

Saint Martin of Tours (written for ages 8-11)

Note to Teachers: Read the story with the class. Some suggestions for discussion and reflection follow. Have Bibles for students to share, and a map of France to point out where Saint Martin lived and worked. You might also want to have a picture of a cloak, or check to make sure students know what a cloak is. Better yet, bring a real cloak to class if you can get one. Have drawing/writing materials if you plan to have the students draw or write about something Saint Martin did, as suggested below.

The man we know as Saint Martin of Tours, in France, was born around the year 316. He was the son of a man who served in the Roman Army. The rule in those days was that if your father had served in the army you had to join the army too. So at the age of just 15, Martin became a soldier, though he never liked it very much.

One good thing about being a soldier was that you were given a warm woolen cloak to wear in the cold weather. One of the most famous stories about Martin has to do with that cloak. He was wearing it one windy, cold day as he rode his horse into town. Martin really looked like a proud soldier in his uniform and cloak, his horse prancing along and his shining sword hanging from his belt.

As he rode along, he noticed a thin, sick-looking man shivering in the cold by the side of the road. The man was surely very poor, for his clothing was old and full of holes. He had nothing warm to keep out the cold.

Martin was sad to see that nobody was even noticing the man. Having no money with him, he stopped, pulled his sword out of his belt and cut his woolen cloak right in half. Leaning down from his horse, he gave half to the poor man. Then he wrapped himself in the other half, and went on his way to town.

Some people laughed at Martin as he rode by—he looked so strange with half a cloak! But that night something wonderful happened. As he was sleeping, Martin had a vision of Jesus Christ in heaven, surrounded by angels and wearing half of Martin’s cloak. Jesus said to the angels, “See how Martin has covered me with his cloak.”

When Martin heard these words, he thought of what Jesus had said when He was teaching the people. His words were, “If you do something to the least of these my brothers, you do it to Me.” He knew that he wanted to serve Jesus for the rest of his life.

Martin went to the ruler of the land—the Roman emperor. He said, “I have served you as a soldier, but it is not right for me to fight anymore. From now on I am a soldier of Christ.”

Once again, some people laughed at Martin. They said, "You're just making excuses because you're afraid to fight." The emperor was angry at losing a soldier he could trust and depend on.

But Martin didn't let the laughter bother him. He didn't let the anger worry him. For the rest of his life, he served Our Lord Jesus Christ as a priest, then as a bishop. Any person in need could count on his help. He cared for prisoners and those who had been accused of crimes, and sometimes was able to save them from being put to death.

He taught many people about God, and the joy of God's Kingdom. Traveling over many miles on foot, by boat, or riding on a donkey, he set up parishes and monasteries in Paris, Chartres, and other places.

Saint Martin's feast day is October 12th. Because he cared so much for the poor and for people in trouble, he is often called Saint Martin the Merciful.

After reading the story, have students look at Matthew 25: 31-40. Talk about how this passage relates to Saint Martin giving his cloak to the man by the side of the road. Let students give their ideas about what "the least of these my brothers" means. Guide them to understand that it means those who are in need, but who don't get much attention from people who have enough of everything. Of course Jesus Christ was including women as well as men, and children too.

Ask students, "What things did you like best about Saint Martin?" Let them answer. Then ask, "What things did Saint Martin do that might be hard for you to do?" (They might recall his being laughed at, refusing to be a soldier for the Roman Empire, or traveling over long distances in France without modern, convenient modes of travel.) Suggest that they pray for Saint Martin's help when they face new situations this year in school, or when they have to do things that are not easy for them. You might also have each student draw a picture of the thing Saint Martin did that is most important to them, or briefly write about it. This can help them in the prayer. ---
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Saint Martin of Tours (written for ages 12 and above)

Note to Teachers: Read the story with the class. Some suggestions for discussion and reflection follow. Have Bibles for students to share, and a map of France to point out where Saint Martin lived and worked. You might also want to have a picture of a cloak, or check to make sure students know what a cloak is. Better yet, bring a real cloak to class if you can get

one. Have writing materials for students who might want to write some of their reactions to the story.

The man we know as Saint Martin of Tours, France was born in about the year 316. Growing up, he already felt drawn to the Person of Jesus Christ and the teachings of the Christian faith.

But as the son of a soldier in the Roman Army, Martin himself was also required to serve as a soldier. He did it well, but he never liked it much, being far more attracted to the life of a monk or priest.

There's a famous story about Martin, in uniform and riding his big horse to town on a windy, cold day. He was wearing the fine woolen cloak that was given to every soldier, and his sword hung by his side. As he rode along, he noticed a man huddled and shivering by the side of the road. Obviously poor, the man's thin and worn clothes did nothing to protect him from the winter chill.

Nobody seemed to notice the man, except Martin. Having no money with him, he stopped, grabbed his sword, and sliced his cloak in half. Leaning down, he gave half to the man, wrapped himself in the other half, and continued on his way. People along the road stared at him, and when he reached the barracks the other soldiers laughed out loud and made fun of him, because he looked so odd in half a cloak.

But that night as he slept, Martin had a vision of Jesus Christ surrounded by angels and wearing half of Martin's cloak. In the vision, Christ said to the angels, "See how Martin has shared his cloak with Me."

From that moment, Martin knew what he wanted to do. He took the huge risk of withdrawing from the army, telling the emperor, "I have served you as a soldier. Now I am a soldier for Christ, and must not fight anymore." This angered the emperor, who didn't want to lose a good soldier, and caused others to shout, "Coward! You're just afraid to keep going into battle!" But Martin was firm in his resolve, and in a few years he was ordained to the priesthood.

For the rest of his life, Martin fought many battles—not military, but other kinds. He struggled to keep people from following the wrong ideas of the Arians, who taught that Jesus Christ was not really the eternal God. When he was made a bishop (against his will) he established monasteries. The best-known one was on a cliff by the Loire River. He and the monks lived in that remote place in crude wooden huts or caves carved from the rock.

Martin also battled for the defenseless, once making a full-day journey from his monastery to Tours, where some prisoners were going to be tortured and beheaded by an imperial officer who was known to be cruel and vengeful. Despite arriving at midnight after the exhausting day

of travel, Martin spent the hours till morning with the officer, refusing to leave until he had convinced the man to show mercy. This wasn't the only time he interceded for people in serious trouble, and poor people knew they could always count on him for material help.

After years of work and struggle, Martin knew his death was near. He lay on the ground, and wouldn't allow the monks even to put a sheet under him. He said, "I want to leave you the example of a Christian sinner, for whom it's appropriate to lie on dust and ashes." When the monks begged him at least to turn from his back to his side for a while so as to rest his body, he said, "Allow me, brothers, to keep looking toward heaven, so that my soul can be ready to take its journey to the Lord."

After Saint Martin died, his tomb became a national shrine in France. There are many churches named after him in several countries, and he is the patron saint of cities in Germany and Argentina. Because of his care for the poor and downtrodden, he is often known as Saint Martin the Merciful. His feast day is October 12th.

After reading the story together, have students look at Matthew 25: 31-40, and discuss the ways this passage relates to some of the things Saint Martin did (giving away half his cloak, interceding for prisoners, caring for the poor, etc.)

Ask students to define, If they are familiar with it, the term "conscientious objector." It means someone who refuses to fight in war on grounds of conscience, but who serves in some other way. Saint Martin served, but not on the field of battle.

Ask students what things Saint Martin did that they find most admirable, or worthy of their emulation, and let them offer answers. Then ask what decisions he made that were costly (for example, being laughed at for wearing half a cloak, being accused of cowardice, risking the anger of the emperor and other soldiers). Ask them to consider what decisions or challenging situations they are facing, especially at school and with their families and friends. Suggest that they pray to Saint Martin to guide them. Offer them the chance to write something (privately) if they wish to. -END-