

MEET FRIAR

MARTIN MARIA DE PORRES WARD

On November 3 each year the Church celebrates the memorial of St. Martin de Porres, patron of Friar Martin de Porres Maria Ward. Like his patron saint, Friar Martin was born into a bi-racial family.

On March 20, 1918, he was born to William Henry Ward and Clara Irby in Boston, Massachusetts. Named Matthias DeWitte Ward, he was the eldest of 13 children. As a child, Matthias' family moved from Boston to Washington D.C. where he attended the famous Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School.

Matthias was raised in a Methodist Church community. However, after attending Mass with a friend at the age of 17, Matthias decided to convert to Catholicism. A year later in 1936, he joyfully received his First Holy Communion.

Drawn to religious life, Matthias entered the Salvatorians' Seminary in St. Nazians, Wisconsin in 1942 but left after suffering a medical complication. He returned to Brooklyn New York and in May 1945 applied for entrance to the Franciscan Friars Conventuals' St. Francis Seminary on Staten Island.

After completing his Philosophy studies at St. Francis Seminary, Matthias completed his Theology studies at St. Anthony-on-Hudson Major Seminary in Rensselaer, New York. On June 4, 1955 he was ordained Priest by His Excellency William A. Scully in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception in Albany, New York.



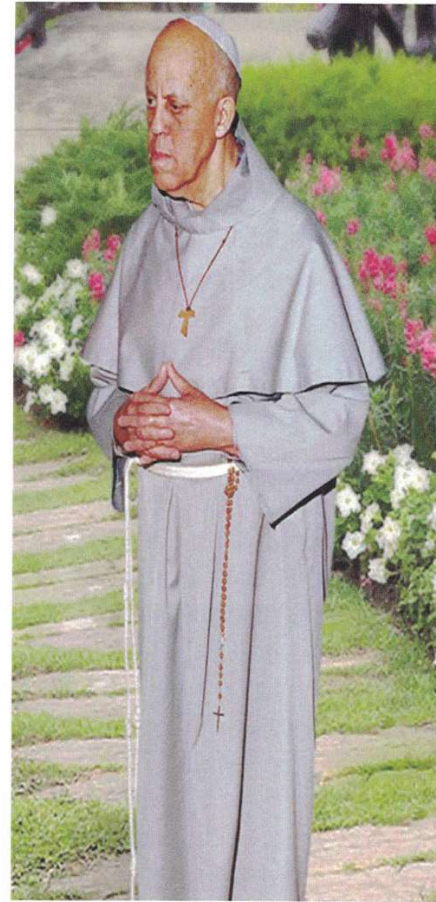
Fr Martin De Porres' rejection by some of his family because of his conversion to Catholicism was eased by his acceptance into Franciscan life and the families he met while studying in Rensselaer and helping out at various parishes in the area.

He was described by his fellow friars as having "an engaging personality, who loved to laugh and get others to laugh. Living with him in community was a sheer delight." The people he worked with saw Fr. Martin as a "holy, warm, loving person with a great sense of humor."

A DEDICATED TEACHER

Soon after his ordination he volunteered for the missions in Brazil. In Brazil, Fr. Martin quickly distinguished himself as a warm, cheerful and passionate teacher. At times he spoke of himself and the gaffes he made while

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Franciscan :: Priest :: Missionary

Fr. Martin de Porres Maria Ward,
OFM Conv.

March 20, 1918 — June 22, 1999

learning Portuguese, his life experiences, his likes and preferences. But his playful approach did not keep him from expecting serious results from his students.

He was always willing to be corrected or learn something new and he referred to others as "compadres e comadres", "amigo e amiga", and as "friends," in affectionate terms.

Friar Martin was seen a very cheerful, charitable and humble friar both in his religious community and by the people he served. When he left the friary for celebrations in the countless chapels he served, he always carried with him in the pockets of his Franciscan habit something to offer everyone he met, giving them a medal, a crucifix, or simply a recycled card, coming from the United States.

In his pastoral ministry, Fr. Martin never made a point of assuming positions of honor and authority; he always preferred to be under the authority of his Superiors and Pastors. He exercised the function of Chaplain, Professor

and Spiritual Director with modesty. His witness of faith was evident in his living of the virtues of simplicity, joy, poverty and humility, especially with the poor.

A HOLY PRIEST AND EXAMPLE

Friar Martin was always an important part of the Vocation encounters with men desiring to become Franciscans. On these occasions, he would tell the story of his calling. According to those who heard him, he shared the many difficulties and trials he overcame. From the prejudice he suffered because he was African-American to the pulmonary disease with which he was stricken, his struggles almost made him give up his vocation. But all these difficulties were overcome by faith in Divine Providence and sublime devotion to the Immaculate Virgin, to whom he had consecrated his vocation and whom he fervently turned to in times of trouble.

In addition to the joy of his priestly ordination, he recounted the fact that he had been able to prepare and baptize his own father, William Henry Ward, on his deathbed. These simple gestures reveal how much Fr. Martin, the dear "compadre" of all followed in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

Of his 81 years of life and 51 years of religious profession, he lived much of it in Brazil. During his time there, he lived a life of prayer, poverty, simplicity and humility. He was surrounded only with what was necessary, never seeking to accumulate superfluous goods. He was always generous towards the poor, with whom he often shared what little he had. In addition to his love for the Eucharistic Christ, he had great devotion to the Most Holy Virgin.

FAITHFUL TO THE END AS PRIEST, FRANCISCAN, MISSIONARY

On June 20, 1999, even though he was not feeling well, he still celebrated Sunday Mass in the Church of the Rosary in Andrelândia, Brazil. Even though he had chest pains characteristic of a heart attack, he continued and concluded the celebration of Mass. Immediately after the celebration, he was rushed to the Hospital where he received first aid. Given the gravity of his condition, his Superiors decided, even against his will, to transfer him to a hospital in the Capital, Rio de Janeiro.

Friar Martin sensed the end of his earthly pilgrimage and obediently bowed for the last time to the will of his Superior. He experienced a serious heart attack during the four and a half hour journey to Rio de Janeiro.

The next day, June 22 at 6:30 pm after receiving the Sacraments of the Anointing of the Sick and the Holy Eucharist, Friar Martin welcomed Sister Death preparing himself for the great encounter with "His God and His All."

At his death, the city of Andrelândia showed him veneration, affection and gratitude, paying tribute to him and praising God for his good-

ness and holiness. Frei Valdomiro Soares Machado, the Provincial Custos of that time, who accompanied Friar Martin in his last moments, wrote to the friars on the occasion of his death:

"Friar Martin, 'a good man', 'a man of God', 'a man of the people', 'a true Franciscan', 'a community man' -- these are the sentiments I heard from his confreres in these last days. Andrelândia will no longer be the same; the Seminary will no longer be the same...They will miss the jokes, the playful puns, and the happy laughter. We will miss the teacher, the confessor, the peacemaker ... But, we have an intercessor in Heaven. The feeling that led us to the seminary of Andrelândia on this day, to express our affection and pray for him, is the certainty that the love that united us in this life continues to unite us with God. He is 'God of the Living, not the Dead!' (Mk 12:27)".

Friar Martin Maria De Porres Ward, our "compadre", is buried in the small cemetery of the São Francisco de Assis Seminary in Andrelândia, Brazil. He is remembered for his love of God and community, especially of the poor and the most needy.

