The Homily on the Feast of Saint Martin de Porres

Father Bob • November 3, 2026

Saint Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru, in 1579, and he was the illegitimate child of a Spanish nobleman and a formerly enslaved Panamanian woman.

So that made him mixed-race; it made him a mulatto, which he even famously referred to himself as: “I’m just a poor mulatto.” So because he was mixed-race, his father actually didn’t even acknowledge him.

His father abandoned the family; I believe he also had a sister. So the Spanish nobleman abandoned his family, leaving the mother and a few children to grow up in abject poverty.

But around the age of 12 or 13, Martin became an apprentice to a doctor and started to learn some of the medical arts of the 16th century, and he was quite good at learning about medicine and healing.

But eventually he felt drawn to the Dominicans, and he wanted to join the Dominican Order, but Peruvian law at that time had a caste system.

If you were illegitimate or mixed-race, you could not hold a public office or a religious office. You could not become a professed Dominican friar. So the Dominicans took him on as a donato, meaning gifted, as someone gifted to a friary to do volunteer menial jobs.

He did the sweeping, he did the cleaning, he worked in the infirmary. Well, going back to the cleaning and the sweeping, he was so good at it that he became known as the “Saint of the Broom.” But there was also an infirmary where he cared for the sick friars and for others who were brought in, and he was really good at that.

He was also very good at cutting hair, so he did that as well.

He begged for alms, and he even planted an orchard to help supply the poor people in the neighborhood with fruit that they could get for free.

So his sanctity was really beginning to flower.

And two of the ways that this became known was that he was one of those saints who levitated during prayer.

When we consider this, it also happened to Saint Teresa of Avila; she hated it. She didn't want it to happen, especially in public.

But when we think about it, why would God grant this charism of levitation?

Well, how about the idea that the soul is so attracted to God, so absorbed in God, that metaphysically the entire body and soul is lifted toward God, which is a beautiful sign of, when we think of it kind of symbolically, being attached to the things of heaven, not so much the things of earth, which is the way things are supposed to go.

He was also known to bilocate, you know, to be in two places at once.

And, you know, when we think about that, why bilocation? Why would God grant this?

Perhaps to get more jobs done, to be in one place and to be able to be in another place.

Sometimes don't we even say that: "I wish I could bilocate to get more done." So these two metaphysical, extracurricular spiritual activities were a part of his life as well.

It is said that he refused to eat meat because, like Saint Francis, he loved animals so much that he would even feed the mice and the rats in the courtyard, and apparently he could even communicate with them.

He died at the age of 60, and he was canonized some 300 years after his death. It took a while.

He was canonized by Pope John XXIII. And on his canonization, John XXIII referred to him as a martyr of charity.

That is very accurate, I would think. I would call him a martyr of humility and charity.

He made the best of his situation given the times in which he lived, and he truly lived the number one commandment of Jesus: to love God and to love others.

He did it exceptionally well, like Saint Thérèse of Lisieux would tell us, to do little things with great love.

So today he is recognized as a patron saint of those of mixed race, of social justice, those who may face racial discrimination.

He is also the patron saint of all those who are involved in menial tasks in life.

So today, let us pray through his beautiful and powerful intercession, that we too may have some share of the kind of humility and charity that he lived in his life, and that our society may be based on God’s form of justice.