

The Legend of Saint Martin



Saint Martin was born in AD 316 / 317 in a territory that belongs to Hungary today, but formed part of the Roman Empire at the time. As his father was a Roman officer, he had to become a soldier, too – very much against his will. In AD 334 he was stationed in what is France today.

Arriving at a city gate in a cold winter's night, he saw a beggar in the street – half frozen to death. People were carelessly passing by. Martin did not have anything along that he could give for remedy. Without further ado, he took his warm woolen cloak he had been wearing, dividing it into two pieces with his sword. He gave one half to the beggar, for him to keep warm.

As he was walking back to his horse, the people standing by started laughing at his cut-up coat. His superiors soon disciplined him for ruining military property. But Martin tolerated the mockery and his punishment, knowing that he had saved someone's life on that day.

He soon left the army and became a priest. Given his exemplary conduct, he was appointed bishop later on. In this position, he always stood up for the poor and oppressed.

After his death, Saint Martin was honored with an annual candlelight procession on the eve of his commemoration day, on 11 November. In later years, people also began to light a bonfire on the harvested fields at that time of the year, as a thanksgiving event for the yield they had received.

In this day and age, innumerable children walk the streets with their crafted, colorful lanterns to celebrate Saint Martin's Day. Saint Martin, dressed up as a Roman soldier and riding his horse, often accompanies them, heading the beautiful parades that are held in many German towns around that day.