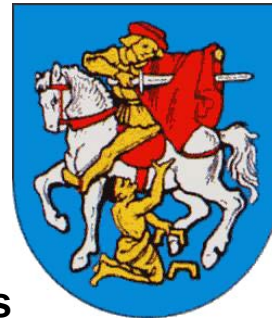




St. Martin of Tours



Born: c.316 at Sabaria (Sarwar) in the Roman Province of Upper Pannonia which today is part of Hungary.

Parents: Martin's father was an officer in the Roman army and we know very little about his mother. When Martin was born neither of his parents were Christians, and although his mother later became a Christian, his father remained a pagan all his life.



Martin's early life: When he was still very young Martin's father was ordered to go to Pavia in Italy as part of his soldiering, and this is where Martin was brought up.

It seems that young Martin wanted to become a Christian from an early age despite the fact that his parents were pagans. At the age of ten Martin went to the local church in Pavia and asked to join. He became a catechumen – this is pupil of the church; a catechumen had to learn certain things before he was baptised. Martin wanted to become a monk from an early age, but his father in particular very much against the idea.

When Martin was fifteen years old he was forced to join the Roman army because of a new ruling that said the sons of soldiers must join the army. Martin did not want to do this, but he had no choice, because he was kept in chains for a while until he agreed.

Once he had joined the army he was sent to a cavalry unit whose job was to protect the Emperor of Rome. Because of this he was not involved in any fighting, which suited Martin because he was not prepared to kill anybody as it was against his Christian beliefs.

As an important officer Martin was given a servant, but because Martin wanted to become a monk he would not allow the servant to look after him, but insisted on looking after the servant by cleaning the servant's boots.



St. Martin Dividing his Cloak

The Story of the Cloak

This is the most famous story about Saint Martin. He had been sent to Amiens in Gaul (which is France today) when, on a bitterly cold winter day, the young Martin rode through the gates of the town, probably dressed in gleaming, flexible armour, ridged helmet, and a beautiful white cloak whose upper section was lined with lambs' wool.

As he approached the gates he saw a beggar, with clothes so ragged that he was practically naked. The beggar must have been shaking and blue from the cold but no one reached out to help him. Martin felt great pity for the man, so he took off his cloak and, with one quick stroke of his sword he slashed it in two. He then handed half of the cloak to the freezing man and wrapped the remainder on his own shoulders.

Many in the crowd thought this was so ridiculous a sight that they laughed and jeered at Martin, but some realized that they were seeing Christian goodness.

That night Martin dreamed that he saw Jesus wearing the half cloak he had given the beggar. Jesus said to the angels and saints that surrounded him, "See! This is the cloak that Martin, who has not yet been baptised, gave me." When he woke, it was the "who has not yet been baptised" that spurred Martin on and he went immediately to be baptised. He was twenty years old.



St. Martin's Dream

We don't know much about the two years that followed, but Martin knew that as a Christian he would never be able to kill anyone, although as a soldier he might be expected to do exactly that. This problem occurred about two years later when two warlike groups called the Franks and Allemanni invaded The Roman Empire. Martin was going to have to fight.

It was the practice at the time to give money to soldiers before battle, in order to infuse the soldiers with a greater love of their country and desire to fight.

When the Emperor Julian lined up the soldiers in Gaul to give them their money, Martin refused to accept the money -- and to fight -- saying, "Put me in the front of the army, without weapons or armour; but I will not draw sword again. I am become the soldier of Christ."



St. Martin tells the Emperor he will not fight

The Emperor Julian was furious with Martin and called him a coward. He then told Martin he would grant him his wish and put him right in the middle of battle the next day. Until that happened, he had Martin imprisoned.

However, against all predictions and all explanation, the invaders sent word that they wanted to negotiate for peace and the battle was postponed. Martin was eventually released from his prison and from the army in a place called Worms, which is in Germany today.

Attacked by Robbers

On a trip over the Alps to visit his parents, he was attacked by robbers who not only wanted to steal what he owned but threatened to take his life. Calm and unperturbed, Martin spoke to the robbers about God. One was so impressed he converted and became a law-abiding citizen.

With Saint Hilary

Martin had a friend and teacher call Hilary who was bishop of Poitiers in Gaul (France), and eventually Martin went to see him. Because Martin wanted to live by himself to worship God as a monk/hermit, Hilary gave him a place to live that was isolated.

The Monastery at Liguge

However, other Christians came to see Martin because they thought that he was a very holy man and wanted to become his disciples. So Martin founded a monastery for them called at a place called Liguge, very close to Poitiers.

Martin's First Miracle

It was at Liguge monastery that Martin performed the first of many miracles. When a catechumen died before baptism, Martin laid himself over the body and after several hours the man came back to life.

Martin remained in this monastery near his teacher and friend until after Hilary died in 367 A.D. Martin was about 51 years old then. He spent a lot of time converting the local people into Christians.



This map shows you where Poitiers and Tours are

Martin becomes Bishop of Tours

The bishop of Tours died in 371 A.D. Tours is quite close to Poitiers, and the people of the town knew about Martin and his wonderful miracles. In those days the bishop of a town was chosen by the townspeople, and the people of Tours decided they wanted Martin.

But they knew of Martin's holiness and of the fact that he preferred to live a solitary life, therefore they also knew he would never agree to be a bishop so they thought of a trick.

A citizen of Tours came to Martin and begged him to come visit his sick wife. When the kind-hearted Martin got to Tours crowds of people came out of hiding and surrounded him. Unable to escape, he was swept into the city.

The people may have been enthusiastic about their choice but the local bishops who were there to consecrate the new bishop declared they were repelled by Martin's dirty and ragged appearance.

The people's reply was that they didn't choose Martin for his haircut, which could be fixed by any barber, but for his holiness and poverty, that only charity and a true love of God could bring. Overwhelmed by the will of the crowds the bishops had no choice but to consecrate Martin as the new Bishop of Tours on 4th July 372 A.D.

Bishop Martin founds a second monastery at Marmoutiers

Instead of living in a palace, Martin made his first home as bishop in a cell attached to a church in hopes of being able to maintain his lifestyle as a monk. But at that time bishops were more than spiritual pastors. With the Empire's administration disintegrating under outside invasion and internal conflict, often the only authority in a town like Tours was the bishop. People came to Martin constantly with questions and concerns that involved all the affairs of the area.

To regain some of his solitude Martin fled outside the city to live in a cabin made of branches. There he attracted as many as eighty disciples who wanted to follow him and so he founded a second monastery of Marmoutiers, near Tours. He kept in touch with Tours through priest representatives who reported to him and carried out his instructions and duties with the people.

Martin the Missionary

It may seem from this that Martin did not get involved with what was going on but Martin was deeply committed to his responsibilities.

He believed that he had an important job to convert those who still held to various non-Christian beliefs. In those early days of Christianity such old beliefs were held by many people.

His method was to travel from house to house and speak to people about God. Then he would organize the converts into a community under the direction of a priest or monk. In order to let them know of his continued love and to keep them following the faith, he would then visit these new communities regularly.

Stories about Martin

The Tree

In one town, when he tried to convince the locals to cut down a pine tree they worshipped, they agreed -- but only if Martin would sit where the tree was going to fall!

Martin seated himself directly under the path of the leaning tree and the townspeople began to cut from the other side. However, just as the tree began to topple, Martin made the sign of the cross and the tree fell in the opposite direction -- slowly enough to miss the fleeing townspeople. Martin won many converts that day.

The Tower

Martin tore down many non-Christian temples and always built a Christian church in their place to make a point about true worship and give people a genuine replacement for their false idols. In one case when a huge tower was not torn down under his orders, a bolt of lightning came to destroy it after his prayers.

The Death of Martin

Martin died when he was over 80 years old on November 8. Historians disagree on the year and put it anywhere between 395 to 402.

St. Martin was visiting a group of monks at Candes where two great rivers, the Loire and the Vienne, meet. He had come to settle an argument between the monks.



While he was there Martin was taken ill and died.

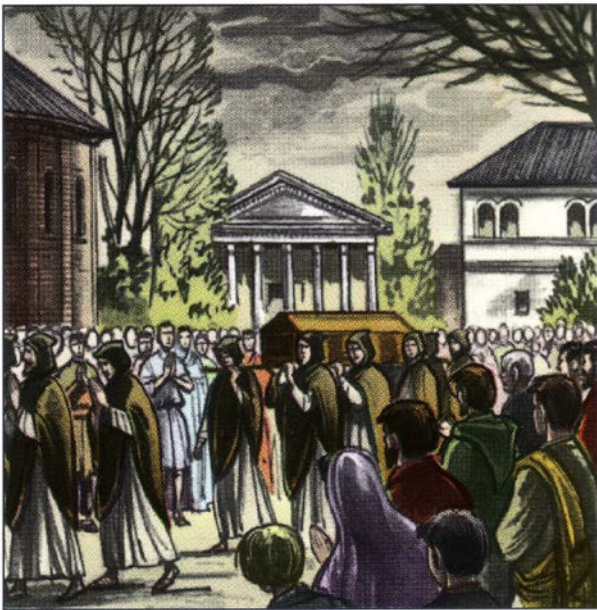
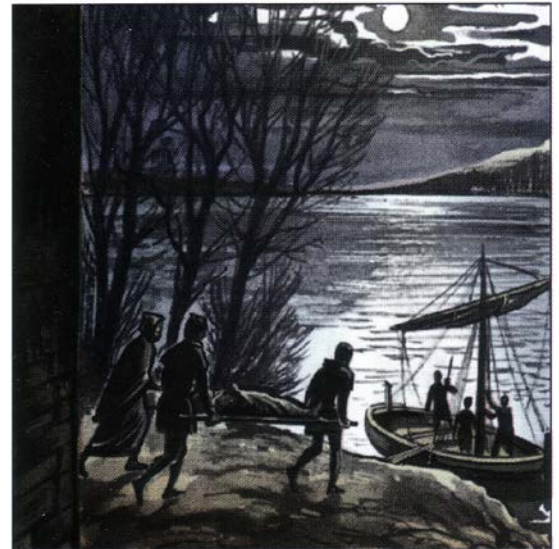
Not surprisingly the monks at Candes wanted to keep his body for burial there.

To have the body of a great saint was an honour which would attract a lot of pilgrims in the future. They would build a shrine to St. Martin. (The town is now called Candes-Saint-Martin).



However, Martin was Bishop of Tours, and the people of the town, including priests and monks, wanted him buried there - after all, he was their saint!

So, in the middle of the night some monks came from Tours and secretly took St. Martin's body back to the city by boat.

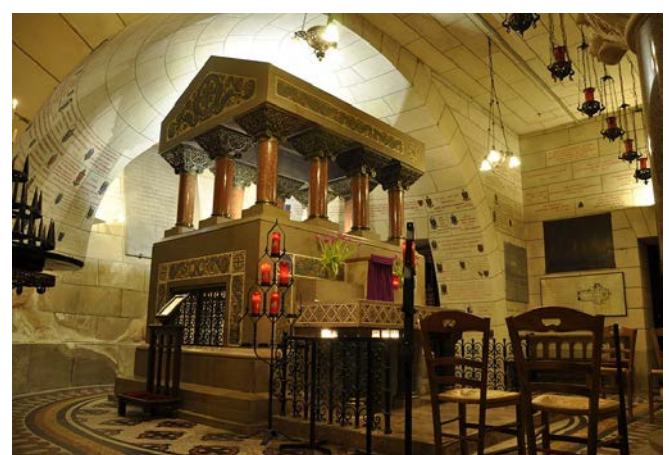


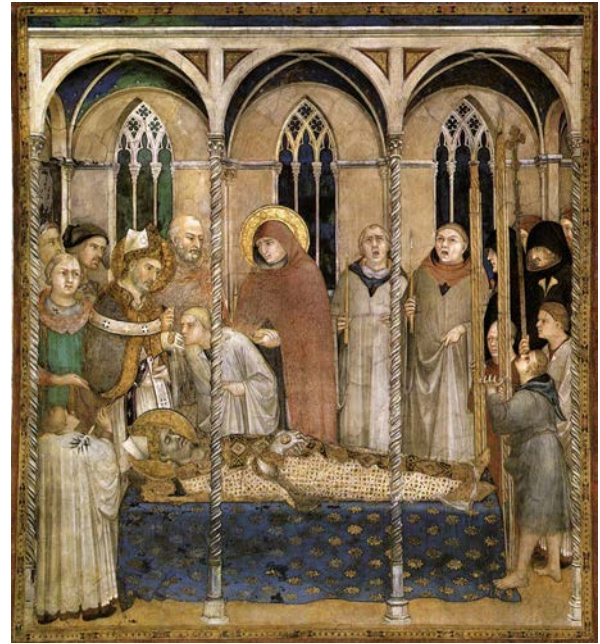
Three day later he was buried, at his request, in the Cemetery of the Poor on November 11th, (which is now his feast day) at Tours.

Two thousand monks and nuns gathered for his funeral, and the next Bishop of Tours built a chapel over his grave, which was eventually replaced by a fine cathedral.

We know so much about the life of St. Martin because his friend and follower, Sulpicius Severus, (360 - c420/5 AD) wrote a "Life of St. Martin". You can read it yourself on the Internet by using Google to search for ***Sulpicius Severus***.

The pictures below show (left) The Cathedral (Basilica) of St Martin in Tours today, and (right) the tomb of St Martin in the Cathedral Crypt. Notice the tiles on the wall which are prayer offerings to St. Martin for individual people or groups, paid for by relatives.





The two pictures above show the death (left) and burial of St. Martin and are by Simone Martini (1280 - 1344). He painted a series of nine wall paintings (frescoes) in the Church of St. Francis in Assisi (Italy), telling the story of the life of St. Martin.



Frescoes of the life of St Martin in Assisi
Over the page you can see 8 of them:

Top Row - Dividing the Cloak, The Dream, St. Martin is knighted.

Middle Row - St Martin renounces his weapons, The miracle of the resurrected child, Meditation (St. Martin praying to himself after being made Bishop of Tours)

Bottom Row - Miraculous Mass and Miracle of Fire.

The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi



Simone Martini painted himself into one of the frescos. Can you find him?