

AFRICAN AMERICAN CATHOLIC HISTORY

“And With Your Spirit!”

Office of African American Catholic Ministries

At the end of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, he said, “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ **be with your spirit**, brothers and sisters. Amen.” Paul addresses a Galatian community who is struggling to live in the freedom of the Christian life. The Church never, ever calls us to the rigidity of living the law—following rules—with the hope of gaining salvation. It is in the mercy and grace of God; in the effort, and the discipline of faithful living that we submit to the conversion of our heart, mind and will.

During this month of November— African American Catholic History Month—let us reflect on and remember what God has already done! And, at the same time let us look forward to what God is about to do in us, through us and for us. It is because of the goodness of the Lord that we acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of our Black & Catholic brothers and sisters. Throughout history, people of color: African, Black and Catholic have played a historic role in the faith of the church. From the Cyrenian who helped carry the cross of Jesus to those contemporary saints who modeled faith for us: Sr. Thea Bowman, Rev. Clarence Joseph Rivers, and Archbishop James P. Lyke. Black people have witnessed the Good News of God’s love and challenge us to love one another.

Let us remember to focus on the contributions and gifts of the African American Catholic community, but also to celebrate our cultural heritage and our diversity as the Body of Christ. “From the beginning, this one Church has been marked by a great diversity which comes from both the variety of God’s gifts and the diversity of those who receive them. Within the unity of the People of God a multiplicity of people and cultures is gathered together.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#)

DID YOU KNOW?

Who was the first African mentioned in the Gospels?

The first African in the New Testament mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew was, Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32) Simon was pressed into service to carry the cross of Jesus. This event is highlighted in the fifth station of the cross.

Who baptized the Ethiopian eunuch?

In the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8:26-40, we read the account of the Ethiopian eunuch. This

person was a black person baptized by Philip. The Ethiopian eunuch was the court official in charge of the treasury of the Queen of the Ethiopians. "Ethiopian" refers to a person of color from Africa. The Greeks used this word which means "burnt" or darker skin.

Who was the Black "Wise Man" at the birth of Jesus?

The Magi, in the Infancy Narrative, refers to Melchior, whose blackness remains today in Christian crib set.

Who was Frumentius?

Frumentius (d.380) was from Syria. He was a slave and held a trusted position in the royal court at Axum. Frumentius was a person of great faith. He opened chapels in Ethiopia, and did mission work; Frumentius was very instrumental in the conversion of the Ethiopian king Ezana. After his freedom, he was ordained Bishop by St. Athanasius, the Patriarch of Alexandria. Frumentius was the first Bishop of Ethiopia.

How many Popes were African?

St. Victor I (186-197)

St. Miltiades (311-314)

St. Gelasius (492-496)

Who was Moses the Black?

St. Moses the Black was a convert and leader of a band of monks in the desert who were martyred about 410. He was one of the most influential monks in the East and West. Because of Moses the Black, many women and men sought a life of prayer in the desert in the cenobitic style of sharing meals and community in Upper Egypt and Ethiopia.

Who was St. Monica?

St. Monica was the Mother of St. Augustine. Monica was an African woman of great faith who prayed for her son to turn against evil. Before her death, Monica had the great joy of knowing that her son had come back to God and used his talents to build up Christ's Church.

Who was St. Augustine?

St. Augustine was born in Tagaste, Africa, and was the son of Monica. At the age of 33 he turned back to God and was baptized Catholic. Augustine was ordained a priest and later Co-Bishop of Hippo. He led a holy and simple life, writing over 200 books, letters, and sermons. His writings are still read today. St. Augustine's feast day is August 28th.

Who were the Ugandan martyrs?

Read and Act out the Story of St. Charles Lwanga and the Ugandan martyrs In the resource [Black Christian Saints and Other Exemplary Black Men and Women \(pp.128-131\)](#) we read the story of the faith filled witness of the Ugandan Royal Pages. This story highlights how to death they didn't give up their faith, and celebrated their execution with joy instead. What a great witness of love. The Martyrs of Uganda were beatified in 1902 and canonized by Pope Paul VI on October 18, 1964.

Who was St. Josephine Bakhita?

St. Josephine Bakhita (Born 1869 in Sudan and Died 1947 in Italy), a Canossian Sister and Sudanese slave, was canonized in October 2000 at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy. At nine, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery, where she was tortured, humiliated, and mutilated by her slave owner to learn about the Catholic faith from the Daughters of Charity ("Canossian Sisters"), and the tender mercies of the gentle God who loved her. Since slavery in Italy was illegal, Bakhita was truly free. She was baptized in January 1890, and took on the name Josephine, and remained in the catechumenate for 4 years. During this time, she could hear the voice of God calling her to religious life. After much prayer and discernment, Josephine joined religious life, and pronounced her vows on December 8, 1896 at the age of 41. Josephine lived a simple life of prayer, until her death at the age 78. During World War I, Sr. Josephine cared for the victims, and spoke out strongly against injustice. Mother Josephine was a woman of immerse faith and forgiveness; she was beatified in May 1992, as a "blessed" in the Catholic canon saints. For more information, visit the Congress website at www.nbccongress.org.

Who was St. Martin de Porres?

St. Martin de Porres "1579-1639", a Black saint, was born from Spanish Nobleman, Juan de Porres, and a black freed woman, Anna Vasquez. He was the first Dominican professed brother in 1603. Martin worked as an infirmaries doctor/nurse, and pharmacist. Martin de Porres is called "Father of the Poor" because of charitable acts and his dedication to prayer. He was canonized a saint in 1962. Martin de Porres was the first African American saint from the Americas.

Who was Harriet Thompson?

Harriet Thompson (1853) wrote to Pope Pius IX to plead for the Catholic Church to minister to black people in New York and address the concerns or racism. This was the beginning of the Black Catholic Movement. (Davis, 1990, Pg. 94-95)

Who was the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters?

Saint Katherine Drexal was the founder of the Blessed Sacrament sisters and the first and only Black Catholic University in United States: Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Who was the first black bishop and priest in the United States?

Bishop James Healy, bishop of Portland, Maine in 1875. And the first black priest was Fr. Augustus Tolton from Illinois in 1886.

Who was the first Black president of Georgetown University?

Fr. Patrick Healy, SJ in 1874

Who was the first African American to lead the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Bishop Wilton Gregory of Belleville, Illinois, a Chicago native was elected the first black president November 12, 2001 during a four day meeting held in Washington DC.

A Modern Day Saint

Sr. Thea Bowman (1937-1990) was a Franciscan sister of Perpetual Adoration who was a gifted teacher, preacher, and evangelizer. Sr. Thea spent her life as a teacher on all levels, including the Institute for Black Catholic Study at Xavier University in New Orleans, and as a resource person for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. Through her teaching, she was described as a “soul liberator, a mind liberator”. Thea also used music as an important part of her ministry. Sr. Thea died on March 30, 1990 of cancer. In the words of a close friend, “Thea was a person who made you simply happy to be alive and made you want to live until you die.”

What is the name of the African American Catholic Hymnal?

Lead Me, Guide Me (Published 1987)

What is the African American National Anthem?

Life Every Voice and Sing by James Weldon Johnson

When is the next National Black Catholic Congress?

The National Black Catholic Congress XII will convene in Indianapolis, Indiana on July 19—21, 2012 at the J.W. Marriott Hotel. The Congress is a convocation of two—three thousand people from across the United States, Canada and the Caribbean who gather to discuss concerns of Black Catholics in America. Congress is a three-day celebration of Catholic and African American faith, identity, and culture.

Where is the Mother of Africa Chapel?

The Our Mother of Africa Chapel is located in the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. It was dedicated on August 30, 1998 during the National Black Congress VIII. The Chapel was presented by the African American community as a gift to the national shrine and to the Catholic community. The Chapel expresses the values, hopes, dreams, aspirations, and history of African American Catholic people. The completion of the chapel provides the shrine with 60 chapels, and six oratories reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the United States church.

How many Black Catholics are there worldwide?

At the dawn of the Third Millennium, the year 2000 A.D., there are 200 million Catholics of African descent throughout the world. Africa will have 130 million, Latin America- 60 million, and the Caribbean and North America- 20 million. Research done by the Catholic African World Network.

What month do we celebrate the National Day of Prayer for the African American Family?

On the First Sunday in February, the African American Catholic community gathers for a National Day of Prayer for the African American Family. This is a day to worship, celebrate, tell the story of African American people, and make family resolutions for the African American Family to strive to fulfill throughout the year. "May our African American Families call upon the Holy Spirit to empower them to be the healing, consoling, and loving Body of Christ in our communities".

AFRICAN AMERICAN FAMILY PRAYER

GOD OF MERCY AND GOD OF LOVE we place our African American Families before you today. May we be proud of our history and never forget those who paid a great price for our liberation. Bless us one by one, and keep our hearts and minds fixed on higher ground.

Help us to live for You and not for ourselves and may we cherish and proclaim the gift of life. Bless our parents, guardians, grandparent's relatives and friends. Give us the amazing grace to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Help us as your children to live in such a way that the beauty and greatness of authentic love is reflected in all that we say and do.

Give a healing anointing to those who are less fortunate, especially the motherless, the fatherless, the homeless, the broken, the sick and the lonely. Bless our departed family members and friends.

May they be led into the light of your dwelling place, where we will never grow old, where we will share the fullness of redemption and shout the victory for all eternity? This we ask in the precious name of Jesus, our Savior and Blessed Assurance. Amen. (Composed by Fr. James Goode, OFM, Evangelist)

Who are the African American Catholic Bishops in the United States?

Most Reverend Joseph Lawson Howze, DD
Bishop of Biloxi, Mississippi

Most Reverend Elliott G. Thomas
Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands
(Retired)

Most Reverend Wilton Gregory
Bishop of Belleville, Illinois

Most Reverend Dominic Carmon, SVD
Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, LA
(Retired)

Most Reverend Leonard J. Olivier, SVD
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC
(Retired)

Most Reverend Edward Braxton
Bishop of Lake Charles, LA

Most Reverend Joseph Perry
Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago

Most Reverend John Ricard, SSJ
Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee, FL

Most Reverend J. Terry Steib, SVD
Bishop of Memphis, Tennessee

Most Reverend Moses B. Anderson
Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit MI
(Retired)

Most Reverend Curtis John Guillory
Bishop of Beaumont, Texas

Most Reverend George Murry, SJ
Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

Most Reverend Gordon D. Bennett
Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

Most Rev. Martin D. Holley
Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC

Most Rev. Shelton Joseph Fabre
Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans

RESOURCES:

Office of African American Catholics—Rev. Mr. Royce Winters, Director
100 East Eighth Street, Sixth Floor—Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
513.421.3131, ext. 2640 Fax: 513.421.1582 rwinters@catholiccincinnati.org

CATHOLIC INFORMATIONAL WEBSITE

Black Catholic Information Mall-www.bcimall.org
National Black Apostolate for Life-www.bcimall.org/nbcal.htm
Secretariat for African American Catholics-www.nccbusccc.org/saac/index.htm
National Black Catholic Congress-www.nbccongress.org
Mother of Africa Chapel-www.nationalshrine.com/NAT_shrine/tour_c31.htm

Biographical Resources

HISTORY OF BLACK CATHOLICS IN THE UNITED STATES by
Fr. Cyprian Davis, OSB—Crossroad/Continuum Publishing Group 1990

*SAY NOT I AM TOO YOUNG” African American Youth Pastoral
(The Biblical Base for the Seven Values-The Nguzo Saba) - Archbishop James P. Lyke, OFM

Valuing Our Differences: The History of African American Catholics in the United States
Brown-Roa, A Division of Wm. C. Brown Communications 1993

Catechesis for the African American Catholic Community—*Hallelujah People”
A daily reflection book for African American Christians to focus on the gospel of the day
based on the Lectionary used by Catholics and many Protestant denominations. This book
flows out of an African American spirituality. Quarterly Publication by Journeys Together,
Post Office Box 92634, Washington, DC, 20090-2634. Phone 301.552.6551 or e-mail:
etsm@cwix.com

‘RISE ‘N’ SHINE: Catholic Education and the African American Community
Mary Alice Chineworth, OSP, Editor—National Catholic Educational Association
1996 Publication

Josephite Pastoral Center—1200 Varnum Street, NE—Washington, DC 20017
202.526.9270 pictures, calendars, films, and other resources

A Call to Evangelization in the African American Community: Ambassadors Speaking For
Christ A Publication of the National Black Catholic Congress (NBCC)
The Catholic Center, 320 Cathedral Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201-4421. Phone
410.547.5330

URBAN MINISTERIES INC.

1350 West 103rd Street—Chicago, IL 60643

UMI has various resources for Vacation Bible Schools, Jr. High, Sr. High, and Young Adults



PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

Almighty Father,
You have created us for some definite purpose.
Grant us the grace to know the path
You have planned for us in this life
And to respond with a generous "Yes."

Make our archdiocese, parishes, homes and hearts
Fruitful ground for Your gift of vocations.
May our young people respond to Your call
With courage and zeal.

Stir among our men a desire and the strength
To be good and holy priests.
Bless us with consecrated religious and those called to a
Chaste single life, permanent deacons,
And faithful husbands and wives,
Who are a sign of Christ's love for His Church.

We commend our prayer for vocations to You, Father, through the intercession
of Mary our Mother,
In the Holy Spirit,
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr