

Good morning. Can anyone tell me what happened on the 11th Day, of the 11th month, possibly at 11 O'clock?

Get answer end of the First World War....

Well done, that's true, but it's not the answer I want - anything else?

No? OK do any of you children know what my name is?

Yes, it's Martin.

Well, today I want to tell you about St Martin. Not me, but St Martin of Tours, I'm just Martin of Kidlington!

Why do you think he is called St Martin of Tours?

It's not because he cycles in France. But.....he was Bishop of Tours, which is in France.

And he was buried on the 11th day of the 11th month in 397 AD.

So St Martin lived a very long time ago - born in 316, or it might have been 336! In what is now Hungary.

St Martin is known for a number of things -

Firstly, he is a friend of children!

So much so that in parts of Holland, Belgium, and Germany, that on this festival of St Martin children make paper lanterns and go knocking on doors, singing songs so that they will be given sweets.

As we remember those who have lost their lives in major wars we may forget the effect of war on children. From those who have parents or relatives killed, to those who lose their homes and become refugees, to those who themselves are killed, or injured.

I read yesterday about a grave in Poplar, London, which marks the mass grave of 15 children, mainly 9 years old, who died when a German bomb crashed through the roof of their classroom in July 1917. So it is not only in far away places. Yet today we also remember the children effected by war in the present day, in countries like Syria, and Yemen, and elsewhere.

Secondly St Martin is known as a friend of the poor

There is a famous story of when he arrived at Amiens - a town in northern France, it was a very cold day, and he was snug and warm in his cloak, riding on his horse! And he came upon a poor, scantily clad beggar. Martin took off his cloak, cut it in half, and gave half of it to the beggar and kept half for himself. That night he had a dream in which Jesus said, 'tonight you have clothed me with your robe'.

Perhaps most of all Martin is known as a soldier. Which is appropriate to this day. His father was a senior officer (tribune) in the Imperial Horse Guard, a unit of the Roman army. As a son of a soldier Martin, at fifteen, was required to join a cavalry unit and was probably part of the elite cavalry bodyguard of the Emperor.

But, of course, Martin is most famous as the inventor of the Mars bar! (hold up Duo bar). Would any one like one? (throw a few out, say the rest will have to wait).

As the Mars Bar was invented in Slough in 1932 this may not be strictly true, but it does have his name on it!

As Martin he is named after Mars. Not the chocolate bar, but the Roman God. Interestingly, the Roman God of war. Yes, that's where my name comes from to.

At some point Martin felt that he was called to dedicate his life to God, and to working for peace, so he decided he wanted to give up being in the army. This would be difficult as he would be expected to serve for 25 years. But he told his commander he wanted to leave; that he would give up his pay, and his pension, but he was charged with cowardice and jailed. He may be the first conscientious objector we know of!

In response to the charge, he volunteered to go unarmed to the front of the troops in a battle. His superiors planned to take him up on the offer, but before they could, the invaders sued for peace, the battle never occurred, and Martin was released from military service.

Martin went on to become a monk and was made Bishop of Tours in 371. He is the patron saint of beggars (because of his sharing his cloak), wool-weavers and tailors (also because of his cloak), soldiers, geese (some say because they gave his hiding place away when he tried to avoid being chosen as bishop, others because their migration coincides with his feast), and he is patron saint of France.

You may wonder if there is any link to the reading from the Bible we had! The reading was all about wisdom, and how wisdom is made known to those that seek her. Notice that wisdom is called she, it is a feminine word. It seems to me that St Martin was someone who had sought and found wisdom. He was known for his support for children, for the poor, his care for those in his charge, his desire for peace. He was very wise.

So today, as we remember all those who have lost their lives in war - the military people, but also the civilians, the young and the old, and especially children. And we remember all those affected by war now.....let us pray for wisdom for the leaders of the nations....let us pray for wisdom for our leaders....to seek to bring peace, let us pray for those working to bring peace, in so many areas of the world today.

And as we remember Martin (of Tours, not Kidlington, or Slough) a soldier, a lover of peace, a servant of the poor and a fan of children... He can be an example to us about how to live, how to be wise.

And to help us remember, there is a mars bar for all the children as they leave and if you are really desperate a few for adults too. Collect them as you leave. And every time you have a Mars bar remember St Martin of Tours and all that he stood for.