

Liturgical Living: A Catholic Veteran's Day

On November 11th, we celebrate Veteran's Day in America. This day is also the Feast of Saint Martin of Tours, known as Martinmas. It is fitting that we remember Saint Martin on Veteran's Day since he is the patron Saint of soldiers.

Martin was born in the year 316 in what is now Hungary. Martin's father was a soldier, and because Martin was the son of a veteran, at the age of 15, he was enlisted into the army.

One day, during a severe winter, Martin met a poor man who was begging near the gate to the city. The man was almost naked and trembling with cold. Martin felt called to help the man but had nothing with him. He drew his sword and cut his army cloak in two—wrapping himself in what was left and giving the beggar the other half.

That night, Martin had a dream in which he saw Jesus dressed in the half of the cloak that he had cut. "Martin has covered me with his garment," he heard Jesus say. Martin had been learning the faith, but was not yet baptized—after that dream, he rushed to complete his initiation into the Church.

After a great deal of travel, Martin wanted to pursue holiness in solitude. Saint Hilary gave him a portion of land where he could live as a hermit. He opposed paganism in the region, confronting idolatry, preaching, and working miracles to spread the faith. Martin died of an illness in old age on November 8, 397.

In Europe, children make paper lanterns to celebrate this day. The nights before and on the night of November 11, children walk in processions carrying lanterns and singing Martin songs. Usually, the walk starts at a church and goes to a public square. A man on horseback dressed like St. Martin accompanies the children. When they reach the square, Martin's bonfire is lit and Martin's pretzels are distributed.

Here are some other interesting international traditions regarding St. Martin's feast day:

Slovakia: They throw a birthday party for Saint Martin....If Saint Martin rides in on either a white or dark horse on this day of celebration it will determine if there will be snow on Christmas! (A white horse will bring snow on Christmas.)

Estonia: On this day children disguise themselves as men and go from door to door, singing songs and telling jokes to receive sweets. They also call this day "Old Halloween"!

Malta: Children are given a "St. Martin's bag" which is filled with fruits and nuts.

Netherlands: Poor people visit farms on the 11th to get food for the winter. This day is also celebrated much like Halloween.

Germany: Bonfires are everything! Symbolizing the light that holiness brings to the darkness, just as St. Martin brought hope to the poor through his good deeds. Processions that accompany the fires have been spread over almost a fortnight before Martinmas. In Western Germany, there is a separate procession where the children go from house to house with their lanterns, singsongs and get candy in return.

Here are some ideas for how you can celebrate Martinmas:

- [This link](#) contains an easy lantern craft and videos of the traditional songs sung in Europe.
- Pray for our country's veterans. [This link](#) offers prayers with 21 different intentions.
- Set aside some clothes to donate to Goodwill in honor of Saint Martin and the beggar.
- Create this [mason jar lanterns craft](#).
- Kids will enjoy [reading this book](#).
- Listen to this [Saint Stories for Kids podcast](#).
- For a snack, put together St. Martin's bags, like they do in Malta. Traditionally, these bags would be filled with various fruits and nuts.

St Martin of Tours, pray for us!