Today’s Saint is very precious to me, he is also especially precious for us at this Healing Mass. The Healing Ministries are at the heart of what we do here at St Marylebone. Let me explain all these connections.

My grandmother now in her 90s (but don’t tell her I told you that!) grew up in the RC side of my family. As a little girl at a Catholic boarding school (which she didn’t particularly enjoy) she was told one day in assembly about this ‘little saint’, who was in the process of canonization – having being made Blessed Martin, there was a campaign to ensure he became St Martin de Porres. So my grandmother and all her schoolmates were to ask Martin for his prayers every day and speed him on to Sainthood. This she did. In fact, my grandmother has asked the prayers of this ‘little saint’ every day for the last near century. Through life’s ups and downs – work came and went, husbands came and went, life is never straightforward, and even her faith (as she would freely admit nowadays) has waxed and latterly waned – but little St Martin de Porres whom she befriended in prayer as a little girl all those years ago has remained her faithful friend in prayer and life, every single day.

She couldn’t have chosen a better friend in many ways. Martin was mixed heritage – the illegitimate son of a Spanish landowner and a freed slave, maybe from West Africa or Central America. Born in Lima, Peru, at the end of the 1500s. St Martin desperately wanted to live life to the full – in real love and service. But because he was mixed race even the Religious Orders of the Church that he so wanted to serve in, dismissed him. Daily he suffered prejudice and discrimination. But he found a way in, as the lowliest servant of the Order of Preachers (the Dominicans).
Gradually, as the most menial servant in the house he earned his habit and eventually made his vows. He was most committed to tending the poor and sick. Indeed, he is thought to have passed through locked doors on several occasions during a bad plague to care for the afflicted. He himself died after a year or more of severe illness, aged 60 in the year 1639.

St Martin’s humility, his tenacity, his love for all in spite of sickness, and in spite of their stupid prejudices make him the perfect companion for my grandmother and for all of us. St Martin shows us that mere mortals like us can indeed do as St Paul writes to the Roman Christians today ‘Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of mutual love’ and ‘love our neighbours as ourselves’. St Martin, even as a young boy of 15 (when he began his journey into Religious Life and into a life full of love and service) shows us what it means to take up our cross of love, daily, and follow Jesus, having counted the cost as today’s Gospel says, and knowing the price; and knowing the depth and riches of our calling.

We cannot all be St Martin de Porres, but we are all called to be Saints, destined to be saints. So we can and must ask Jesus to fill our lives with the same love with which Jesus filled Martin’s live, we must ask Jesus to fill our lives with the same humility with which he filled St Martin’s life, the same commitment to care and love, service and healing, in every sense of that word. And just like my grandmother’s life and her friendship with St Martin, we ask Jesus to do these things knowing that it isn’t a switch that is flicked, or a computer programme once installed and sorted – it is a friendship, a life long journey of becoming Saints, of becoming the you and me, that you and I were made to be. However old we are – 90 or otherwise, let’s ask St Martin’s prayers, turn to Jesus and start afresh today.