

By Br Nana Amponsah
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Dominic de Guzman: Lord that I might see!

I really esteem St. Dominic de Guzman.

I'm tempted to share the story of his life here, but that can be found on the website of the Dominican Order.

I'm also tempted to try to figure out how best to reflect about him, but I think the story of Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:51) best speaks to Dominic's story.

Bartimaeus is one of those characters in the Gospel that spur me on. His insistence, even when the crowd wanted to shut him down, is a mark of courage. He was much focused and knew what he wanted. His request to Jesus is brief: "That I may see."

What a wonderful request to make of our Lord!

Dominic de Guzman was confronted by the murky shadows of his time through the 'Albigensian Heresy', which diluted the sound theological teachings of the church and gave a wrong hermeneutical approach to what prevailed.

This could be best described as the blindness which lured many astray. Like the blind Bartimaeus who pleaded to Jesus to restore his sight, Dominic through the inspiration of God, was endowed with a new vision to fight the heresy through the VERITAS which is TRUTH; Dominic aspired to preach what was in opposition of the 'blind' doctrines and theology of the Albigensians.

Dominic knew that he was a loved sinner. That filled him with such gratitude that he desired with all his being to know (through study and contemplation), love and serve the one who loved him so mercifully. Once his heart was on fire with a passionate desire to be with Jesus, he came to a spiritual freedom that was quite powerful, liberating him to serve others with all his heart, and this is projected in the VERITAS.

Dominic learned to acknowledge, distinguish, reflect upon, and discern the origin of the various movements within and around him. He wasn't afraid of contradicting even those who were seen as the 'gurus' and 'academics' of his time, because he spent time and much effort to discover what the TRUTH which illumines all darkness was. He found great power in embracing the challenges which confronted the Church. Dominic could find intimacy with God in all things, particularly in his quest to study, his love for community life and ardent love for preaching.

Perhaps because he found grace in the messiest parts of his life especially in his 'fight' with the Albigensians, and because he wasn't afraid to wade around in his preaching, Dominic always trusted God was available to him in any experience. Anything

at all, no matter how busy or troubling, good or bad, secular or simple, embarrassing or exhilarating any experience could be the occasion and the means for an experience of intimacy with God.

Dominic had a passion for others, and found it incredibly easy to be with others. It was all integrated for him. If Dominic loved Jesus and wanted to be with Jesus through his preaching and his love to stand for the TRUTH, it was simply natural to be committed to others, as Jesus is.

It is quite obvious that the Heresy propagated by the Albigensians and the work undertaken by Dominic and his friars to correct the anomaly might have created a dichotomy in comparison with darkness and light.

Like the blind Bartimaeus who cried to Jesus to restore his sight in these simple words "I want to see", Dominic might have made a similar petition in the following: I want to see people return to God; I want to see people rejoicing in living out God's word; I want that I myself can rejoice when I suffer for the sake of the Lord; I want to understand how Jesus Christ is my High Priest and intercedes for me; I want to see how Jesus Christ is always present in His Church even when there is so much sinfulness in the members of the Church; I want to see how Christ loves me even when bad things happen to me; I want to see our political leaders live as agents of TRUTH, JUSTICE and PEACE not channels of hooliganism, corruption and embezzlement of public funds; and I want to see everything

which concerns me turning around for my good!

Bartimaeus' prayer was rewarded with an immediate answer, just like that of Dominic through the establishment and the success of the Order of Preachers, popularly known as the Dominicans.

The experience of Dominic de Guzman during the time of the Albigensian Heresy is not different from today's world characterised by various forms of abuse, terrorism, crimes ranging from daylight robbery to the various forms of assassination (character and physical) and lies which have been misrepresented as 'eloquence'.

The experience of Dominic and the Blind Bartimeaus should teach us a very simple lesson: when we are focused, we definitely will say precise and short prayers truthfully (VERITAS), but when we are not, we babble as Jesus said the Jews do in their prayers (Mt. 6:7). Dominic received a vision but a spectacular one which enabled him to see even into ETERNITY by the continuous work done by the Dominicans; this moment is also and part of eternity. May Jesus not only open our eyes to see all we desire to see, but also open our hearts and minds to decipher the TRUTH from FALSEHOOD as Dominic de Guzman did.

*Remember the Feast of St Dominic
on August 8th!
St Dominic - Pray for Us!*

A New Heaven and a New Earth

“God’s ways are not our ways” - a truth that is still difficult at times for us to accept. And so we find ourselves looking back and wondering why God allows certain things to happen.

Most of us know some tragic story about a person being in the wrong place at the wrong time - a car accident that shouldn’t have happened, a divorce that could’ve been avoided, the death of a loved one that makes no sense whatsoever. When one looks back at the chaos and destruction caused by the conquest of America and the trafficking of millions of African slaves one is tempted to wonder if maybe God just fell asleep that day.

Would it not have been better if Europe, America and Africa had simply never met?

It is like wondering what our world would be like if the atomic bomb had not been invented or if Jesus had not been crucified. If Martin is the fruit of a tragic “mistake” in history, then what does he teach us about God?

FOCUS: TRAGEDY AVERTED



Maria Beltran was the daughter of an important military officer in Lima. In the midst of a difficult labour, and unable to give birth to the child (*la criatura*) who was stuck in the birth canal, the relics of different Saints were placed on her belly with the hope of obtaining some divine help.

Nothing happened, and she was advised to make a confession and prepare for death. At that moment Lupercia Gonzalez de Mendoza, the mother of Maria, “remembered she had a piece of the sleeve from the habit of the venerable servant of God, Brother Martin de Porras,” and she took it and placed

it over the witness’ belly and asked fervently [of St. Martin] to intercede with his divine Majesty to give a good birth. At that very moment the child was born healthily, “without being crippled or with any other wound”.

Again we turn to the insights of Alex Garcia Rivera for our starting point. With a keen eye for reading the stories, he notes that “the first clue that this is not going to be like other miraculous stories is that relics of the Old World saints are placed on Doña Maria’s belly without any effect It is the relic of a would-be New World saint, a saint that is yet-to-be, that has effect.”

This story is about something new that is happening, or about to happen - a new kind of holiness, a new kind of Church that is being born. And Martin De Porres is part of this wonderful, new birth that God is bringing about in the land conquered and devastated by war and destruction.

We are being invited, through a story like this, to set aside our previous convictions and ways

We live in tough economic times. And yet it is amazing how much people spend on things like eating out, drinks, hair extensions costing thousands of Rands, entertainment, expensive toiletries and other luxuries.

For the past few months we have been inviting readers to contribute to the ministries of vulnerable people like the deaf, the handicapped and marginalised. To date we have received R250! This is sad, to say the least. If you who are reading this had a member of the family who was vulnerable in any of these ways, I’m sure you would be very discouraged and disappointed.

It is sad but true that we are all too often turned in upon ourselves and don’t notice the suffering of people around us. This was so true in the days of apartheid when many people never noticed or thought about the suffering of people around them. How many privileged people took the time and trouble to be conscientised by reading about the suffering of others or visiting the marginalised wherever they were?

I personally became very conscientised when I was challenged to be exposed to the situations that the poor and suffering were exposed to. It is so important that we reach out in some way to the marginalised and vulnerable people.

Count Your Blessings!

This is exactly what Jesus did.

Due to a somewhat rare disease I can no longer write, type or drive. I cannot do buttons and find it very difficult to use a zip. I have difficulty in finding the light switch on the wall in the dark. I have difficulty finding the buckle of my safety belt. I can hold a pen or sign my name only with much difficulty. Walking is a problem and I am constantly tired. I used to be very active and there wasn’t much I could not do. Now, I look at people who can do the simplest of things like walking or writing or running up and down stairs and I am full of admiration at how easily they do these things. What you do so easily and what I used to be able to do so easily, will now never be possible for me without a miracle. I now look at life very differently and thank God that I can do some of these things although with difficulty.

It is most likely that you are able to do many of the things I can no longer do. I invite you to stop and think for a moment of how fortunate you are and how much you

pamper yourself with some of the things I have mentioned above. You are most likely blessed in many ways and I would like to invite you to think about those who might not be as blessed as you are. I pray that when you come to the end of your life you will not be filled with regret about the things you could’ve done but did not do.

I invite you now to think for a moment of vulnerable people and to ask yourself what you might be able to do for them in some small way. I know that there are many who are unemployed and have very little means of survival but there are also many who have more than they need. I am challenging you to think for a moment and to ask yourself about what you might be able to do to assist in the ministry to vulnerable people. Our bank details are at the end of this newsletter and I invite you to stop now and ask yourself what you might be able to pledge. It doesn’t have to be a big amount but something you can afford maybe by way of a small sacrifice. I hope that in our next newsletter I might be able to indicate a substantial improvement on the R250 we have so far received. I thank you in advance for your generosity and assure you of my prayers and a remembrance at my daily mass. And I know how much you appreciate prayer. I am convinced also that this is something St Martin would very much approve of!

Fr Emil Blaser OP - Director
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of thinking, and open ourselves to new possibilities. This is what conversion is about - turning around and seeing life from a new perspective. Before we continue, though, it is important to make one very clear statement: God never wills evil or injustice. The conquest of the Americas by Spain was both. But having said that, we must also be challenged to see with the eyes of faith, that is, see what marvels God does in the wake of our human mistakes and blunders. God did not will the violent death of Jesus, but through his resurrection from the dead, we can testify to the fact that God works marvels: “O! *Felix culpa!*” O! Happy fault!”

Martin de Porres is a living example of God’s marvelous actions in the midst of our sinful and broken world. Martin was a “mistake”. His mother’s people should never have been captured and shipped to a foreign land against their will. His Spanish father had no right to be part of an occupying army in the sacred land of the Incas, and he certainly was wrong in fathering a child and then practically abandoning him and his mother. God’s ways, though, are not our ways. God has a way of fash-

ioning something new from the broken pieces of our mistakes.

Martin is a symbol of this something new which God is creating. The coming together of his African soul and his Latino warrior’s heart - itself the fruit of an unjust mistake of history - is a living example of how God is creating “a new heaven and a new birth” (Rev 21:1). As the story of the birth of Maria Beltran’s child shows, Martin is a New World saint in an old world.

He shatters the old moulds, because he is part of a new creation. He is a mestizo, a mixture of ancestral bloodlines and cultures and histories and dreams. He is a mixture of wars and violence and rape and conquest. He is all this. And he is God’s beloved child - dark brown clay in the hands of the divine Potter: “*See, I am making all things new*” (Rev 21:5).

“A great portent appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pangs, in the agony of giving birth Then a dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, so that he might devour her

child as soon as it was born. And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations.” (Revelation 12:1-5)

The story of Maria Beltran’s difficult birth, aided by the prayerful intercession of Martin de Porres, is a kind of retelling of this story from the book of Revelation. It is a story about God birthing new life in the face of death. It is the story of Martin’s birth and his place in



the new mestizo society. The old world relics no longer work. The old ways have come and gone. The old structures of power and domination, of conquest of slavery, are now giving way to the new heaven and the new earth. History’s “mistake” is redeemed by the God of history.

This is equally true with the “mistake” called Martin de Porres, “son of an unknown father and a freed slave woman”. His very life of contradiction becomes a wide open space for God to fashion a new creation in Christ (see 2 Cor 5:17).

Martin is the Peruvian version of Mexico’s Maria de Guadalupe. In the same way that she, the dark skinned and pregnant Virgin of Guadalupe, gave birth to a mestizo society and Church, so too with Martin. His dark skin - the product of one of history’s tragic “mistakes” - is transformed into a Word-Made-Flesh which announces the birth of a new People of God.

The European Church that arrived on the shores of indigenously America, ancient Africa, and mysterious Asia “has been groaning in labour pains” for two thousand long years (Rom 8:22). Finally, even despite strong position in every age, the Church is beginning to take on a new face. At last the secret of Pentecost is beginning to seep into the cracks of the Church’s walls, and we are

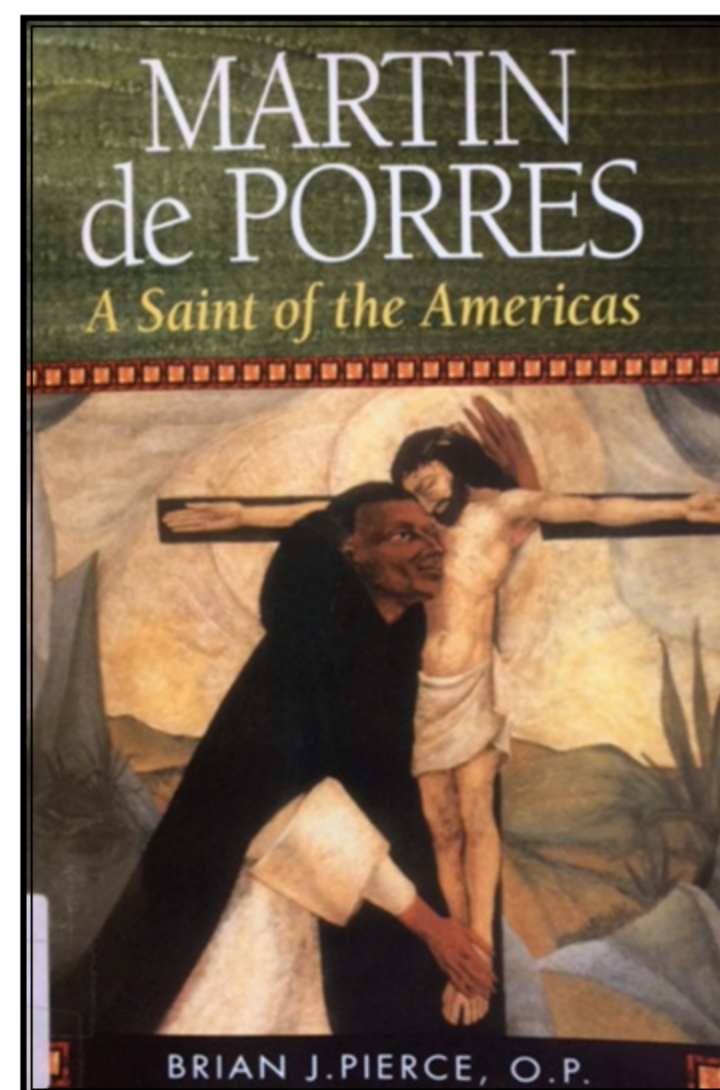
again having the marvels of God proclaimed in every language the heaven (Acts 2:1-13).

Life is full of mistakes. We all look back and wonder what would life have been like without the wars and the bombs, the gas chambers and the thoughtless bursts of anger that severed sacred ties. What would our story be like if Christ had not been crucified by hatred? We cannot know, for the road of history took other turns. But what we do know, and what Martin de Porres teaches us time and again, is that God is not yet finished creating the universe. We are clay in the hands of the Potter, and nothing is impossible with God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Am I willing to trust that the mistakes and blunders of my life can be re-created through God’s infinite love? Do I trust God’s providence, even when it seems so unfathomable? Does my faith community reflect the new people of God, rich in diversity? Evil and injustice are as real in our world today as in Martin’s day. How can I offer my life as a wide open space for God to fashion a new creation in Christ? Pray and reflect on Psalm 139.

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Now here's a Martin de Porres Miracle!

Antonio Perez-Camacho tells us how in 1956 he was cured through the intercession of Blessed Martin de Porres – as he then was.

He said it all began with a childhood prank on August 25, 1956. He was a very mischievous boy and was walking with another boy who had a bar of soap and threw it into a house under construction. His friend began to cry and said that his father would punish him. Antonio said: "Don't worry. I'll go and find it".

As he was climbing the roof of the structure, a 25kg cement block came loose.

"I fell to the ground and the block fell on top of me. My left leg was crushed," he said.

Doctors examined him and found that there was no blood circulation in the leg and that gangrene was beginning to set in.

"They pulled off pieces of rotten flesh," he recalled. His condition did not improve. On August 31 the doctors said his leg would have to be amputated, as he was also beginning to show signs of hepatitis and blood poisoning.

On September 1 a relative of his named Adolfo Luque arrived from Las Palmas. He told Antonio's mother, Berta: "There is nothing left to do here except to pray. I am very devoted to Blessed Martin de Porres and I have a lot of faith in him. I want to give you this holy card because the only thing left to do is to pray".

Antonio's mother placed the card on his leg and prayed all night. He recounts how "...the next day, the doctors came to take me to surgery. They removed the bandages and were shocked to find my condition had radically changed. There was circulation in my leg, and they said that there was no need to amputate anything. That's what happened. A few days later I was sent home. The only long-term effect was the scar. Everything else was normal".

This news reached the Dominicans, who decided to begin an investigation to determine if this could be investigated as the second miracle needed for the canonisation of the then Blessed Martin, who had worked among Peru's improv-



erished people in the 16th century. The first miracle was the healing of an elderly woman in Paraguay in 1948.

Antonio notes that the testimony of the doctor, Dr Angel Capote, and an avowed atheist, was key. "He said that from a medical point of view there was no explanation for what had happened. And Dr Angel died an extraordinary Christian because what had happened led his conversion".

This was the miracle that led to the canonisation of Martin de Porres. Antonio, who became a dental surgeon, said: "I was influenced by St Martin, who was a healer and who pulled teeth out. St Martin is the patron saint of barbers, who were at the same time also surgeons".

In 1963, Dr Antonio was invited to a meeting with the Peruvian government. He had fond memories and said in 2012 that before he died he would like to go back to Peru once more and pray before the tomb of St Martin for health, peace and love.

Dr Antonio completely recovered through the intercession of St Martin and at the age of 12 he was playing soccer and was as good with his right leg as with his left!

Saint Martin, pray for us.

If you have any similar testimonies, please send them to us for publication and inspiration.

Another miracle ...

Inspired by St Martin, you could help in bringing about a few more miracles! Donate NOW:

- towards the education of a priest – R100000 per year
- support a priest in his old age – R3000 per month
- support St Martin's project for needy children in Delmas – R300000 per month
- support an unemployed person who has to care for his aged mother
- support ministry amongst the deaf
- support the education of the child

"This openness of the heart is a source of joy since 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' (Acts 20:35). We do not live better when we flee, hide, refuse to share, stop giving and lock ourselves up in our own comforts. Such a life is nothing less than slow suicide" (Pope Francis Joy of the Gospel 272). "Every person is immensely holy and deserves our love. Consequently, if I can help at least one person that already justifies the offering of my life. It is a wonderful thing to be God's faithful people. We achieve fulfilment when we break down walls and our heart is filled with faces and names!" (274).

The time to act is now. God bless you.

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