

Saint Martin and the Cloak

It was a dark wintery night as young Martin traveled along the well-worn road to Amiens. The road was wet and cold from melted snow, and Martin's military uniform was not thick enough to keep him warm. Blessed, he was wearing his cloak, or the wind would have blown right through him. Martin could not get to Amiens fast enough, where the Saturnalia fires were lit in the streets and the winter solstice festival awaited. He could almost taste the food, smell the evergreen garlands, and hear the tambourines. His friends were excited to drink beer and gamble their money, but Martin just wanted a fire. It was cold!

Being a soldier in the Roman army was hard work. But, every year during Saturnalia the army rested. Martin had not wanted to be a soldier. His father was an officer in the army, and everyone expected Martin to follow in his footsteps. Martin wanted to make his father happy and he became a Roman soldier, but in his heart he dreamed of being a monk. Even though he was young Martin loved going to church. In fact, he was a catechumen. He was learning all about the Christian faith, and he believed the stories about Jesus. They were so different from the stories of the Gods; the stories his father told him about Jupiter and Mercury were fierce. Martin never talked to his father about Jesus, but his mother loved to listen to Martin tell about the Resurrection, how Jesus died and three days later he rose up from the grave. As he walked on this cold night Martin thought about his father and mother, and he missed them very much.

As they neared the Amiens' city gates, Martin began to pick up his feet. His friends had to run to keep up with him. They shouted and laughed as the lights and smells of the city grew stronger. They were just about to enter the gates when Martin noticed a beggar lying on the cold wet ground. The man was half naked and shivering from the cold. Martin stopped, but his friends paid no attention to the man. Instead, they pushed him forward, but Martin could not leave the poor man in the cold. Martin broke away from his friends and looked down at the desperate man. He took off his cloak and with his sword he cut it in half. He gave one half to the trembling beggar, kept the other for himself, and left to join his friends without saying a word. "Finally," he thought, "a good use for this heavy sword."

Martin tried to enjoy the festival, but he could not stop thinking about the poor man at the gate. When he ate his mutton soup he thought of the man. When he warmed himself at the bonfire, he thought of the man. When he listened to the music in the streets, he thought of the man. When he saw everyone eating and drinking and dancing, he thought of the man. "We have so much, and he has nothing at all," he thought.

After the festival, Martin and his friends boarded at the Somme Inn, and Martin shared a room with his friend Clement. As they were bedding down Clement asked Martin about the man at the gate. He said, "Martin, why did you give the man at the gate half of your cloak." Martin replied, "Because he was cold." Clement did not say anything after that, but he thought that Martin was a strange fellow.

That night the wind howled outside, and frost gathered on the windows. Martin slept warm and cozy in his bed. While he slept he had a dream. In his dream Jesus came to him with all His angels. Jesus was wearing the half cloak that Martin had given the poor cold beggar at the gate. Jesus spoke to the angels and said, "Martin is only a Catechumen, yet behold: he has clothed Me with his garment." Martin woke up in awe. Was that Jesus at the gate? How could I have not recognized him? In his heart, Martin knew

that this was a miracle. He loved Jesus even more because Jesus cared about the beggar too. That is what the dream meant. Jesus is always with us, especially in times of suffering.

Martin could not wait to go home and tell his mother about his wonderful dream, and how Jesus loves the poor. On the long walk back to the army camp Martin thought about his life, and he thought about the beggar, and mostly he thought about the dream. He decided that no matter the cost he was going to follow the Way, the Christian way. He was a little scared to leave the army and more afraid of disappointing his father, but he knew he had to follow his heart. When he told his mother his plans and all that had happened to him she too wanted to become a Christian.

Martin was baptized, and then he baptized his mother. Shortly after he was tonsured a monk. From that time on Martin lived a very holy life. God gave him a gift to do great miracles. He raised the dead and cast out evil spirits. He loved serving others, and the people he knew loved him. When Saint Hilary wanted him to become a priest Martin cried many tears and begged him to let him be a monk in a place far away from everyone. Martin never thought he was a great man. Even when he became the Bishop in the city of Tours he always served others. When Martin was old he saw his death coming closer and he told his friends. They wept bitterly and begged him not to leave them. Martin had compassion on his friends and prayed where they could hear him, "Lord, if I am still needed by Thy people, I do not reject the labor. Let it be according to Thy holy will." Martin loved his friends very much.

Martin remembered the beggar throughout his whole life and thought about him often. And every winter when the wind howled and the frost gathered on the windows Martin remembered that Jesus wore his cloak, and that warmed his heart to the end.