

November 11th: Saint Martin of Tours, bishop

Gospel text (Mt 25,31-40): Jesus said to his disciples, «When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on the throne of his Glory. All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, so will He do with them, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

»The King will say to those on his right: ‘Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me’.

»Then the good people will ask him: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?’. The King will answer, ‘Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me’».

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Today as we celebrate the memorial of St. Martin of Tours, the liturgy invites us to reflect on this particular passage from the Gospel according to Matthew. This passage tells us about the end of times when the Son of Man comes to judge and separate the just from the sinners. In doing so, Jesus will recompense the just by inviting them to take possession of the kingdom prepared for them. But, what was the condition to inherit the kingdom? The Gospel states this clearly: «I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me (...))» (Mt 25,35-36).

The people however were surprised to the fact that they have never seen the Lord. So they question: how could we have done this to you and yet we never met you? Jesus then explain himself saying: «Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me» (Mt 25,40).

This was exactly what Martin did while he was still a catechumen. It is said that one very cold day at the gates of the city of Gaul, Martin met a shivering and half-naked beggar. Moved with compassion, he divided his coat into two parts and gave one to the poor man. He did this because he saw Christ in that poor man. Just like St. Martin, we too are all called to care for the poor. This is our vocation as Christians. It is in this sense that Pope Francis says in “Evangelii Gaudium” that «none of us can think we are exempt from concern for the poor and for social justice». May St. Martin intercede for us to truly care for the needy.