

Saint Martin

• Michael Martin

The following is an excerpt from volume 10 of the Little Series, newly published in English by WECAN in 2009. The Little Series was developed by Dr. Helmut von Kügelgen, founder of the International Kindergarten Association, to support the inner work of the early childhood educator, and several of the other volumes explore the major seasonal festivals of Christmas, Easter, and Michaelmas. This study can help to awaken modern American readers to the historical and esoteric significance of Martinmas. While some Waldorf early child educators do not celebrate saints in kindergarten or earlier, many programs celebrate a lantern walk at the time of year of Martinmas, perhaps even the same date (November 11). Saint Martin is also reviewed by Nancy Blanning on page 29 of this issue.

Saint Martin in the Fourth Century

Martin was born in the year 316 in the Roman city of Savaria, today part of Hungary. His father was a Roman officer in the local garrison. Thus Martin was born as a Roman into a military environment. His unusually long life (he died in his eighty-first year) was not filled with inward contemplation or bound to one place. He spent his childhood in Italy, then we find him as a young man in Amiens, in Worms, later in Poitiers or on the island of Gallinaria (now Isola d'Albenga) off the western coast of Italy, to name only a few places, until he finally found a base in Tours for his long journeys through Gaul. He could not be prevented from going into the diocese of Candes to mediate a controversy, although he foresaw his death; there he died on November 11 in the year 397.

His active life reflected the fourth century AD, in which crucial transformations took place. Paganism was wiped out by the onset of Christianity, which was made the exclusive state religion by Theodosius in the year 391. At the same time the old Roman world order

broke down, because it was built solely on the development of outward power.

These mighty tremors are the outward signs of profound transformations in the evolution of humanity in Europe. Rudolf Steiner illuminates with his insights the spiritual background of this century:

However, the course of human evolution was so ordered that the ancient primordial wisdom had to be extinguished. And it was during the fourth century after Christ that things reached the point where it was no longer possible for anyone to make use of this primal wisdom. In yesterday's lecture I described, from another point of view, how this wisdom gradually dimmed and darkened. The fourth century was, in a certain sense, the time when man first began to stand alone—to base his conception of the world only on his sense-perceptions and what his reason and intellect were able to make of them. In order that mankind might gain its freedom—which it never could have done had it not rejected the primordial wisdom and its dependence on superterrestrial things—it was necessary for man to lose the ancient wisdom and be abandoned with only a materialistic conception. The first faint dawn of this materialistic conception appeared in the fourth century after Christ and gradually increased in strength, reaching its climax during the nineteenth century.

Yet materialism also has its good side in the evolution of humanity. When the supersensible light no longer shone into the human soul, when man was thrown entirely upon his senses' perceptions in the surrounding world, a feeling of independence awakened in him, a force that strove toward freedom (Steiner, "Wisdom Working in Historical Evolution," 7-8).

With these words the task of Rome is placed before our inner eyes: to anchor humanity to the earth and to enable the individual to experience the self as a citizen of this world. To this belongs the differentiating of one from another as free citizens, including outer ownership and the drawing of regional boundaries. The Roman saying *Si vis pacem, para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war) characterizes the result: making one's borders unassailable means pitting one nation against another, arming them appropriately. The realm of the individual is protected by Roman law.

Nation and individual appear as the large and small manifestations of a necessary stream of human development. This stream finds expression on the one hand in the warlike and materialistic attitude of the Romans, and on the other in the development of their legal and judicial aspect. But in the heart of the individual lies the seed of selfless love of Christ, which builds the other pole of development. Both poles are active with especial force in the fourth century: we find this again in the individuality of Saint Martin.

It is astonishing that the saint's life as told in the medieval collection *The Golden Legend* begins with many explanations for the name "Martinus," but the simplest and most revealing is not mentioned. "Martinus" means "the one dedicated to Mars" or "belonging to Mars." And just this name is characteristic of Saint Martin and reveals much about his essential being. In order to understand this, the warrior aspect of the saint must be deeply understood. The image of the Roman war god immediately emerges, but we are dealing with something completely different in the fundamental motif of Mars: the assertion of the individuality who stands for himself.

The "assertion of the individual" is not the goal of every epoch. Earlier, the human being had allowed himself to be led by the archetypal wisdom that streamed down to him from the spiritual cosmos, to be received as imaginative pictures. Independence only began through the separating from divine guidance in the manner described by Rudolf Steiner above. The individual soul forces of the human being on earth can then be strengthened, before being reconnected with the divine-spiritual world.

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Destiny also speaks in Saint Martin's death day, November 11, which reveals something of his being. Rudolf Steiner drew our attention to the path of the human soul through the course of the year, in connection with the cosmic circumference, in the *Calendar of the Soul*. For the week of November 10-16 we find the following verse:

*I feel my own force, bearing fruit
And gaining strength to give me to the world.
My inmost being I feel charged with power
To turn with clearer insight
Toward the weaving of life's destiny.*

The same "I" force speaks out of this verse ... the same devotion to the world as that which fills the life of Saint Martin. Only thus can the "I" protect itself from egotistical paralysis. We find the clarity of his individual being again in *The Golden Legend's* description of Martin's hour of death: "... and his countenance shone as though it had already been transfigured."

Martin worked out of his own innermost forces, but at the same time could fully give himself to others out of the love in his heart. He was not necessarily an easy person to be with, even for his brothers in the faith, as we are told by the monk Severus in his biography of Martin: "His continual wrestling against evil brought hatred from the evil ones. The heretics hated him because he scourged their actions and way of living. On the other hand the good people were full of awe and love."

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A New Legend of Saint Martin

... In summer, the plant world grows toward the sun, opening to its warm glowing, accompanied by the animal world which comes to life through light and warmth. In winter, the life of nature is subservient to the forces of the earth; it dies in the cold and darkness and draws in its forces, concentrated by the seeds into the earth's depths. We can share in this rhythm and observe that we too are woven into this play of forces with our soul: in summer we feel freed from earth's gravity and drawn into the circumference of the outer world; in winter we withdraw into our own

inner soul or self. In summer, there is the general danger of losing oneself in the enjoyment of outer light and warmth, dreaming away life in illusion, freed from all necessity. The forces of winter, on the other hand, entice the soul to harden itself, becoming an egoist in the search for power, ownership, and material gain. In the autumn, the time of transition, the human soul is exposed to both dangers. We hearken back with longing to the intoxication of summer, wanting to remain in the enjoyment of warmth and light, but the winter draws us to focus on material security, only living for oneself.

. . . But to find oneself in the Christ means to educate one's humanity in love towards heaven and earth, to develop the forces of devotion without losing oneself. This seed of the Christ power will be born in human beings at the Christmas night.

But in autumn, both powers threaten to win human beings for their own. The picture arises before us of the two-faced dragon, who wants to prevent human beings from finding themselves in between the opposites characterized above.

The apostle John tells us (Revelation 12:9) of the double nature of the dragon, which is both diabolical and satanic. In the Devil, Lucifer is hidden, the one who entices us into pleasure and sin; in Satan we recognize Ahriman, who brings death through materialism. In this battle against the opposing forces in the form of the dragon, Michael intervenes. He, who stands before the countenance of God, supports and strengthens the power of will, which the human being must call up in order to resist temptation. Only in this way can the human being quicken in himself the seed of Christ's light in the deepest darkness of night. In a wonderful way, the *Calendar of the Soul* describes how at Michaelmas the force of will, hidden in the outer death of nature, is at the same time active and flowing to the human being, who is striving to creatively prepare the Christmas mood within.

Michaelmas Mood
*O Nature, your maternal life
 I bear within the essence of my will.
 And my will's fiery energy
 Shall steel my spirit striving,
 That sense of self springs forth from it
 To bear myself in me.*

This "to bear myself in me" comes to expression in the first two lines of the Christmas verse with the words:

Christmas Mood
*The spirit child within my soul
 I feel freed of enchantment.
 In heart-high gladness has
 The holy cosmic Word engendered
 The heavenly fruit of hope,
 Which grows rejoicing into worlds afar
 Out of my being's godly roots.*

Exactly between the Michaelmas and Christmas verses the newborn feeling of self is addressed, which must first be attained ("That sense of self springs forth from it") so that the human being can bear himself into himself:

*I feel my own force, bearing fruit
 And gaining strength to give me to the world.
 My inmost being I feel charged with power
 To turn with clearer insight
 Toward the weaving of life's destiny.*

This is the verse for the week of Martin's death day, which was earlier mentioned as being characteristic for him. Even more noteworthy is the fact that St. Martin's Day lies exactly between Michaelmas on September 29 and Christmas Eve on December 24! So we have found a way which leads from Michaelmas, through Martinmas, to the Holy Night. The human being's individual power of will is awakened (Michaelmas), this individual being of the self develops in active life (Martinmas), the spirit light will be enkindled in the prepared soul (Christmas Eve).

Martin appears as a human being who treads this path. In his readiness for active life, the Mars-force of the "I" is working, penetrated by the love of Christ, which would devote itself to humanity.

References

Steiner, Rudolf. "Wisdom working in historical evolution," lecture of December 25, 1921, Dornach. Typescript of translation from Anthroposophic News Sheet 1935, Supplement No. 6, courtesy of Rudolf Steiner Library.

_____. *Calendar of the Soul* (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2007).