November is Black Catholic History Month. During this month we acknowledge and celebrate the accomplishments of our Black brothers and sisters. Throughout history, people of color: African, Black and Catholic have played an historic role in the faith of the church. From the African who helped carry the cross of Jesus to present-day role models such as 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 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.

What is the story of 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.

Was Frumentius a saint?
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? Three
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. Augustine?
St. Augustine was born in Tagaste, African, 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 was the St. Augustine’s mother?
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 uses his talents to build up Christ’s Church.

Who were 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 Josephine Bahkita?
Saint Josephine Bakhita (Born 1869 in Sudan and Died 1947 in Italy), a Canossian Sister and Sudanese slave, was canonized on October 1, 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 to learn about the Catholic faith from the Daughters of Charity (“Canossian Sisters”), and the tender mercies of 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 simply 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 immeasurable 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.nbcongress.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.

How did the Black Catholic Movement begin?
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 Drexel 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. She was canonized on October 1, 2000 in ceremonies at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.
Who was the first black bishop in the United States?
Bishop James Augustine Healy was appointed bishop of Portland, Maine on February 12, 1875. He was consecrated as Bishop of Portland at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on June 2, 1875. He became the first black bishop ordained in the United States.

Who was the first black priest?
On April 24, 1886, Fr. Augustus Tolton was ordained a priest at St. John Lateran Basilica in Rome. He celebrated his first Mass on Easter Sunday, April 25, 1886 at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome.

Who was the first African American presented to the pope for sainthood?
On March 17, 2010, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., Archbishop of Chicago, announced Fr. Augustus Tolton’s cause for sainthood. The Cardinal appointed the Most Rev. Joseph N. Perry, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, as the Postulator for the cause of Fr. Tolton. I am excited that the Archdiocese of Chicago has begun the Cause for Canonization for Fr. Augustus Tolton [http://www.toltoncanonization.org/]. God willing, Fr. Tolton will be the first African American priest to be canonized as a saint. I invite pastoral ministers throughout the Archdiocese of Cincinnati to pray and encourage the sick to pray the prayer for the Cause of Canonization for Augustus Tolton. [http://www.toltoncanonization.org/prayer/canonizationprayer.html]

Who was the first Black bishop 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 Chicago native, Bishop Gregory was ordained priest in 1973, made auxiliary of Chicago in 1983 at the age 36, and bishop of Belleville in 1993.

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

| Most Reverend Joseph Lawson Howze, DD | Most Reverend John Ricard, SSJ |
| Bishop of Biloxi, Mississippi | Bishop of Pensacola-Tallahassee, FL |
| Most Reverend Elliott G. Thomas | Most Reverend J. Terry Steib, SVD |
| Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands | Bishop of Memphis, Tennessee |
| Most Reverend Wilton Gregory | Most Reverend Moses B. Anderson |
| Bishop of Belleville, Illinois | Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit MI |
| Most Reverend Dominic Carmon, SVD | Most Reverend Curtis John Guillory |
| Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, LA | Bishop of Beaumont, Texas |
| Most Reverend Leonard J. Olivier, SVD | Most Reverend George Murry, SJ |
| Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC | Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands |
| Most Reverend Edward Braxton | Most Reverend Gordon D. Bennett |
| Bishop of Lake Charles, LA | Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands |
| Most Reverend Joseph Perry | Most Rev. Martin D. Holley |
| Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago | Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC |
| Most Rev. Shelton Joseph Fabre | Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans |
Who was Sr. Thea Bowman?
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.” Celebrating Racial Diversity

Where is the Our Mother of Africa Chapel located?
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 will be 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.

When is 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 your 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)
RESOURCES:
Office of African American Catholic Ministries
100 East Eighth Street, Sixth Floor
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
Office: 513.421.3131 ext. 2640  FAX: 513.421.1582
www.catholiccincinnati.org
rwinters@catholiccincinnati.org
Facebook: African American Catholic Ministries

CATHOLIC INFORMATIONAL WEBSITES
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
Passing Glory, the movie: www.tnt.turner.com/movies/intoriginals/passing/frame_main.html
Please as Bookmarks or Favorite Places

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

*BLACK CHRISTIAN SAINTS AND OTHER EXEMPLARY BLACK MEN AND WOMEN
Lesson, Activities, Prayer Resources of Black Saints
Marguerite Stith, 1987
Religious Education Office-Diocese of Cleveland

*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

*Say Not I am Too Young, a Video for the many youth who dream of making a difference in the world.
(1995)

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

God Bless Them…African American Catechetical Camp Meetin’: A Gathering to Chart a New Course
Department of Education: United States Catholic Conference (1992)

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
African American authors, theologians on culture/history, methods, curriculum, spirituality, and leadership in the African American community.  
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

Recommended Videos:

PASSING GLORY: a story of a young African American priest who become a history teacher at St. Augustine, an all Black Catholic school, in Louisiana and eventually takes over as coach of its undefeated basketball team. This team battles the code of segregation in the 1960’s, and ignites a spark of change in a Louisiana town. This is a TNT Original film premiered in February 1999. A Website is also available for classroom activities and discussions.  
www.tnt.turner.com/movies/tntoriginals/passing/fram_main.html

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