



“St. Martin Sharing His Coat” located in St. Gatien Cathedral, Tours, France



This large painting of St. Martin hangs in the beautiful principal Cathedral of Tours, France. The cathedral is called “St. Gatiens” Cathedral, named after St. Gatianus, who was one of the “seven apostles of Gaul” commissioned by Pope Fabian in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century to evangelize the region which is current-day France. Gatianus was the founding bishop of Tours, and a few decades later, St. Martin succeeded him as Tours’ third bishop. St. Gatiens Cathedral is known not only for this beautiful painting of St. Martin, but also for its impressive 16<sup>th</sup> century pipe organ and exquisite stain glass rose windows. A few miles from this Cathedral in

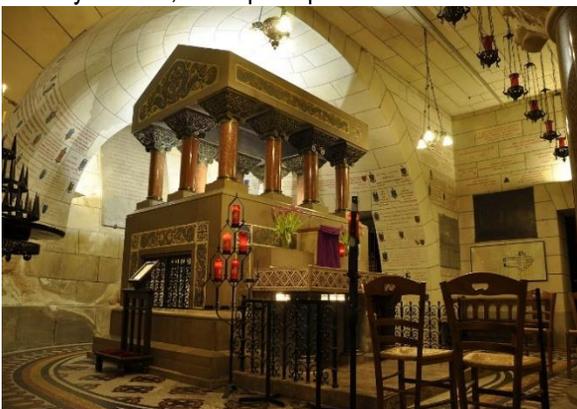


Tours stands the beautiful Basilica of St. Martin, which was built atop St. Martin’s grave and houses the tomb of St. Martin. So, who was this saintly man whom Tours remembers with such great affection and pride, and for whom our parish is named? We know quite a few details of St. Martin’s life, thanks to a contemporary of his (Sulpicius Severus) who wrote a biography of St. Martin.

St. Martin was born in Pannonia (current day Hungary) in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century. At a young age, he began attending a Christian church and became a catechumen, against his parent’s wishes. (Although Christianity had recently been legalized within the Roman Empire, there were yet scarce numbers of Christians in this region of the world and hostility towards Christianity remained.) Being the son of a senior veteran officer of the Roman army, Martin was required to join the ranks of the Roman army too. He joined a cavalry unit that was stationed in what is current day Amiens, France. Martin’s biographer, Sulpicius, tells us that one cold day as Martin approached the city gates of Amiens, he encountered a scantily clothed beggar. Martin cut off half his warm military cloak and gave it to the man. That night Martin dreamed he saw Jesus wearing the half-cloak he’d given away. In this dream, Jesus was speaking to His angels, saying: *“Martin, who is still but a catechumen, clothed me with this robe.”* Shortly thereafter, Martin was baptized. He eventually left his military career, declared God his commanding officer, and made his way to the city of Caesarodunum (current day Tours), where he became a friend of St. Hilary of Poitiers. Martin lived as a monk and hermit before the people of Tours determined to make him their bishop. Martin was resistant to being raised to this position, and so took shelter in a barn, hoping not to be found by the townsfolk. But the barn’s cackling geese made his whereabouts known. Martin eventually agreed to be consecrated bishop, praying, *“Lord, if Your people need me, I will not refuse the work. Your will be done.”* He served Tours for over 25 years as bishop, during which he fought with great piety and bravery for souls. He vigorously evangelized the Christian faith, fought heresies, founded monasteries, served the poor, and even suffered a public scourging when he opposed the Arian heresy prevalent in one of his jurisdictions. He eventually converted his mother to Christianity, but was never able to win over his father. Upon Martin’s death, succeeding bishops had a small church built upon his grave, which quickly became a popular pilgrimage site. Devotion to St. Martin was particularly strong during the middle ages throughout Europe.

The half-cloak that St. Martin kept became a famous relic preserved in the oratory of the Merovingian kings of the Franks at Marmoutier Abbey near Tours, and interestingly, gave rise to the two English words “**chaplain**” and “**chapel.**” After his death, this relic of his cloak, (in Latin called: *“cappa Sancti Martini”*) was carried by kings into battle, and oaths were sworn upon it. Charlemagne ceded this highly venerated relic to monks of St. Denis in 789. Priests charged with the care of the cloak in its reliquary were given the name *“cappellanu.”* As time went on, all priests who served the military were called *“cappellani.”* The French translation of this term is *“chapelains,”* from which the English word “**chaplain**” is derived. Small temporary churches were built to house this St. Martin half-cloak relic. Pilgrims who came to venerate the relic called the small churches *“capella,”* which meant “little cloak.” Over time all small churches (losing their association with this relic) simply began to be referred to as *“capellas”* (in English, “**chapels**”).

In the year 490, Bishop Perpetuus of Tours issued a regulation that a fast should be held on three days of every week from the feast of St. Martin (November 11) to Christmas. The term “Advent” was not yet used by the Church for this preparatory period leading up to the celebration of the birth of Christ, but rather it was first called *“Quadragesima Sancti Martini”* (“Forty Days’ Fast of St. Martin’s”). The feast day of St. Martin, called “**Martinmas,**” became a celebratory day of thanksgiving for full barns after the autumn harvest. Customs for Martinmas that arose included playing festive games, eating a roasted goose, and holding a procession through the town where a man atop a horse (wearing a cloak, of course!) was followed by children carrying lighted lanterns -- symbolizing the bringing of the light of Christ to the world, along with St. Martin!



St. Martin’s Tomb in the Basilica of St. Martin, Tours, France