

Black Catholic History Month St. Martin de Porres

St. Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru in 1579, the son of a Spanish nobleman and soldier and a Panamanian freed slave of African and Native descent. After his father abandoned his family Martin grew up in extreme poverty with his mother and younger sister. Being of mixed race, he experienced a great deal of ridicule and oppression. At the age of 15, unable to join the Dominican's Priory in Lima because of a law barring mixed race people from religious orders, he began volunteering at the priory

Eventually, Martin was permitted to take vows as a member of the Third Order of Saint Dominic and then allowed to profess religious vows as a Dominican lay brother when his prior disregarded the Peruvian law on racial restrictions to religious orders. However, not everyone felt the same about his addition to the order and Martin endured ridicule due to his mixed race from other lay brothers and a priest.

St. Martin was a gifted healer and at age 34 was assigned to the priory's infirmary where he cared for the sick regardless of economic status or race. He additionally founded a hospital and orphanage for abandoned children and slaves. It is said that he had many spiritual gifts and miraculous powers. During an epidemic in Lima, Martin passed through locked doors at the priory on more than one occasion to care for the sick. After enduring a year of sickness and agonizing pain he died in 1639 at age 59.

St. Martin de Porres was beatified by Pope Gregory XVI in 1837 and was canonized by Pope John XXIII in 1962. His feast day is November 3. St. Martin de Porres is the patron saint of mixed race people, barbers, innkeepers, public health workers, and those seeking racial harmony and has been chosen by St. Elizabeth's EmbRace Justice ministry as its patron saint.