

St. Martin of Tours - 125th Anniversary
Somersworth, NH
Nov. 11, 2007

Happy 125th anniversary St. Martin of Tours Parish. You were born in 1882, twenty-five years after the founding of Holy Trinity. Chester Arthur was serving as the 21st President of the U.S. And Leo XIII, who reigned for 23 years, was Pope of the Catholic Church.

Some interesting events happened the year you were born.

- The K. of C. was formed in New Haven, CT. on Feb. 2, 1882.
- Jessie James was killed by Robert Ford on April 2 and paid \$5,000.00. Yes, I saw the movie.
- Congress passed a new Immigration Act on Aug. 3.
- The Russian composer Peter Tchaikovsky debuted his "1812 Overture" in Moscow.
- On Sept. 5, the first Labor Day parade was held in New York City.

The following celebrities were born in 1882.

- Franklin Delano Roosevelt on Jan. 30.
- The Irish author James Joyce on Feb. 2.
- Music composer Leopold Stokowski on April 18.
- The founder of MGM Studios Samuel Goldwyn on Aug. 17
- The rocket scientist Robert Goddard on Oct. 5.

Two important people died that year.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson on April 27
- Mary Todd Lincoln on July 16 at age 64.

In the world of sports the National Baseball League was founded in 1882.

- Within two years eight cities from Boston to Chicago had professional teams.
- Apollo won the Kentucky Derby that year.

In the literary world Mark Twain published his famous "The Prince and the Pauper."

All of this information is courtesy of "Google.com" which wasn't in anyone's imagination 125 years ago.

You were founded two years before the Vatican elevated Manchester to the status of a diocese. You were named after a French saint who had died 1485 years before. Martin of Tours was a conscientious objector who wanted to be a monk. He was born of pagan parents in what is now Hungary and raised in Italy. The son of a veteran, he was forced to serve in the army against his will at the age of 15. He became a Christian

catechumen and was baptized at age 18. After his discharge he became a disciple of Hilary of Poitiers.

He returned to France with Hilary and established what may have been the first French monastery near Poitiers. He remained a monk for 10 years forming disciples and preaching throughout the countryside. He was so popular and well loved that the people of Tours demanded that he become their bishop. As a bishop he fought paganism as well as pleaded for mercy to heretics.

As he faced death his followers begged him not to leave them. He prayed, *“Lord, if your people still need me, I do not refuse the work. Your will be done.”*

Your parish patron was a powerful voice for God's word. Like the Maccabean family in the first reading he fought skillfully to defend the faith. The Maccabees were victims of the rise of Syria as a super power in 200 BC. The sadistic ruler Antiochus IV instituted a policy of uniformity in his empire and set about to abolish the practices of Judaism.

A resistance movement emerged led by a single family, the Maccabees. Their story credits God with their success. Throughout the fifteen chapters we read of the defeat suffered by the enemies of Judaism. Woven into these chapters are story after story about the bravery of devout Jews as they faced persecution. The story in Chapter seven of a brave mother and her seven sons is the focus of the first reading. Though the cruelties were excessive the story is intended to encourage faithfulness to God who never gave up on the chosen people. What seems like defeat in chapter seven will become victory in chapter fifteen. This underscores a wisdom saying, *“what you focus on determines what you miss.”* In other words, chapter seven is not the end of the story. It is a prelude to the New Testament. In Jesus, and his Resurrection, the hope of these seven brothers would become our hope.

This is the message of the final judgment scene in Matthew 25. It applies to the life of St. Martin, bishop of Tours. He was one of the first to receive the honors of a saint without suffering martyrdom. Jesus' words about clothing the naked are fulfilled in a legendary incident in the life of Martin as a soldier. I will preach about this incident at the retreat service on Monday night.

Finally, in the second reading, St. Paul is a powerful voice for God's word. His word to the Thessalonians is a word of hope and consolation. He speaks about Christ's return in glory. Evidently, many in the community were disturbed, and falsely led to believe that the day of the Lord is here. He discusses that rumor at length, and in these few verses from his second letter, he prays that God will console them. Part of the gospel message is the eternal consolation given to humankind. By being constant in the faith they received by baptism, he prays, they will be further consoled as they wait for that day. Paul speaks to their distress by comforting them. He is a voice that consoles and not upsets.

For the next three days I will be among you as a similar voice. I am Fr. Paul Mast of the Diocese of Wilmington, Delaware. I have come to help you celebrate your 125th anniversary by leading you in a retreat, a spiritual renewal .

The focus of the retreat is on your parish saint, Martin of Tours now living among a great cloud of witnesses. You have already read details in the bulletin announcements so I won't bore you with them.

I will, however, say something about the retreat services. Each time we gather I will lead you in an exercise to slow down, get still and know God in the quiet. A chant based on Psalm 46:10 will help the "slowing down" process. "Be still and know that I am God."

Each retreat service will include a parishioner who will give a faith witness.

- Sunday's theme is "Martin the convert."
- Monday's theme is "Martin the soldier."
- Tuesday's theme is "Martin the priest."

Corresponding scripture texts will complement these themes. My preaching will include stories from the book of my life including the conversions that have brought me to deeper faith in Jesus Christ, three visits I have had to a county jail to see a 20-year old young man who killed my 19-year old nephew in a car accident on June 24th and finally, my dark nights of the soul I had during the clergy sex abuse scandal.

If you want to hear more, you are invited to the retreat services. And practice St. Martin's unique brand of Catholicism and bring along with you a parishioner who is no longer active or a non-Catholic who may need you to encourage them to begin a faith walk as St. Hilary encouraged St. Martin.

On ABC World News Thursday night they had a story about the increased bear population in Mammoth Lakes, CA. Their solution was unique. They called in Paul Rego, a "bear whisperer." He talks to them, coaches them, and sometimes gets angry with them. But, they listen to him.

I am among you as a "hope whisperer." That's what the Maccabean Family did for the suffering Jews 200 years before Christ. That's what Paul did for the Thessalonians. That's what Matthew did for his community. That's what Martin of Tours did for the flock he served. My desire is to sow seeds of hope among you. And as you begin 126 years of Catholic faith and witness in Somersworth you continue the legacy of your parish saint and become "hope whisperers" for future generations.

Amen.