

Saint Martin of Tours

317 circa-397

In the biography of Saint Martin of Tours written by Venanzio Fortunato, the story is told of a miraculous intervention by the Angels on behalf of the Saint:

“A crowd of peasant farmers blocked him from destroying another pagan temple and having been kicked out from there he retreated into the nearby areas, but having done penance for two days, scattered ashes and, without eating or drinking, asked, begged, the help of God to destroy those pagan symbols. Suddenly presented before him were two celestial princes of the angelic militia who had spears and shields who said: ‘We have come down from Heaven, O Martin, to help you so that you can bring to an end the work for which Heaven battles in your favor. Now stop your lingering, you will see the armies that will help you until the crowd of peasants rebel no longer. It will be up to us to defeat the arrogant.’ At that time the man consecrated to God broke the idols into pieces, toppled the altars and the crowd of farmers who was his enemy, then became complicit in the destruction of those symbols of iniquity that it had been defending... The Angels called him from his earthly place into Heaven as a relative would be calling out to him with a voice and inviting him with love and there will always be an Angel to heal his injuries with the touch of a hand and cause the wounds that were infecting his limbs to disappear.”

The principal source of information about Martin is the book *Vita* written by a monk named Sulpicio Severo, completed before the death of the Saint.

Martin was born in Sabaria, in the Pannonia, around the year 317, to a high Roman official. He then transferred to Pavia, and at fifteen launched a military career. After he entered the Roman Army, he remained until about the year 356. He enlisted into the cavalry of the imperial guard for Constance II and then, to the service of Julian. In Pavia, he converted and became a catechumen.

He found himself in the thick of winter in Gaul, near Amiens, where the most famous event of his life occurred: he gave up a part of his cloak to a poor man he encountered on the street. After he was discharged from the army, he went to the Bishop Hilary of Poitiers,

at the time in a conflict with the Arians. He retired in 361, to a monastic life in the Benedictine Ligugé Abbey, in the outlying area of the city, and radically changed his life's existence and that of those who followed him. He ascertained that the territories around Gaul had not yet known the preaching of the Gospel, so he put all of his energies into the work of evangelizing the people.

Ordained a priest by Hilary, in 371 he himself was elected Bishop of Tours. In Marmoutier, a short distance from the city, he founded a religious monastery for monks,



where he spent much time in prayer and would go up to it in the time he had free from pastoral commitments. He was in control of the episcopal ministry while he remained fundamentally a monk. For this, he would have to put up with the opposition of many Bishops who did not accept his ascetic lifestyle.

His work was done through his evangelical preaching: he traveled the countryside where he constructed churches and destroyed idols; he combated heresy; he worked to reconcile opposing factions and there were many faithful who were witnesses to the numerous miracles associated with his passage through the towns. He died in Candes, on the 8th of November 397, while he carried out a work of peace.