

BLESSED MARTIN CENTENARY

(1837-1937)

NORBERT WENDELL, O.P.



HE present year marks the first centenary of the solemn beatification of Blessed Martin de Porres. Thousands throughout the world, particularly here in the United States, are planning to honor in various ways the memory of this humble Dominican laybrother on his feast day which occurs on November 5. Since 1935 the name of this previously unknown seventeenth century negro has become almost a household word in Catholic homes all over the country. Perhaps in no place in the world is Blessed Martin so well known as here in the United States. Articles have appeared in all the Catholic papers of the country and even the secular press has not failed to recognize the news value of the possibility of a negro saint for the negroes.

Devotion to Blessed Martin in this country, however, dates back much farther than 1935. Research work conducted by the Blessed Martin Guild discloses the fact that as early as November, 1893, Monsignor Burke, then head of Saint Benedict's Home for Destitute Colored Children, Rye, N. Y., sponsored a movement in favor of Blessed Martin. Loyally assisting Monsignor Burke in this movement were the Dominican Sisters of Spar-kill, N. Y.

Nothing more of any great importance seems to have been accomplished in this country until 1930 when a statue of Blessed Martin, designed and sculptured by the Reverend Thomas M. McGlynn, O.P., then a student at the Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D. C., once more drew attention to "the black barber of Lima." This statue drew high commendation from all quarters and Father McGlynn's concept of Blessed Martin is perhaps better known than any we have.

Five years later, on January 2, 1935, Father McGlynn, then in Rome, wrote to the Reverend Norbert Georges, O.P., of the Dominican House of Studies, River Forest, Ill., begging him to bend his efforts toward making Blessed Martin better

known on the American side of the ocean. Father McGlynn cited in particular the tremendous asset a Saint Martin de Porres would prove to the Negro Apostolate in this country. He was in close touch with the Postulator General of the Order, Father Lenzetti, and he told much that was encouraging in respect to the possibility of Blessed Martin's long hoped-for canonization.

Father Georges read the letter to the students at River Forest and waited for their reaction. Their response was instantaneous. They wanted to do something at once. Copies of the letter were made and sent to friends, soliciting prayers for Blessed Martin's canonization; articles written by the students were sent to various magazines and were copied by many of the leading Catholic newspapers. Father Georges visited various priories and convents giving talks, arousing interest in the cause and organizing a veritable crusade of prayer for the canonization of the negro Blessed.

Saint Albert's Guild, conducted by the theological Students of Saint Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio, chose Blessed Martin as the subject of its work during the school year, 1935-6. By means of the literature distributed through the Guild thousands of children were brought to a knowledge of Blessed Martin, and the interest aroused on all sides was a very evident sign of the growing popularity of the cause.

In New York City the Blessed Martin Guild was founded by the Reverend Edward Hughes, O.P., and the *Torch* was designated as the Guild's official publication. Father Hughes and his associate editors have been indefatigable in furthering Blessed Martin's cause. Almost three thousand letters reporting favors attributed to the intercession of Brother Martin have been received at the Guild office. Under the auspices of the Blessed Martin Guild various novenas and services have been held at the Blue Chapel of the Dominican Sisters of the Perpetual Rosary, Union City, N. J.

However, what is most important to remember during this centenary year is that prayer counts for more than anything else. Radio addresses, preaching and writing all help, but what Blessed Martin's cause needs most of all is humble, persevering prayer. The grace of God is required to canonize this negro laybrother and the grace of God must be sought by men and women and children on bended knees. DOMINICANA earnestly entreats its friends to pray for the canonization of this man of God whose face was black, whose soul was beautiful.