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# Seasoning the Seasons™

The Institute for Christian Formation, Inc.

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Martinmas

## Saint Martin of Tours

The Memorial of Saint Martin of Tours is celebrated on November 11. Saint Martin was born around the year 316 to pagan parents in what is now the country of Hungary. He became a catechumen (someone preparing for baptism) at an early age, but his parents would not allow him to be baptized. Martin's father was a soldier, and at that time sons were to follow in their father's footsteps. So Martin became a soldier.

According to a legend, when Martin was a military officer, one cold and snowy evening he came across a beggar who was half naked and shivering. Martin took his sword and cut his own cloak in two, giving half of it to the beggar. Martin then dreamed that he saw Jesus wearing half of his cloak. This vision led to Martin's baptism.

Martin gave up the military life to become a soldier of Christ. He became a pacifist who believed it was not lawful to fight. The people of Tours (in modern day France) demanded that Martin become their bishop.

Saint Martin was buried in Tours on November 11, 397. Since the 6th century, Martin of Tours' Feast has been celebrated at Rome. He is the first Saint on the Roman Calendar who was not a martyr. His November 11 Feast Day became known as Martinmas and was a great harvest festival, as well as a celebration of peace, in Europe.



The Dream of St. Martin  
by Simone Martini  
1312-17, Fresco  
Cappella di San Martino,  
Lower Church  
of San Francesco, Assisi

## Martinmas

- \* Saint Martin of Tours was a soldier, then a pacifist. World War I ended on his Feast Day, November 11.
- \* Martinmas is a thanksgiving/harvest festival. Among other customs and traditions, lantern walks have been associated with Martinmas for more than a thousand years.



## Veterans' Day



Martinmas was a celebration of peace in Europe.

This day, November 11, would have been an important traditional Feast Day well known to the European soldiers in World War I. It is no coincidence that peace was declared in World War I at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month – November 11 – Martinmas. Martin of Tours is the patron of many people and places, including soldiers and the

country of France. Today as we celebrate Martinmas and Veterans Day, it is good to pray for all who have served, and continue to serve, our country. And it is good to pray for peace. May Saint Martin of Tours intercede for the protection of all men and women serving in our Armed Forces, and for an end to war and a peace-filled world.

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## Duck, Duck, Goose!

Saint Martin was a modest, unassuming man. He modeled his life on Christ, and did not have lofty ambitions. When the people of Tours demanded that he become their bishop, tradition says he tried to hide, or “duck” that responsibility. But, as the story goes, a big honking goose gave him away!

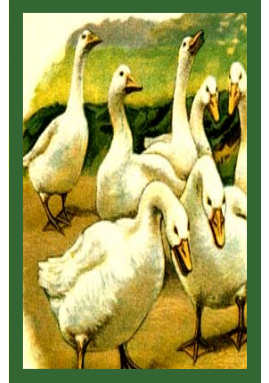
Goose has been served at the Martinmas feast for centuries. Geese were fat at this

time of year, and a perfect main course of a festive meal.

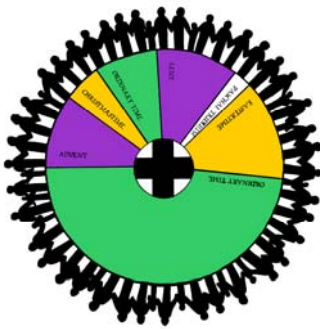
Martinmas is celebrated in the autumn. It is a harvest, or thanksgiving, festival. It is also the time of year that animals were slaughtered for winter meat. In addition to the goose, Martinmas celebrations often included pork or beef. Red cabbage accompanied the goose. Apples and pears and cranberries were in season. Chestnuts were plentiful, and

were eaten on this Feast Day.

A traditional autumn Martinmas celebration looks a lot like our Thanksgiving dinner. A harvest festival is always time to give thanks to God for the bounty with which we are gifted. And it is a good time of year to remember Saint Martin, who cut his cloak in two to share with the beggar. What will we share with those in need? Remember that when we help the stranger, it is Christ we are helping!



## St. Martin's Lent



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Easter is the premier time for baptism. Lent developed as a time of immediate preparation for Easter baptism. But Easter was not the only time of year when baptisms were prevalent. Epiphany, traditionally celebrated on January 6, also was a time for baptism.

Martinmas ushered in a forty-day fast for prepara-

tion for baptism at Epiphany. If you look at your calendar and count the days between Martinmas and Epiphany (don't count Saturdays and Sundays, as they were not fast days in this part of the world) you come up with forty days! This fasting period was called “Saint Martin's Lent” since Martinmas ushered it in.

Recall that Epiphany is a Christmas feast. Saint Martin's Lent, as a preparation for Epiphany, is a precursor of the liturgical season of Advent. It's no wonder that Martinmas is such a “feast” day. Feasting before fasting always puts things into perspective, as does fasting before feasting!

## Patron of Winemakers



Saint Martin of Tours is the patron of many people and places. As Tours is in modern-day France, Martin is the patron saint of France. He is also the patron saint of vintners, or wine makers. Martinmas falls at a time of year when the new wine is ready. So Martinmas and wine go hand in hand.

Martinmas was celebrated throughout Europe for hundreds and hundreds of years. In Venice, it is said that children would sing this song...

*This is the lovely night,  
When we sit beside the fire,  
With the chestnuts all around,  
And a good bottle of wine,  
To celebrate St. Martin.*

So as we celebrate Martinmas, enjoy a good glass of wine and toast the wine harvest and the wine makers. And remember that it is at the time of year we celebrate Martinmas that the new vintage of Beaujolais Nouveau is released around the world. Enjoy a glass (perhaps with some goose paté?), and in the spirit of Saint Martin, share a glass with your neighbor!



# Stay Tuned for Your Local Forecast...

Martinmas, celebrated November 11, was the traditional day of the start of winter in Europe. Saint Martin, often depicted riding a white horse, was connected in folklore to bringing in the white snow. Indeed, there were a number of weather predictions associated with Martinmas.

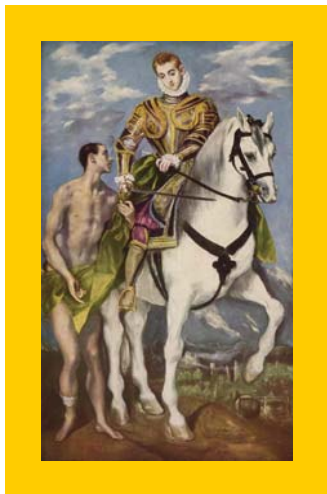
An old English saying was, *“Ice before Martinmas, enough to bear a duck. The rest of winter is sure to be but muck!”* In past days the English also used to say that if the wind was northwest at Martinmas, the winter would be severe. The French would say that on Martinmas Day winter was on its way. In Germany, they used to say that winter didn’t joke any more after Martinmas. However, if the weather was nice on Martinmas - pleasant and mild - this could be a prediction of a mild winter.

It is also not unusual in the autumn to experience a spell of summer-like weather. We call this Indian Summer. In former times in Europe, this was referred to as Saint Martin’s Summer.

So don’t worry about tuning in to the news for your local forecast... Just see what the weather is like on the Feast of Saint Martin of Tours!



## Trick or Treat?



St. Martin and the Beggar  
El Greco

Halloween, or All Hallows Eve, has come and gone for another year by the time we celebrate Martinmas. But in some countries of Europe, children would go begging on Saint Martin’s Feast Day. Recall that Saint Martin came across a beggar who was cold and shivering, and Martin cut his cloak in two and gave half to the beggar. So it was a tradition in parts of Europe for children to go “begging” on Martinmas. Depending on the country, the children may have begged for money or for treats. Sometimes they were given pastries in the

shape of Saint Martin on his horse.

Today you can still celebrate Martinmas with cookies cut out in the shape of a horse or a horseshoe. Or you can even make cookies and crafts in a very traditional cookie mold shaped like Saint Martin on his horse cutting his cloak in two to give to the beggar.



## Whatsoever You Do...

We have seen that Saint Martin is the patron saint of soldiers, winemakers and winegrowers, and is patron of France. He is also the patron saint of beggars, outcasts, and drunkards. Recall that he gave half his cloak to a cold and shivering beggar one snowy night.

The Gospel assigned to the Feast of Saint Martin is

Matthew 25:31-40, which is Saint Matthew’s account of the Last Judgment. This Gospel clearly tells us that whatever we do to help someone else, we do for Jesus Christ.

Saint Martin is a wonderful role model for us, as we remember to serve others, those we might consider the least among us, in Jesus’ name.

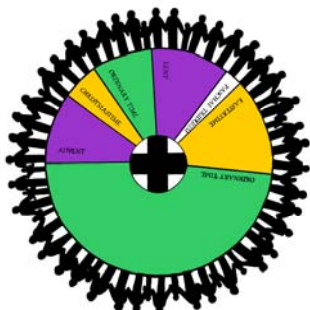
There is an old saying that *“Everyone will have his (her) Martinmas.”* As Martinmas was the time of year for slaughtering livestock, this literally meant that we are all going to die. At the Last Judgment, through the grace of God, may we be deemed as generous and loving as was Martin of Tours. Saint Martin, pray for us!



St. Martin  
by Gregorio Fernández  
(ca 1576-1636)  
Diocesan Museum, Valladolid

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## Walking By the Light of Faith

In my neighborhood - the Clifton neighborhood of Cincinnati, Ohio - on the first Sunday in November we gather for what has become an annual community event in Clifton – our November Lantern Walk. What joy we experience in gathering with our friends and neighbors for this tradition, brought to Clifton from Germany. And as a people of faith, we experience this joy on an even deeper level as we understand the Christian origins of this tradition!

November 11 is the Feast Day of Saint Martin of Tours. Since the 6th century, Martin of Tours' Feast has been celebrated at Rome. (In addition to the Roman Catholic Calendar, Martin's November 11th Feast is also observed on the liturgical calendars of other Christian denominations, such as Lutheran and Episcopal.)



Days are short and nights are long in November. Lighting the night with lantern walks accompanied by singing is a tradition that has been associated with the celebration of Martinmas in many countries of Europe for more than a thousand years! Saint Martin reportedly once said, *"I want to be a light that shines for everyone."* Could this be the true origin of Martinmas Lantern Walks? At our baptism, we received the light of Christ, and were instructed to walk always as a child of the light. At our Lantern Walk we keep this in mind as we join with our neighbors and friends carrying our lighted paper lanterns. As people of faith, a wonderful community event takes on even deeper meaning!

So as we join in our community Lantern Walk, we celebrate the warmth of friends and community in our neighborhood. We unite ourselves with people throughout the world who celebrate traditional Lantern Walks on dark November evenings. As we are led on our walk by an officer on a horse, we recall Saint Martin of Tours who is often depicted on a white horse. And as a people of faith we remember our own baptism, and most of all we remember Christ, our Light! At our Lantern Walk, in a special way, we walk as children of the light keeping the flame of faith alive in our hearts!