



CLASSIC WISDOM COLLECTION

# Secrets of the Spirit

WISDOM FROM

Luis Martinez



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## Foreword

Archbishop Luis Maria Martinez (1881–1956) was a popular spiritual writer in his day, and even today his writings continue to inspire us. He lived in Mexico during very turbulent years, when the Church was persecuted by a militant anti-Catholic government. Despite all this, Martinez carried out a successful ministry and he spent the last nineteen years of his life wisely guiding his people as primate archbishop of Mexico City.

When I saw his picture I liked his joyful smile and the cheerful glint in his eyes. Martinez was known for having a good sense of humor, and some of his contemporaries even thought of him as too lighthearted. But beneath the good humor, he was a man of deep spirituality and

mysticism, and a dedicated spiritual guide to his people, endowed with wise social and political abilities. His rich and holy life is now under review during the process of canonization.

When I read *The Sanctifier*, Martinez's classic book on the Holy Spirit, I was moved by his poetic language and consoling message of God's care and goodness. At that time I needed this encouraging message more than ever. My mother had recently died after living with Alzheimer's disease for several years. I had cared for her during the last few years of her life. Although I believe that her death was a gentle deliverance from her suffering as she entrusted her soul to God, it left a void in my life and the lives of my family members.

One month later I was diagnosed with cancer, which derailed my own life's plans. I initially responded with shock and disbelief, followed by denial of the seriousness of the cancer. I expected to sail through surgery and recuperate quickly, in order to start an exciting new assignment overseas. But my denial was shot through with the news that I would need six months of chemotherapy, two months of radiation, and later six more months of a clinical trial medication.

The year-long journey of treatment and recovery taught me many lessons. As a woman religious I had been

praying several hours daily for many years, but I was confronted with a challenging season in my prayer and interior life. I had thought that when I was sick and needed God's help and protection the most, I would be able to pray more. Instead, the discomfoting effects of chemotherapy and radiation affected me physically, emotionally, and spiritually, so that prayer was often more of a burden than a consolation.

At those times when my physical strength lagged and my spirit felt like a small boat adrift without a compass on the wide sea, I was given the gift of being supported and uplifted by the sisters of my community as they gathered daily in chapel to raise their voices in prayer. Sometimes silently or in a weak whisper, I united myself to this chorus of praise and felt strengthened by this communion.

On many days, my time of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament consisted in simply "showing up," in being present without too many words or lofty thoughts, trusting that Jesus Master accepted my desire to pray. He, himself, is always offering us his own unfailing, silent, comforting presence in the Eucharist. The Rosary, with its gentle rhythm of Hail Marys, became a reassuring prayer as I reflected on Jesus's life and Mary's response of faith. I found great benefit in reading Scripture and a few spiritual books. In this regard, whenever I opened *The Sanctifier*, I

was never disappointed. Martinez's profound message, vested in rich, lyrical writing, provided the words that I needed for prayer, and the courage to face my ordeal.

Although prayer and the interior life demanded more effort during my illness, I didn't think of giving them up. At that most vulnerable time, when my usually healthy body struggled with a silent, destructive enemy, I pondered life's deep questions. Death had always been an elusive thought in the midst of my very active life. But faced with the concrete awareness that death is inescapable, the core of my being focused on essentials. In those times, the idea of my detailed *curriculum vitae* describing works, travels, diplomas, roles, and activities faded into insignificance compared to a simple life spent in union with Jesus Christ, seeking holiness through selfless ministry to others.

During that period of introspection resulting from my illness and the awareness of life's precariousness, I appreciated having the writings of Archbishop Martinez as consoling and secure guidance.



Luis Maria Martinez was born on January 9, 1881, in Michoacan, Mexico. The joy of his birth was clouded eleven days later by the death of his father, Rosendo Martinez. Suddenly widowed, Ramona Rodriguez cared lovingly for

her son, and relied on her brothers to be a paternal influence for the young boy. His two uncles, one of them a priest, passed on to young Luis a love of nature and the disciplined and manly traits that characterized his entire life.

At an especially young age, Luis Maria entered the seminary on January 2, 1891. He was ordained a priest on November 20, 1904. He was soon named professor of the seminary in Morelia, in the state of Michoacan, then vice rector, and eventually rector of the same seminary.

It became obvious to those who knew him that this young priest possessed the gifts of intelligence, leadership, and rich spiritual acuity and devotion. In quick succession he attained other positions of responsibility. He was named rector of the Cathedral of Morelia, then apostolic administrator in the Diocese of Chilapa. As a capable and trusted pastor, Martinez was ordained auxiliary bishop and vicar general of Morelia in 1923. He held this post until 1937, when he was named primate archbishop of Mexico City.

Father Pedro Fernandez, O.P., the biographer of Archbishop Martinez and the postulator for his cause of beatification, described four distinct periods characterizing the productive life and ministry of Luis Maria Martinez: *his years in the seminary, his social apostolate, his work as spiritual director, and his years as bishop.*

As *director of the seminary*, Martinez's principal concerns were the academic, disciplinary, and spiritual renewal

of the seminary and the seminarians. This stage of growth came to a violent end in July 1914, when revolutionary troops opposing the Church destroyed the seminary library with its precious collection of more than fifty thousand volumes, and vandalized the building. Undaunted, Martinez carried on, training the reduced number of students who were forced to live in private residences until the political situation improved.

Martinez responded to these turbulent times of Church persecution in Mexico with a *social apostolate*. This consisted of forming a group of Catholic lay leaders to be actively involved in society and politics. His goal was for these lay leaders to establish a Catholic government in order to change the pervading atheistic and unjust laws into laws that would respect religion and the human person. Martinez never supported violence or taking up arms. Instead, he always sought the good of his country and tried to maintain balance between the enemies of the Church and the general population, most of whom were Catholics.

It is easy to understand why Martinez, a man of deep spirituality, would be a sought-after *spiritual director* for priests, men and women religious, and lay people. He contributed his greatest and most polished writings to the field of spirituality.

Finally, *as a bishop*, Martinez was entirely dedicated to his pastoral ministry. A holy and devoted servant of God, he dedicated himself to the care of his priests and the spiritual development of his people, to teaching and guiding, to prudently seeking peaceful resolutions to the persecution of the Church, and above all, to fostering his own spiritual life, which led him to great heights of holiness. At his death, as a poor archbishop without material possessions, he was considered rich in spiritual gifts to the point that the people exclaimed: “A saint has died.”



What does my heart long for? What does God’s Spirit yearn for in my regard?

We are people of restless hearts, living in a busy age, surrounded by a cacophony of noises that bombard us all day long. Often we dart through this loud, speeding world trying to find something or someone that can satisfy the deep longing at the center of our being. That which is good, true, and beautiful in our world can certainly make us happy. But at some point our hearts need further reassurance, because there is a deep space within each of us that cannot be filled by finite matter, things, or people. It can only be filled by God.

Many people don't even recognize this inner yearning because of its many guises: boredom, dissatisfaction, crises, and desires we can never satisfy. We seek more money, relationships, sex, substances, activities, honors, entertainment, and distractions. But these things can only satisfy our longing temporarily.

Some people turn to today's popular wisdom writers to find clever ways of naming and explaining humanity's yearning. Television personalities and evangelists promote attractive messages to those who are searching. Books, blogs, videos, the internet, and social networking sites pick up the same ideas, and before long popular movements spring up. People sincerely search for spiritual answers. But secular prophets, although well intentioned and sincere, offer only partial answers. Many movements remain on a natural level, devoid of reference to God. Perhaps they identify a being, force, universe, or wisdom figure that stands for something and someone greater than themselves. But that is not enough. Attempts to understand suffering prove inadequate. Every effort is made to help people avoid all pain and always be happy. Yet, evading suffering and pain proves to be impossible.

We can only find satisfactory and lasting answers to the problem of evil and suffering when we discover a personal God who loves us and redeems us through Jesus Christ his Son. Only the biblical God can bring us peace

and happiness, because this God is not an abstract concept, but a *person* who longs for union and communion with us. Only this God of Love can fill our hearts with the joy and peace for which we long. Martinez understood this truth, lived it throughout his life, and expressed it in his writings with clarity and beauty.

The God who is Love pursues and woos us. In his immense affection for us, he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, who, through the mystery of *kenosis* or self-emptying, became one of us and saved us through his life, suffering, death, and resurrection.

Since our earthly journey inevitably comes face to face with the cross, we turn to Jesus who made suffering sacred by taking it upon himself, and we learn from him. He did not hold back, but gave us the gift of himself, his total love.

Martinez highlights the hope-filled message of God's love and concern, and speaks of the Holy Spirit as the sweet companion of our souls. He describes well the human struggle to grow in union with Jesus as we seek to develop our interior life. Never glossing over the reality of sin and suffering, Martinez offers the hopeful message that "the work, pain, and sufferings of this world do not constitute the definitive atmosphere of our souls. Our atmosphere is rest in God."<sup>1</sup>

"I have a special place in the thought of God," writes Archbishop Luis Maria Martinez. "I occupy a post of honor

in his heart; I am the unique object of his providence and his action. . . . My life, with its alternations of joy and grief, fear and hope, activity and repose; my life, with its variable and innumerable circumstances, is God's work. It is the fruit of his love."<sup>2</sup>



## I

# God's Gift of Peace

**P**ace is the gift that Jesus Christ brought us from heaven, his gift, the gift of God. It is a gift so beautiful, so profound, so all-embracing, and efficacious, that we shall never truly comprehend it.

We might say concerning peace what our Lord said of himself to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "If you knew the gift of God . . ." (Jn 4:10). Truly, if we understood this God-given gift of peace, we could appreciate how it is the synthesis, the very peak, so to speak, of all the graces and heavenly blessings we have received in Christ Jesus.

Peace is the seal of Christ. It is not just one of his many gifts; it is, in a certain way, his own gift. When Jesus appeared in the world on that unforgettable night in Bethlehem, the angels proclaimed peace. On another unforgettable night, the last that he spent on earth, the pivotal night of the Cenacle and the Eucharist, Jesus left peace to his loved ones as a testament of his love: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (Jn 14:27).

Our Lord’s customary greeting to his apostles after his resurrection was “Peace be with you!” Furthermore, he recommended that in pursuing their apostolic mission, they should always say these words upon arriving at any house: “Peace be with you” (Jn 20:21, 26), and any person of peace who dwelt there should receive their peace; if not, their good wishes for peace should return to the apostles. . . .

Our Lord’s peace has distinctive characteristics, which call for at least a brief consideration. First, it is a peace *exclusively his own*; he has a monopoly on peace. On the eve of his passion, he said to his disciples: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives” (Jn 14:27).

The world, which counterfeits everything, cannot counterfeit peace, no matter how much it tries. It misrepresents joy; the world’s happiness is always superficial and sometimes even bitter. The world counterfeits wisdom, dazzling the credulous with a showy but empty

knowledge. It counterfeits love, giving this sacred name to mere passion or to base egoism. The world, the offspring of Satan, father of lies, is essentially an imposter, falsifying everything. But it is powerless in counterfeiting one thing: peace. The world cannot give peace because peace is a divine thing; it is the seal of Jesus Christ.

A second characteristic of our Lord's peace is its *profundity*. It is not superficial, merely exterior, the peace of the tomb or the desert. Such is not really peace, but solitude, emptiness, desolation. The peace of God, on the other hand, reaches even to the depths of our hearts. It pervades our innermost being, penetrating it like an exquisite perfume. Peace is plenitude; it is life.

Thirdly, peace is *indestructible*. Nothing and no one can force the peace of heaven out of a person who has received this gift of God. Neither the persecutions of tyrants, nor the snares of the devil, nor the vicissitudes of earth can disturb a soul in which God has established his peace.

On the night before his passion, Jesus told his apostles that he gave them his joy and added: ". . . and no one will take your joy from you" (Jn 16:22). The same may be said of peace: "Nobody can take it away from you." Everything else may be taken away from us: our homes, property, liberty, and even our lives. In a certain sense, we can be deprived of happiness. It is true that perfect joy can be experienced even when the eyes weep and the heart

suffers, but such heights are characteristic of only very elevated, perfect souls. Consequently enemies may take from us, in some measure, even our joy. But they can never deprive us of peace when Jesus has given it to us. Peace can continue its reign in our hearts in spite of the miseries, sadness, and bitterness of life.

Finally, the peace of Christ is a *rich* peace, full of sweetness and mildness. Saint Paul describes it as “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding” (Phil 4:7). This peace is the only form of happiness unparalleled upon earth; it is the substance of heaven. Without the splendors of the beatific vision, without the overflowing happiness of that everlasting state, peace is the substance of what we hope to enjoy in heaven. . . .

But is it always possible to preserve peace of soul? Should our hearts never be disturbed by anything at all? . . . I would like to present the means whereby the soul may preserve peace despite all obstacles.

The first path to peace is faith. In fact, if we lived by faith, we would live in peace. . . .

Faith teaches that God loves us, and that he loves us not as a group, but personally, individually. “He loved *me!*” (cf. Gal 2:20). Each one of us can make these words of Saint Paul our own without fear of error. God knows my name; he has engraved my image in his heart. Still more, I can be assured that his heart is all mine because our Lord

cannot love as we do, by halves. When he loves, he loves with his whole heart, infinitely. . . .

We may go a step farther. God's love for us is not a sterile love, confined to heaven. It is an active love, provident, watchful, solicitous. It is a love that does not forget us for one moment, but protects us unceasingly, and keeps arranging minutely all the events of our life from the most far-reaching to the most insignificant.

I am not exaggerating. Jesus himself affirmed it: "But not a hair of your head will perish" (Lk 21:18). Some persons may consider this hyperbole. Perhaps, but at any rate it is a hyperbole that expresses the solicitude, constancy, and minute care of God's love for us. . . .

Through what strange phenomenon, through what inexplicable illusion do we Christians disquiet ourselves, knowing with the certainty of faith that a loving God bears us in his arms and surrounds us with his divine tenderness?

— Excerpts from *Only Jesus*, pp. 13–19