

What is it that has made St. Martin so popular a saint, in both his own day, and ever since? Perhaps it's partly no doubt because of Sulpicius Severus' successful hagiography and especially the story of his dividing of his cloak (or capella – the origin of our word *chapel*) and giving one half to a poor beggar. But, perhaps, also because of his transition from soldier to monk which satisfies a deep-seated yearning in all of us, especially in times of trouble, for peace. Here he was, at the end of that immense period of Roman rule throughout Europe, showing another way forward, another way of surviving those pagan forces threatening to tear the Empire apart. And he did so with the 'pagani' - the country dwellers – especially in mind, founding monasteries in rural areas to overthrow the old pagan gods and give the ordinary people, the rural poor, a spirituality which would later convert their own rulers also. And how much that speaks to us today where it's our failure to win the popular vote which is leading our rulers to act in such egregiously selfish ways with all the military posturing that goes with individual hubris.

Pope John XXIII saw this danger so clearly at the time of the Cold War:

How strongly does the turmoil of individual men and peoples contrast with the perfect order of the universe...the fickleness of opinion often produces this error, that many think that the relationship between men and states can be governed by the same laws as the forces and irrational elements of the universe. (Pacem in Terris n. 4,6)

We might qualify that in many ways, now, especially the concept of the perfect order of the universe, but its essential recognition that the elements of the universe itself are insufficient to save us remains. The greater war we face now is that these forces will, indeed, tear us apart and that it's only conversion of heart such as that of St Martin which will enable us to survive them – to separate the sheep from the goats.

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