

St. Martin de Porres

St. Martin de Porres was born in Lima, Peru, on December 9, 1579 to Don Juan de Porres, a Spanish nobleman and adventurer, and Ana Velasquez, a freed daughter of slaves from Panama. His father abandoned the family when Martin and his sister, Juana, were very young. Ana Velasquez supported her children by taking in laundry. Martin's childhood poverty did not embitter him but made him sensitive to the plight of the poor, and especially the orphans to whom he would devote much of his time and resources. Even as a child, Martin would give the family's scarce resources to the beggars whom he saw as less fortunate than himself.



When Martin turned eight, his father had a change of heart and decided to claim his two children (publicly identified as mulatto, a term used for mixed-race children) in spite of the gossip to which it subjected him. He made sure that both were afforded a good education and had enough money for the family not to suffer privation.

At the age of twelve, Martin began an apprenticeship with a barber/surgeon named Marcel de Rivero. He proved extremely skilful at this trade and soon customers, who at first were sceptical of the young coloured boy, came to prefer and ask for him.

After leaving home, Martin took a room in the house of Ventura de Luna. Always a devoted Catholic who spent much time in church, Martin begged his landlady for some candle stubs. She was curious about his activities and one night spied on him through a keyhole and witnessed Martin in a vigil of ecstatic prayer — a practice he would continue throughout his life.

