food of the Jews) and throw it to the dogs (the Gentiles)." Concerned for her sick daughter, she had no choice but to persist: "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Jesus was left speechless: "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." The girl was healed immediately (Mt 15:27-28).

If there were ever a gospel story which shows how Jesus grew and changed during his years of public ministry, it is this one. This story is vitally important if we are to understand the rest of Jesus' life, his message, the Last Supper, and his death. He lived within a culture and a religion that saw the Gentiles as enemies, unbelievers, godless heathens, not so different from how the Indians and Africans were viewed during the years of European colonialism in America.

## FOCUS: TOGETHER IN PEACE

Martin knew what it meant to be laughed at and discriminated against. During his lifetime, the European intellectuals were still debating whether the Indians, Africans, and Mulattos in America were full human beings. Needless to say, this posed a faith dilemma for many of the victims of discrimination. They wondered if they could accept the God of a religion that approved of war, violence, and slavery against innocent people. There is a story told by Bartolome de las Casas of an Indian who asked if the Spaniards were going to heaven. When he was told "yes", he responded that he would prefer, then, to go somewhere else. Martin, though, found in the open arms of the crucified Christ a God whose love knows no limits, and whose table was big enough so that the whole universe could sit down and eat.

The great miracle in this story is that Jesus does finally "break bread" with the Canaanite woman. He heals her and her daughter by establishing authentic communion with them, by reaching out and offering them the gift of life and love. He does not turn them away because of their religious differences, nor does he simply toss them the crumbs, as one would to a dog. He invites them to sit at the table of God's love.

This infuriated the religious leaders at the time, pulling out from under them their platform of power and domination. This is clearly seen on another occasion, when Jesus was eating a meal at Matthew's house, surrounded by people of questionable religious purity. The Pharisees, terribly upset, demanded an explanation from his disciples: "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mt 9:11). For Jesus, this posed absolutely no problem at all, because it was love – not purity – that was the guiding principle of his ministry.

This is exactly what is going on in the little story about Martin welcoming the dog, the cat, and the mouse to the same bowl of soup. He opened up a space within his servant heart for the outcasts to break bread together. This is no children's story. It is the gospel of Christ, pure and simple. It is a story about the all inclusive love of God that breaks down the barriers that separate us from one another. Not only do the dog, the cat, and the mouse sit together, but Martin himself is part of the communion table. It is he who hosts the banquet.

For St Paul and his disciples, welcoming the Gentiles, the out-

siders, into the family of God was one of the great, liberating gifts of the gospel: "In Christ Jesus you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall" (Eph 2:13-14). In Christ, there are no more walls, and no more crumbs thrown to the dogs (or the mice, for that matter!).

Martin understood this great truth with every fibre of his being. God's table is for everyone – and every living creature under the heavens. He who was a social outcast himself, knew that in Christ he was seated with dignity at the banquet table of God's reign (see Lk 14:21).

What about our world today? What would Martin say about a nation that spends millions of dollars on diet programs while millions of people starve today in our world? Who is missing from this table? How can a nation whose crops are picked and processed, whose restaurants are staffed, and whose hotel rooms and public restrooms are cleaned in large part by Latino immigrants, deny these very same people a place at the table of justice? This spirit of welcome must begin with us who call ourselves followers of Jesus. The Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States wrote recently in a joint letter, echoing words from Pope John Paul II, "In the Church no one is a stranger ....[We] welcome all persons regardless of race, culture, language, and nation with joy, charity, and hope ... We stand with you, our migrant brothers and sisters, and we will continue to advocate on your behalf for just and fair migration policies."

What about the community of world religions? Do we sit at the table of dialogue and mutual respect with Muslims, Protestants, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and others? Do we pray for people of other faith traditions? Sister Pascaline Coff OSB, says that dialogue with people of other faiths is "a form of the practice of hospitality.... welcoming the Divine in the other."

This is what Jesus did with the Canaanite woman, and what Martin did with the mouse; they

## The Life of St Martin - 10

offered hospitality: I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35).

Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker movement in the US, said that we offer hospitality to the poor "not because it might be Christ ... but because they are Christ ... We start by loving them for him, and soon we love them for themselves, each one a unique person."

How, then, do we offer hospitality to all the people who "don't fit" into the dominant, acceptable categories that our world sets up? Are the handicapped visible in our world? Where are the mentally ill? Is the political refugee offered safe haven? Do we remember that criminals are human beings, and need a place for healing and rehabilitation?

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said, after visiting the men on death row at San Quentin prison in California, "Whatever you do to [the least of] these men, you do God."

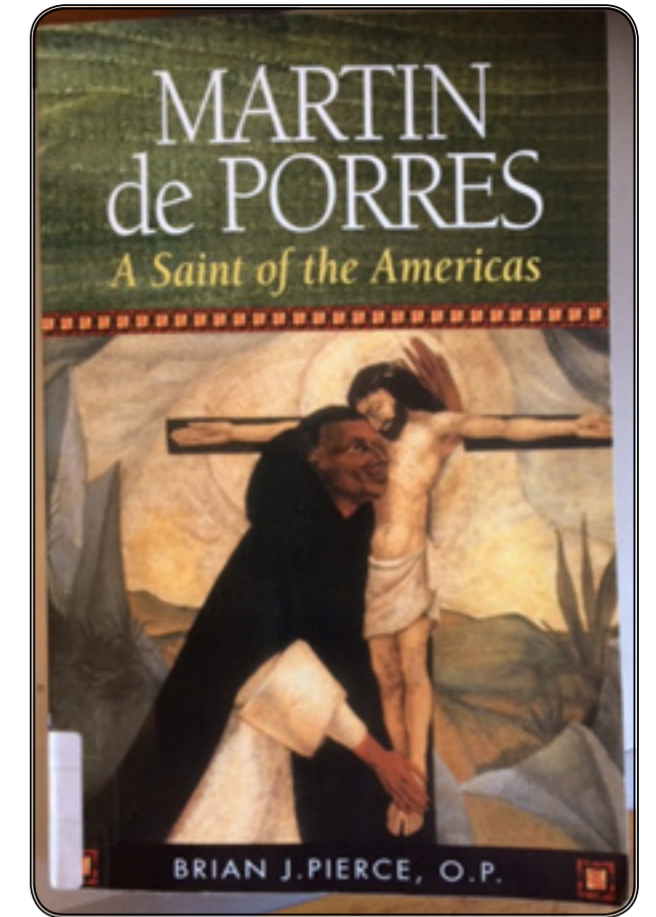
And in our churches, synagogues and temples? Who is missing? Who does not feel welcome? Is there a place for the deaf in our religious services? Do those who have suffered the tragedy of divorce know that they have a place at the table of the Eucharist? What about gay men and lesbians? Do we just throw them the crumbs as if they were dogs? Where are the single mothers and fathers? The pregnant teens? The elderly? Are they seated at the table?

Several years ago a middle-aged man, dying of AIDS, showed up at a Catholic hospital that had a special hospice for those with HIV/AIDS. He had lived in the street for many years; he was dirty, hungry, hurting. He was given a bath, a clean bed, food and good care. He had been a practising Catholic for many years before, but his life had taken unexpected turns, and he had wandered from the faith. One day he got up from his bed and went to the chapel for mass. It had been a while, but suddenly, after a long time, he wanted to see God again. He listened to the priest's homily and felt happy to once again be in God's house, safe from the violent streets. It came time for communion, and with his cane he got in line to receive the body and blood of Christ. When he had almost reached the priest, someone grabbed him and pulled him from the line, telling him that he was not prepared to receive the Lord, that he needed to go to confession first. He walked back to his seat confused and sad. He had so hoped to see God again.

Martin, without hesitation, spoke to the mouse, "Don't be afraid, little one. If you're hungry come and eat with the others."

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Make a list of people you know who feel "left out, overlooked, forgotten, pushed



aside, not included." Take some time pray for each one of them. Read one or both of the following texts: Matthew 15:21 to 28 order Luke 14:14 to 24. What do these texts say about "God's table"? How does our nation exclude or include people at the table of justice? How might I help to make at least one person feel more welcome at "God's table"?

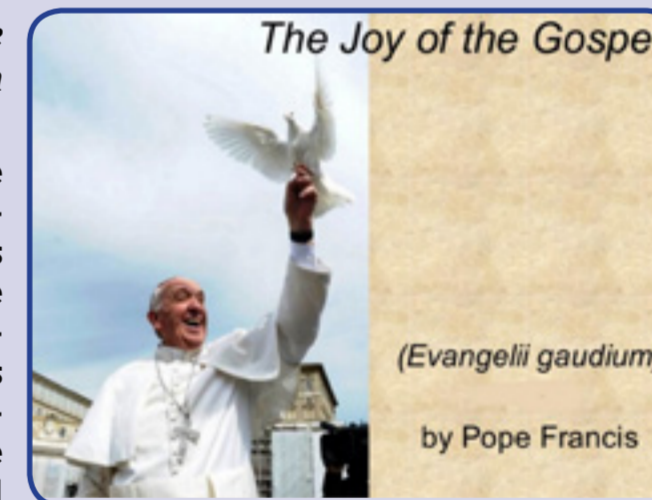
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## The Joy of the Gospel - Pope Francis

### Quotations from The Joy of the Gospel - Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis

Jesus, the evangeliser par excellence and the gospel in person, identifies especially with the little ones. This reminds us Christians that we are called to care for vulnerable of the earth. But the current model, with its emphasis on success and self-reliance, does not appear to favour an investment in efforts to help the slow, the weak or the less talented to find opportunities in life. (209)

It is essential to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognise the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis. How beautiful are those cities which overcome paralysing mistrust, integrate those who are different and make this very integration a new



factor of development! How attractive are those cities which, even in the architectural design, are full of spaces which connect, relate and favour the recognition of others. (210)

I have always been distressed at the lot of those are victims of various kinds of human trafficking. How I wish all of us would hear God's cry: "Where is your brother?" Where is your brother or sister who is enslaved? Where is the brother and sister whom you are killing each day in clandestine warehouses, in rings of prostitution, in children used for begging, in exploiting undocumented labour. Let us not look the other way. There is greater complicity than we think. The issue involves everyone! This infamous network of crime is now well established in our cities, and many people have blood

on their hands as a result of their comfortable and silent complicity. (211)

Doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights. Even so we constantly witness among them impressive examples of daily heroism in defending and protecting their vulnerable families (212).

If we are to share our lives with others and generously give of ourselves, we also have to realise that every person is worthy of our giving. Not for their physical appearance, their abilities, their language, their way of thinking, or for any satisfaction that we might receive, but rather because they are God's handiwork, his creation. God created that person in his image and he or she reflects something of God's glory. Every human being is the object of God's infinite tenderness, and he himself is present in their lives. Jesus offered his precious blood on the cross for that person. Appearances notwithstanding, every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person to have a better life, that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfillment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names. (274)

# LET IT BE DONE FOR YOU AS YOU WISH

A quote about fear reads, “**F.E.A.R.** has two meanings: **Forget Everything And Run or Face Everything And Rise**”.

We all have fears – named and unnamed. A moment comes in life when one would either have to stand up and face his/her greatest fear or forever remain the slave of that fear. So does healing come, either by accepting one’s condition and working for a remedy, or denying the reality of one’s condition/situation to jeopardise one’s chances of healing.

Mahatma Gandhi in his autobiography tells how, during his student days, he read the Gospels and saw in the teachings of Jesus the answer to the major problem facing the people of India, the caste system. Seriously considering to embrace the Christian faith, Gandhi attended church one Sunday morning intending to talk to the cleric about the idea. On entering the church, however, the usher refused to give him a seat and told him to go and worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned. “If Christians have caste differences also,” he said, “I might as well remain a Hindu.”

The belief that God’s blessings are somewhat limited to peoples of certain nationalities or cultures has been around for a very long time.

Such a belief was very much alive in the society in which Jesus grew up, (and even to this day, we still find such) and this must have caused (and continue to cause even till date) a gargantuan disparity among those who lived in that epoch. Jesus is quoted to have said in some part of the gospel, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) he was expressing a popular belief. It is not clear whether he really believed it himself or whether he said it in order to expose and correct its false claims.

Every group of people and culture has a handful of such prejudices and myths; from the myth of the Jews as the only people of God to that of no salvation outside of the Church; from the prejudice of the caste system in India to that of racial superiority in Nazi Germany; from the myth of the superiority of men over women to that of the superiority of Western cultures; and from the

By Nana Amponsah Francis OP

prejudices which revolves around the leit-motif same sex relationships, to the biases about albinism and some countries being regarded as s...holes. There is a profound invitation to each person to expose such myths and correct their false and exaggerated claims through a healing process.

It took the active intervention of a person considered to be a complete outsider, a Canaanite woman, to create the awareness among early Jewish Christians that the belief in the exclusive divine prerogatives of the Jewish people did not stand up to reason. Probably you and I owe the fact that we are Christians today to the heroism of this unnamed woman who dismantled the dividing wall of intolerance between Jews and Gentiles. How do we manage the pain, depression, trauma or even the alienation of the many people the society have placed in a derogatory quadrant? We need to consult this woman in the gospel of Matthew, asking her to teach us how to go about dismantling the structures that create undue division among God’s children, the human race that God has loved into being.

The first thing she teaches us in our Christian vocation to reconcile all humankind to God is courage. Given her position as a foreigner and as a woman, it took phenomenal courage on her part to decide to take on the all-Jewish and all-male company of Jesus and his disciples. She was so small that, even though she addresses Jesus by his proper Messianic titles: “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David” (verse 22), Jesus still ignored her: “He did not answer her at all” (verse

23a). Most people at this point would give up and accept defeat. But not our Canaanite sister. Rather she intensifies her efforts and embarks on a one-woman-demonstration to the point that the disciples had to ask Jesus to do something about it: “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us” (verse 23b). Her courage and her refusal to take NO for an answer finally paid off.

The second thing we can learn from this woman is focus or what the civil rights movement calls “keep your eyes on the prize.” When Jesus spoke to her in a language that demeaned her people: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs” (verse 26), she did not lose her cool but kept her eyes on the goal of her mission, which is to show that even non-Jews (like you from another country and I from Ghana) are entitled to God’s blessing in Christ. Our sister Canaanite, knew that if she gave Jesus a piece of her mind at that moment, that would jeopardise her mission and she might lose what she came for. But with focus and with her eyes on the prize, she made it. She is a model of non-violence, if you figure that the words of Jesus to her were unjustified verbal assault on her and on her people.

Finally, it was Jesus who gave in: “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish” (verse 28) and the woman got what she wanted. The message of this single woman outsider to every one of us today is: Be not afraid. Be not afraid to challenge prejudice and falsity even in high places, even in religious high places. The least among us can be a vehicle that God can use to bring justice and healing to all of God’s disadvantaged daughters and sons all over the world.



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