

**Black Catholic  
History Information**



# **Black Catholic History - History, Heritage, and Truth**

Some people lambast Christianity as "a white man's religion." Worse yet, there have been Christians, Black and White, Protestant and even Catholic, who regard Catholicism as a "white church." Amazingly enough, these myths and misconceptions remain entrenched in some people's minds.

On July 24, 1990, the National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus of the United States designated November as Black Catholic History Month to celebrate the long history and proud heritage of Black Catholics. Two commemorative dates fall within this month, Saint Augustine's Birthday (November 13) and Saint Martin de Porres' Feast Day (November 3). More importantly, November not only marks a time when we pray for all saints and souls in loving remembrance, but also a time to recall the saints and souls of Africa and the African Diaspora. Some people forget that Christianity did not originate in Europe and even express surprise when they learn that Black Catholic History began in the Acts of the Apostles (8: 26-40) with the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip the Deacon. This text is important for several reasons. First, it chronicles the conversion of the first Black African in recorded Christian history. Second, the text suggests that the man was a wealthy, literate, and powerful emissary of the Nubian Queen and also a faithful, practicing Jew prior to his baptism. Clearly, he was not an ignorant heathen. Third, the Ethiopian Eunuch's conversion predates the conversions of Saints Paul and Cornelius. Most significantly, many cite this conversion as the very moment when the church changed from a Hebrew and Hellenist community to the truly Universal and Catholic Church.

Black Catholics trace their faith history back to Christian antiquity long before other nations heard the "Good News." Christian Africa was indeed a "leading light" in early Christendom. Black Catholics point to three popes who were born in Africa: Saints Victor I, Melchiades, and Gelasius I. All three shepherded the early church through tough and tumultuous times in history. Black Catholics claim many Black Saints like Saints Cyprian, Zeno, Anthony of Egypt, Moses the Black, Pachomius, Maurice, Athanasius, Pistentius, Mary of Egypt, Cyril of Alexandria, Monica of Hippo, Augustine of Hippo, Perpetua, Felicitas, and Thecla. Some of these mystics, monastics, and martyrs literally made the church what it is today.

Not many people know that King Nzinga-a-Nkuwu Mbemba (Afonso the Good) of the Kongo and his subjects made their profession of faith thanks to the work of Portuguese missionaries one year before Christopher Columbus made his famous voyage in 1492, or that Pope Leo X consecrated the king's son, Henrique, Titular Bishop of Utica in 1518 which was one year before Martin Luther nailed his list of ninety-five theses to the Church in Wittenberg. Bishop Henrique was the first native bishop of West Africa. However, he died in 1531. The Congolese Church and the hopes for an indigenous clergy died with him. Finally, the genocidal slave trade killed true evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa for several centuries.

Notwithstanding the moral crimes of chattel slavery, the French and Spanish missionaries ministered to their free and enslaved African population within their respective colonies. This ministry laid the foundation for Black Catholic communities within the United States, i.e. Mobile, Alabama; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Saint Augustine, Florida. It is important to note that many African-American Catholics cherish a certain Peruvian Dominican, Saint Martin de Porres, the only Black Saint from the Western Hemisphere to date.

Tragically, the American Catholic Church did not seriously commit its time and resources to minister to the African-American population during the ante-bellum or post-bellum periods. However, God made a way!!! In spite of insuperable obstacles and opposition, African-American Catholics created a remarkable movement of faith and evangelization. Many courageous people played pivotal roles within church history like Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, Mathilda Beasley, Daniel Rudd, and the Reverend Augustus Tolton. They witnessed their faith, ministered to their people, and left lasting legacies in the face of prejudice, ignorance, and indifference. One cannot read their stories without feeling tremendous joy, sorrow, and inspiration. They are truly heroic accounts!

Black History Month provides opportunities to learn and share the whole history and rich heritage of Christian Catholicism. Ubi Victoria Veritas! The Victory of Truth!

**Timeline of Black Catholic history**  
By Fr. Cyprian Davis

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### **1565-1899: St. Augustine, Florida**

Blacks, both slave and free, help to found this oldest town in the United States. In 1693 Spain offers freedom in Florida to slaves who convert to Catholicism.

**Until 1763**, these freed slaves live in a community northeast of St. Augustine. Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, or Fort Mose, established in 1738, thus becomes the first free black town in the United States.

### **1781: Los Angeles**

Governor Don Felipe de Neve recruits 11 families to settle on the Porciuncula River--now Los Angeles. The settlers are all Catholic, a mix of Africans, Spanish, and American Indians.

Meanwhile, Maryland's black Catholic population grows to 3,000 as a result of Jesuit evangelization in the region.

### **1829: Oblate Sisters of Providence**

A handful of women from Baltimore's Haitian refugee colony begin to educate local children in their homes. With the support of the archbishop, in 1829 they create the Oblate Sisters of Providence. The first superior is Elizabeth Lange, born in Cuba of Haitian parents. A later archbishop dismisses the need for an order of black religious, but the sisters find new advocates among the Redemptorists and in Saint John Neumann, then archbishop of Philadelphia. Their ministry spreads to Philadelphia and New Orleans.

### **1839: In Supremo Apostolatus**

In this 1839 apostolic letter, Pope Gregory XVI condemns the slave trade as the "inhuman traffic in Negroes." Rome outshines the U.S. in race relations from the 17th to 20th centuries. Many U.S. bishops as well as men's and women's religious orders in this period own slaves, sometimes advocating for their proper treatment.

Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina defends the American domestic slave trade, arguing that Pope Gregory's apostolic letter refers only to slaves imported by the Spanish and Portuguese. Though claiming he is not personally in favor of slavery, he says it was a "question for the legislature and not for me."

### **1842: Sisters of the Holy Family**

Founded by Henriette Delille and Juliette Gaudin in New Orleans, the Sisters of the Holy Family become the second religious order for black women. Biracial and of African descent, the founders are free people of color, at that time a separate class and culture above the slaves. The order ministers to poor blacks, educating and tending the sick.

This follows an earlier attempt by Frenchwoman Marie Aliquot to start the Sisters of the Presentation, soon dissolved for violating Louisiana's segregation laws because the white Aliquot sought black women to join her. Aliquot is not allowed to join the new Sisters of the Holy Family because she is white.

During an outbreak of yellow fever, the nuns heroically nurse the sick and are thus granted public recognition. But they are not allowed to wear their habit in public until 1872.

### **1766-1853: Pierre Toussaint**

Arriving in New York from Haiti in 1787 with his owner, Jean Bérard, Pierre Toussaint is apprenticed to a New York hairdresser. He becomes a friend to the city's aristocracy by dressing the hair of wealthy women.

When Jean Bérard dies penniless, Toussaint financially supports Bérard's wife, nursing her through emotional and physical ailments. She grants him his freedom in 1807. His stable income allows him to buy freedom for his sister and his future wife, and to be generous with many individuals and charities, including an orphanage and school for black children. He cares for the ill when yellow fever sweeps the city and opens his home to homeless youth, teaching them violin and paying for their schooling.

A case for his beatification has since been opened in Rome. He would be the first black American saint.

### **1875: James Augustine Healy, First Black Bishop**

Although James Healy and his nine siblings--all fathered by a Georgia plantation owner--are officially slaves; their father brings them north for education and freedom. Three of the Healy brothers--James, Patrick, and Alexander--become the first African American priests in the U.S., although they do not identify with being black and never speak out on behalf of blacks.

Bishop John Fitzpatrick of Boston, a friend of their father, encourages the boys to attend Holy Cross College in Worcester, Massachusetts. James studies for the priesthood in Paris and is ordained bishop of Portland, Maine in 1875.

His brother, Patrick Francis Healy, a Jesuit who conceals his African origins for much of his career, becomes president of George-town University in 1874 (ironic because George-town admitted no black students until the mid-1900s).

James would not ally himself with black Catholic leaders nor agree to address meetings of black Catholics, once citing Saint Paul's admonition that there shall be no Greek nor Jew in Christ.

### **1889: Daniel Rudd Calls Black Catholic Congress**

In January 1889 almost 100 black Catholic men meet with President Grover Cleveland on the last day of the first black Catholic lay congress in U.S. history.

Daniel Rudd, a journalist from Ohio and founder of the American Catholic Tribune, becomes a leader of black laity.

Fiercely proud of the Catholic Church, Rudd claims the church is the one place of hope for black people.

Rudd recruits delegates to the first Black Catholic Congress, hoping to "let them exchange views on questions affecting their race; then uniting on a course of action, behind which would stand the majestic Church of Christ."

The delegates' statement calls for Catholic schools for black children, endorses temperance, appeals to labor unions to admit blacks, advocates better housing, and praises religious orders for aiding blacks.

Rudd also helps organize the first lay Catholic congress of the entire U.S. in 1889, where he insists that blacks be treated as part of the whole, not as a special category.

At the fourth Black Catholic Congress in 1893, Charles Butler decries prejudice and discrimination within the Catholic Church, asking, "How long, O Lord, are we to endure this hardship in the house of our friends?" The congress calls attention to the church's failure in its mission "to raise up the downtrodden and to rebuke the proud."

Thus black Catholics made the social implications of Catholicism into a primary feature of the faith, a new and bold approach for the time.

### **1909: Knights of Peter Claver**

The fraternity of the Knights of Peter Claver is established by the work of Josephite priests as a parallel to the Knights of Columbus. It soon develops chapters for women and young people.

### **1916: Committee for the Advancement of Colored Catholics**

Led by Thomas Wyatt Turner, the Committee for the Advancement of Colored Catholics forms during World War I to care for black Catholic servicemen, neglected by both the Knights of Columbus and the black YMCA.

After the war, the group broadens its focus. Its advocacy gives birth to a new national forum for black Catholics. Its purpose: "Collection of data concerning colored Catholics, the protection of their interests, the promotion of their welfare, and the propagation of the faith among colored people."

The U.S. bishops, despite requests from Rome to act on behalf of blacks during the race riots and lynchings of 1919, avoid the topic at their first annual meeting.

In response, the committee publicly urges the bishops to denounce discrimination and consult with black Catholics, saying, "at present we are neither a part of the colored world (Protestant), nor are we generally treated as full-fledged Catholics."

### **1916: Handmaids of Mary**

The Georgia state legislature introduces a bill prohibiting whites from teaching black students. Although the law eventually fails, a community of black sisters is formed to teach. In 1922 the sisters relocate to New York where they start a soup kitchen and begin educating local children.

**In 1929** they affiliate with the Franciscan Third Order, becoming the Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary. Still active in Harlem, their ministries have spread elsewhere in the United States.

### **1920: First Seminary for Blacks**

The Society of the Divine Word in Greenville, Mississippi, with the blessing of Pope Benedict XV, opens St. Augustine's, the first seminary for blacks. Some American bishops are still not convinced of the merit of a black priesthood.

### **1958: Denunciation of Racism**

American bishops denounce racial prejudice as immoral for the first time.

### **1965: March in Selma**

Many Catholic clergy and women religious join the march in Selma, Alabama, marking the church's foray into the civil rights struggle for racial equality.

### **1968: First Black Clergy Caucus**

Prior to the meeting of the Catholic Clergy Conference on the Interracial Apostolate in 1968, Father Herman Porter of the Rockford, Illinois diocese invites all U.S. black Catholic clergy to a special caucus. More than 60 black clergy gather to discuss the racial crisis and decide to form a permanent organization. They send a statement to the bishops strongly criticizing the church but clear in its expression of their devotion and hope. It lists nine demands for the church to be faithful in its mission to blacks and to restore the church within the black community. The caucus remains active today.

### **1985: Today's Black Catholic Congresses**

The National Black Catholic Congress is re-established in 1985 as a coalition of black Catholic organizations. In 1987, NBCC renews the tradition of gathering black Catholics from across the country. The first renewed congress, Congress VI (the first five took place in the 1800s), takes place in May of 1987 in Washington, D.C. NBCC holds a national congress every five years, and each event attracts growing numbers of attendees. Congress IX is August 29-September 1 in Chicago.

*Source: The History of Black Catholics in the United States, by Cyprian Davis (Crossroad)  
Father Cyprian Davis, O.S.B. former monk of St. Meinrad Archabbey, professor of church history at St. Meinrad School of Theology, and author of works on black Catholic history.*



**African Popes**

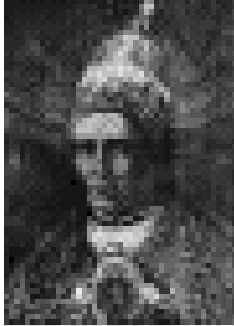
**African Saints**

**And**

**Black Martyrs**

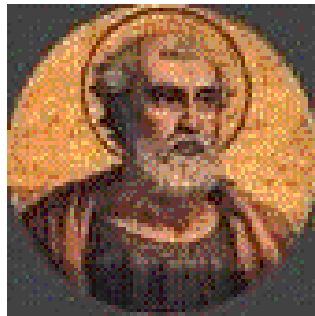
## African Popes

There were three African Popes who came from the region of North Africa. Although there are no authentic portraits of these popes, there are drawings and references in the Catholic Encyclopedia as to their being of African background. The names of the Three African Popes are: Victor (183-203 A.D.), Gelasius (492-496 A.D.), and Mechiades or Militiades (311-314 A.D.). All are saints.



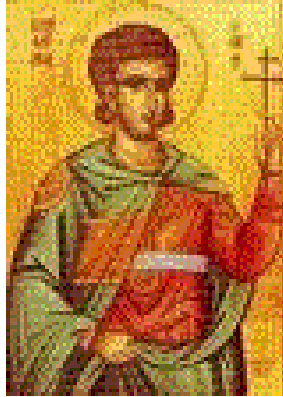
### Pope Saint Victor 1

Saint Victor was born in Africa and bore a Latin name as most African did at that time. Saint Victor was the fifteenth pope and a native of black Africa. He served from 186 A.D. until 197 A.D. He served during the reign of Emperor Septimus Severus, also African, who had led Roman legions in Britain. Some of the known contributions of Victor were his reaffirming the holy feast of Easter to be held on Sunday as Pius has done. As a matter of fact, he called Theophilous, Bishop of Alexandria, on the carpet for not doing this. He also condemned and excommunicated Theodore of Byzantium because of the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. He added acolytes to the attendance of the clergy. He was crowned with martyrdom. He was pope for ten years, two months and ten days. He was buried near the body of the apostle Peter, the first pope in Vatican. Some reports relate that St. Victor died in 198 A.D. of natural causes. Other accounts stated he suffered martyrdom under Servus. He is buried in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City near the "Convessio." Pope Saint Victor 1 feast day is July 28th.



### Pope Saint Gelasius 1

Saint Gelasius was born in Rome of African parents and was a member of the Roman clergy from youth. Of the three African popes, Gelasius seems to have been the busiest. He occupied the holy papacy four years, eight months and eighteen days from 492 A.D. until 496 A.D. Gelasius followed up Militades' work with the Manicheans. He exiled them from Rome and burned their books before the doors of the basilica of the holy Mary. He delivered the city of Rome from the peril of famine. He was a writer of strong letters to people of all rank and classes. He denounced Lupercailia, a fertility rite celebration. He asked them sternly why the gods they worshipped had not provided calm seas so the grain ships could have reached Rome in time for the winter. He wrote to Femina, a wealthy woman of rank, and asked her to have the lands of St. Peter, taken by the barbarians and the Romans, be returned to the church. The lands were needed for the poor who were flocking to Rome. His theory on the relations between the Church and the state are explained in the Gelasian Letter to the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius. He was known for his austerity of life and liberality to the poor. There is today in the library of the church at Rome a 28 chapter document on church administration and discipline. Pope Saint Gelasius 1 feast day is November 21st.



### **Pope Saint Miltiades 1**

Saint Miltiades was one of the Church's Black Popes. Miltiades occupied the papacy from 311 to 314 A.D. serving four years, seven months and eight days. Miltiades decreed that none of the faithful should fast on Sunday or on the fifth day of the week ...because this was the custom of the pagans. He also found residing in Rome a Persian based religion call Manichaenism. He furthered decreed that consecrated offerings should be sent throughout the churches from the pope's consecration. This was call leaven. It was Miltiades who led the church to final victory over the Roman Empire. Miltiades was buried on the famous Appain Way. Pope Saint Miltiades feast day is December 10th.

## African Saints

### **Saint Anthony the Great of Thebes**

St. Anthony is called the Patriarch of Monks. He was born at Aama, village south of Memphis, near Thebes. His parents were rich Christians. Shortly after inheriting his parents' fortune, he sold all his vast fortune and gave the proceeds to the poor, sent his sister to a nunnery and retired to an old ruin of a tomb. He ate only every three or four days and spent his time at manual labor and prayer.

### **Saint Antonio Vieira**

Antonio Vieira was an African born in Portugal. When he was fifteen years old, he became a Jesuit novice and later a professor of rhetoric and dogmatic theology. He went to Brazil where he worked to abolish discrimination against Jewish merchants, to abolish slavery, and to alleviate conditions among the poor. On the 200th anniversary of his death in 1897, he was canonized.

### **Saint Augustine**

Historians tell us that there is more intimate knowledge available about St. Augustine than of any other individual in the whole world of antiquity. Augustine the sinner is all too well known. There is knowledge of him as a convert and author of Confessions, but little is known of his as Father of the Church and as a saint.

Augustine was born in the little town of Teglata, Africa, on November 13, 354. He claimed that he learned the love of God from his mother Monica's breast, and that her early Christian training influenced his entire life. He was highly educated, having studied at Madura, Africa, the University of Carthage, and Rome. He was brilliant - actually a genius, and he used his great abilities to lead men to love God.

His thousands of letters, sermons and tracts, combined with 232 books, instructed the Early Church and have relevance for the Church today. It is said that Christian scholars through the ages owe much to St. Augustine and that the full impact of his psychology and his embryonic theology will be felt in years to come. Augustine was truly a saint. He lived an austere life, performing great acts of mortification and penance. He wrote, "I pray to God, weeping almost daily." Two of his most famous books are "Confessions" which is an autobiography and "City of God".

St. Augustine's feast day is August 28th

### **Saint Bessarion**

St. Bessarion was born in Egypt. He went to the desert to become a hermit. He is credited for many miracles. Once he made salt water fresh. He brought rain during a drought and once walked on the Nile.

### **Saint Benedict the Moor**

St. Benedict the Moor, a lay brother, was born in Sicily in 1526. He was the son of African slave parents, but he was freed at an early age. When about twenty-one he was insulted because of his color, but his patient and dignified bearing caused a group of Franciscan hermits who witnessed the incident to invite him to join their group. He became their leader. In 1564 he joined the Franciscan friary in Palermo and worked in the kitchen until 1578, when he was chosen superior of the group. He carried through the adoption of stricter interpretation of the Franciscan rule. He was known for his power to read people's minds and held the nickname of the "Holy Moor". His life of austerity resembled that of St. Francis of Assisi.

St. Benedict the Moor feast day is April 4th.

### **Saints Felicitas and Perpetua**

Women persecuted for Christianity at Carthage. Perpetua is recorded for having several visions that depicted her death. At death, she called out to the crowds: "Stand fast in the Faith and love one another. Do not let out suffering be a stumbling block to you..." Felicitas was Perpetua's slave. They died together.

Sts. Felicitas and Perpetua feast day is March 6th.

### **Saint Katharine Drexel (Noteworthy Non-Black)**

The foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, she dedicated her life to the defense and promotion of Native and African Americans. Her story is unique given her background of power and privilege and wealth.

Katharine Drexel was born in Philadelphia on November 26, 1858. Her family was part of the social and economic elite of America. Her father, Francis Anthony Drexel, shared with his two brothers ownership of an international banking empire that included partnerships with J. P. Morgan in New York and the House of Morgan in London. The family firm eventually became the Wall Street powerhouse Drexel Burnham Lambert,

Katharine's concern for the "Colored people" paralleled her concern for the Indians. Her blood sisters, even though now married, also shared it with her. With the help of her sister Louise, Katharine purchased a sixteen hundred acre tract on the James River near Richmond, Virginia, where she established St. Emma's Industrial and Agricultural Institute for young black men-naming it after her mother. On a piece of the land adjoining it, she had a school for black girls built, and named it St. Francis De-Sales after her father. Many whites were opposed to the efforts of the Drexel sisters in favor of the Blacks. Neighbors even burned down the new St. Francis school barn. But nothing daunted Katharine. She traveled throughout the United States, search for opportunities to serve black people.

Katharine's crowning achievement was the Building of Xavier University in New Orleans, the first U.S. Catholic institution of higher education for African-Americans. In 1914 Mother Drexel quietly purchased the abandoned buildings of Louisiana's Southern University for Negroes. Three years earlier, the state legislature had moved it out of the city because of the objections from the white population.

The constant demand for Mother Katharine finally caught up with her. In 1935, during an extensive visitation to missions in the West, she suffered a heart attack and after that rarely left the Motherhouse in Philadelphia. Coupled with a life of contemplation, she continued to fight for civil rights, funding some of the NAACP's investigations of the exploitation of black workers, and organizing letter-writing campaigns to President Franklin Roosevelt.

She was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 2000; her feast day is observed on March 3. She was the second canonized saint to have been born in the United States and the first to have been born a U.S. citizen.

### **Saint Martin de Porres**

On May 16, 1962, Pope John XXIII, in a ceremony at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, made Martin de Porres the first black American saint. Martin was born on December 9, 1579, in Lima, Peru, the illegitimate son of Don Juan de Porres of Burgos a Spanish nobleman, and Ana Velasquez, a young freed Negro slave girl.

From early childhood Martin showed great piety, a deep love for all God's Creatures and a passionate devotion to Our Lady. At the age of 11 he took a job as a servant in the Dominican priory and performed the work with such devotion that he was called "the saint of the broom". He was promoted to the job of almoner and soon was begging more than \$2,000 a week from the rich. All that was begged was given to the poor and sick of Lima in the form of food, clothing and medicine.

Martin was placed in charge of the Dominican's infirmary where he became known for his tender care of the sick and for his spectacular cures. In recognition of his fame and his deep devotion, his superiors dropped the stipulation that "no black person may be received to the holy habit or profession of our order" and Martin was vested in the full habit and took the solemn vows as a Dominican brother.

As a Dominican brother, he became more devout and more desirous to be of service. He established an orphanage and a children's hospital for the poor children of the slums. He set up a shelter for the stray cats and dogs and nursed them back to health.

Martin lived a life of self-imposed austerity. He never ate a meal, he fasted continuously and spent much time in prayer and meditation. He was venerated from the day of his death.

Many miraculous cures, including the raising of the dead, were attributed to Brother Martin. Today throughout South America, Central America and the islands of the Caribbean, people tell of the miraculous powers of St. Martin de Porres. St. Martin de Porres's feast day is November 3rd.

### **Saint Monica**

St. Monica, an African laywoman is a saint with whom most black women can readily and easily identify, because Monica epitomized the present-day black women.

St. Monica was born in Teggaste in northern Africa in about 331. She was a devout Christian and an obedient disciple of St. Ambrose. Through her patience, gentleness and prayers, she converted her pagan husband. To her son, St. Augustine of Hippo, whom she loved dearly, she gave thorough religious training during his boyhood, only to know the disappointment of seeing him later scorn all religion and live a life of disrepute. Before her death, Monica had the great joy of knowing that Augustine had returned to God and was using all his energies to build Christ's Church, and that her youngest daughter had become a nun. St. Monica's feast day is August 27th.

### **Saint Moses, The Black**

Saint Moses, the Black, was a desert monk, born around 330. He was an Ethiopian of great physical strength and unruly character. Moses was a big man and his enormous strength was well known. He belonged to a band of professional thieves and robbers in Egypt. Yet he was a slave Moses always in trouble with the law and his master.

Fearing eventual death from his Ethiopian master, or other criminals Moses ran away into the Scete Desert. No regular people were there, only poor hermits with nothing worth stealing. The hermits converted Black Moses to Jesus; yet his former bad ways held on to him. In order to fight harder for Jesus, Moses moved further into the desert. Soon his conversion to Jesus became widely known. The report reached his former band of robbers. Some of them came and tried to turn him back to crime. He converted them. He was chosen for priesthood, and at his ordination the bishop remarked to him, "Now the black man is made white". Moses replied, "Only outside, for God knows I am all black within." At age 75, was killed during a raid by Mazics on the monastery, which he refused to defend. He left seventy disciples to mourn him. St. Moses, The Black feast day is August 28th.

### **Saint Peter Claver (Noteworthy Non-Black)**

St. Peter was ordained a priest in Bogotá in 1604. He is known for his interest and spiritual welfare of the slaves. He is known for healing leprosy and other ailments. He was canonized on September 1, 1887.

### **Saint Valentine and Dubatatus**

Were executed for their faith at Carthage. Sts. Valentine and Dubatatus feast day is November 17th.

### **Saint Victoria**

Died for her faith at Abitene in Proconsular, Africa. Having been arrested for assisting at Mass, she confessed her faith before a judge in 304. She was stretched on the rack and later died in prison.

## Calendar of African Saints

January		
	17	Saint Anthony of Egypt
	20	Blessed Cyprian Michael Iwene Tansi
February		
	8	Saint Josephine Bakhita
	28	Martyrs of the Alexandrian Plague
March		
	3	Saint Katherine Drexel
	7	Saints Felicita and Perpetua
April		
	2	Saint Mary of Egypt
	4	Saint Benedict the Moor
May		
	3	Saints Timothy and Maura
	22	Saint Julia of Carthage
June		
	3	Saint Charles Lwanga and Companions
	30	Venerable Pierre Toussaint
July		
	17	Saint Speratus and Companions
	28	Pope Saint Victor 1
August		
	15	Blessed Isidore Bakanja
	21	Blessed Victoria Rasomanarivo
	26	Saint Serapion the Sendanite
	27	Saint Monica
	27	Saint Poemen
	28	Saint Augustine
	28	Saint Moses the Black
September		
	9	Saint Peter Claver
	16	Saint Cyprian of Carthage
	22	Saint Maurice and the Theban Legion
October		
	8	Saint Thais
	18-20	Blesseds Daudi Okelo and Jildo Irwa
November		
	3	Saint Martin de Porres
	21	Pope Saint Gelasius I
December		
	1	Blessed Marie Clementine Anuarite Nengapeta
	3	Saint Cassian of Tangler
	6	Blessed Theresa Chikaba
	10	Pope Saint Miltiades

## **Black Martyrs**

### **Martyrs of Africa**

Records prove that Greeks commemorated three hundred Africans. Their feast day is December 7th. Other reports state that many African nuns were killed under the Arian King Huneric in the fifth century.

### **Martyrs of Uganda**

Africans have been abundantly blessed by dedicated young men who devoted time, energy and life to the conversion of their people. The Church of Uganda has been nourished by the blood of her martyrs and their zeal, for they were all apostles to their brothers before being martyrs. Everyone said that they were the best in the country, the most sincere, the most intelligent and the most generous. Yet, King Mwanga hated them so intensely for their purity he ordered them cut into pieces and thrown to the dogs.

The White Fathers had converted many Africans to Christianity, and because of their success they were expelled from the country. The new converts dedicated their lives to carrying out the work of the missionaries. They revised the catechism, printed it in their native language, and secretly gave instruction. They taught the people the true faith, encouraged them to pray and give witness to Christ and, although there were not priests in the country, they kept alive the faith. They met great opposition from tribal chiefs, medicine men, pagans and Moslems.

Because the Christian pages attached to the court refused to perform impure acts, the King ordered twenty-two boys ranging in age from thirteen to thirty to be tortured. They endured horrible cruelty with heroic courage and died nobly for Christ. Immediately after the persecution there were 500 Christians and 1,000 catechumens in the country. The White Fathers were asked to return to Uganda after the death of King Mwanga. They baptized more than 150 catechumens. Now Uganda, a Christian land, has two million Catholics, three major and eight minor seminaries. Some 200 African priests, 200 brothers and 1,000 sisters, native of the country, dedicated themselves to evangelizing their people. Every parish comprises from Bishops of Uganda, there are two Bishops. Two institutes of African religious, seven institutes of African sisters and 4,000 catechists continue the work of the Uganda Martyrs.





**Currently being considered for  
Beatification and Canonization;  
would become First African-American Saint**

### **Mother Henriette Delille**

Henriette Delille Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family is regarded as a honor to her race and a strong member of the Catholic Church, especially in New Orleans. She was a woman of strong determination, kindness, compassion, generosity, faith and deep love of God.

Henriette Delille, Julietta Gaudin, and Josephine Charles, free women of color, wanted to be religious but legal and social restraints twenty years before the abolition of slavery and the Civil War prevented local communities from accepting them. They, therefore, sought to form their own. The reply to their request from Church officials was permission to form a pious society that took no vows and whose members were free to withdraw as they wished. Marie-Jeanne Aliquot, a French immigrant, sympathized with their cause and assisted them all she could with financial and moral support. Bishop Antoine Blanc acceded to the request of Abbe Etienne Rousselon, Vicar-General and pastor of St. Augustine Church to direct them in their pursuit.

Henriette and her friends had the courage to pray and to live as Jesus and His apostles had they knew will that although they, as free people of color, lived in a relatively easy life compared to the people held in slavery, that Christ would have sought the poor, the sick, the elderly and helpless, the lonely, the uneducated who needed care.

God smiled on their work and gave countless blessings and countless trails. Not only by their own group mocked and made fun of by the people in general, but by their own group as well. "Whoever heard of that? I wonder how far they will go with that?"

They trusted in God and they grew and grew, until today many hundreds of young women have consecrated themselves to God's service as Sisters of the Holy Family. Henriette was chosen the leader, and she continuously encouraged her fellow members that like them in their new life endure and He had endured.

In 1862 when Henriette died the community had the fatherly protection of Bishop and his representatives.

## Louisiana Black Catholic Bishops

**Bishop Dominic Carmon, SVD** was appointed titular bishop of Rusicade and auxiliary bishop of New Orleans on December 16, 1992. Bishop Carmon retired December 13, 2006.

**Bishop Joseph Abel Francis, SVD** was appointed titular bishop of Valliposita and auxiliary bishop of Newark on May 3, 1976 and served there until his death September 1, 1997. Born in Lafayette, Louisiana, Joseph Francis was ordained a priest for the Society of the Divine Word on October 7, 1950.

**Bishop Raymond Rodly Caesar S.V.D.** (Born 14 Feb 1932 in Eunice, LA, was appointed bishop of the Diocese of Goroka, Eastern Highlands- Papua New Guinea on August 5, 1978 and died June 18, 1987.

**Bishop Fernand Cheri, III OFM** the Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, and the Titular Bishop of Membressa, Bishop Cheri was appointed January 12, 2015 and installed March 23, 2015. Born January 28, 1952 in New Orleans, Louisiana.

**Bishop Shelton J. Fabre** born October 25, 1963 in New Roads, Louisiana was appointed titular bishop of Pudenziana and auxiliary bishop of New Orleans December 13, 2006. He was appointed Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux on September 23, 2013, and he was installed Bishop of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales, Houma, LA, October 30, 2013.

**Bishop Curtis J. Guillory, SVD** Most Reverend Curtis J. Guillory was born in Mallet, Louisiana on September 1, 1943., was appointed titular bishop of Stagno and auxiliary bishop of Galveston-Houston on December 21, 1987. Bishop Guillory became the bishop of Beaumont in Texas on June 2, 2000.

**Bishop Leonard Olivier, SVD** Most Reverend Leonard Olivier was born on October 12, 1923 in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He was ordained a priest for the Society of the Divine Word in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. On November 7, 1988, he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington by Pope John Paul II. He was consecrated bishop on December 20, 1988. Olivier was a Fourth Degree Knight of St. Peter Claver, a Fourth Degree Knight of St. John and Columbus as well as a board member of the National Black Catholic Congress. He retired in 2004. He passed away on November 19th, 2014.

**Bishop Harold R. Perry, S.V.D., D.D.** Most Reverend Harold Perry born on October 9th, 1916 in Lake Charles, Louisiana. He was ordained on January 6th, 1944, and was the 26th African American to become a Catholic priest. On September 29, 1965, Perry was appointed titular bishop of Mons in Mauretania and auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of New Orleans by Pope Paul VI. He received his Episcopal consecration on January 6, 1966, from Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi. For many years he also served as national chaplain of the Knights of Peter Claver. He left this world on July 17th, 1991.

**Bishop James Terry Steib, SVD** was appointed titular bishop of Fallaba and auxiliary bishop of St. Louis on December 6, 1983 and was later appointed bishop of Memphis in Tennessee on March 23, 1993. Born in Vacherie, Louisiana. Pope Francis accepted his resignation on August 23, 2016.

**Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ.** Born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Bishop Ricard entered the Josephite Seminary College at Newburgh, New York following graduation from high school. He completed his theological training at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, D.C. and was ordained to the priesthood on May 25, 1968. Bishop Ricard is now the Bishop Emeritus of Pensacola-Tallahassee and residing at St. Joseph Seminary in Washington, DC where he is serving as rector for his former religious community, the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart (S.S.J.).

## **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? Three**

St. Victor I (186 A D - 197 A D) from the Roman province in Africa St. Miltiades (311 A D -314 A D) born in Rome of African descent St. Gelasius (492 A D - 496 A D) born in Rome of African descent.

### **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 immense 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](http://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 of 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. She was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 2000; her feast day is observed on March 3. She was the second canonized saint to have been born in the United States and the first to have been born a U.S. citizen.

**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.

**What is the name of the African American Catholic Hymnal?**

Lead Me, Guide Me

**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”.

**What is National Black Catholic Congress?**

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**Cause for Canonization**

Four black Catholics whose causes are moving forward for canonization: Venerable Pierre Toussant, Archdiocese of New York; Mother Mary Lange, Archdiocese of Baltimore; Fr. Augustus Tolton, Archdiocese of Chicago; and Venerable Henriette Delille, Archdiocese of New Orleans.

Sr. Thea Bowman  
**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

**Did you know about these African people?**

St. Zeno was bishop of Verona in Italy. He died in 372. St. Maurice and a group of Ethiopian Christian soldiers called the "Theban Legion" belong to the Roman army. In the Middle Third Century, this group while serving in Switzerland were told to take part in a heathen service, but refused. The group was later butchered.

**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 world. 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. 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.

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**St. Martin de Porres (1579 - 1639)** was the first African-American saint. Martin de Porres was of Spanish and African descent. He was the first Dominican professed Black brother in 1603. Martin de Porres is called "Father of the Poor" because of his charitable acts and his dedication to prayer. He was canonized a saint in 1962.

**Pierre Toussaint** was a slave who after freedom performed extraordinary works.

**St. Esteban (Stephen)**- d. 1536, native of Morocco, was a member of the Spanish exploration party of Panfilo de Narvaez.

**St. Charles Lwanga and the Ugandan martyrs**

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**Who was the founder of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters?**

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**What is the meaning of the colors of the African-American Flag?**

The Flag is a symbol of liberation as a people created by Marcus Garvey.

RED: symbolizes the blood from our past, present, and future suffering for dignity and freedom

BLACK: symbolizes our people of African descent

GREEN: symbolizes Mother Africa and the future.



## **Sr. Thea Bowman 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

### **Xavier University**

Louisiana’s Xavier University is the only black Catholic university in the U.S. It is also the only university in the U.S. founded by a saint, St. Katharine Drexel. Also, Xavier is home to the Institute of Black Catholic Studies, where students from around the world come to study how to minister to their own communities.

### **Louisiana Facts**

Louisiana's Xavier University is the only black Catholic university in the U.S. It is also the only university in the U.S. founded by a saint, St. Katharine Drexel. Also, Xavier is home to the Institute of Black Catholic Studies, where students from around the world come to study how to minister to their own communities.



## **BLACK CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF THE U.S.**

Most Reverend Joseph N. Perry  
Auxiliary bishop of Chicago, Illinois

Most Reverend George Murry, SJ  
Bishop of Youngstown, Ohio

Most Reverend Martin D. Holley  
Bishop of Memphis, Tenn.

Most Reverend Wilton Gregory \*  
Archbishop of Atlanta, Georgia

Most Reverend Curtis John Guillory, SVD  
Auxiliary Bishop of Beaumont, Texas

Most Reverend Edward Braxton  
Bishop of Belleville, Illinois

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre  
Bishop of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana

Most Reverend Roy Edward Campbell, Jr.  
Auxiliary, Bishop of Washington DC

Most Reverend Fernand Cheri III, OFM  
Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, Louisiana

### **Retired**

Most Reverend Guy A. Sansaricq  
Auxiliary Bishop of Brooklyn, NY

Most Reverend Gordon D. Bennett, S J  
Bishop Emeritus of Mandeville, Jamaica

Most Reverend Dominic Carmon, SVD  
Former Auxiliary Bishop of New Orleans, LA

Most Reverend John J. Ricard, SSJ \*  
Bishop Emeritus of Pensacola-Tallahassee, Florida

Most Reverend Joseph Lawson Howze, DD \*  
Former Bishop of Biloxi, Mississippi

Most Reverend Elliot G. Thomas  
Former Bishop of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

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

- Bishops who worked on pastoral letter in 1984, "What We Have Seen and Heard"

### **Deceased**

Most Reverend Moses B. Anderson, SSE \*  
Former Auxiliary Bishop of Detroit, Michigan  
Most Reverend James August Healy (1830-1900)  
Most Reverend Raymond Rodly Caesar, S.V.D. (1932-1987)  
Most Reverend James P. Lyke, Archbishop of Atlanta  
Most Reverend Carl Fisher, Aux. Bishop of Los Angeles, CA  
Most Reverend Emerson J. Moore, Aux. Bishop of New York  
Most Reverend Harold Perry, Aux. Bishop of New Orleans  
Most Reverend Joseph A. Francis, SVD, Aux. Bishop of Newark, NJ  
Most Reverend Eugene A. Marino, SSJ Former Archbishop of Atlanta, GA  
Most Reverend Leonard J. Olivier, SVD, Former Auxiliary Bishop of Washington, DC.

## CATHOLIC INFORMATIONAL WEBSITE

Black Catholic Information Mall-[www.bcimall.org](http://www.bcimall.org)

National Black Apostolate for Life-[www.bcimall.org/nbcalf.htm](http://www.bcimall.org/nbcalf.htm)

Secretariat for African American Catholics-[www.nccbusccc.org/saac/index.htm](http://www.nccbusccc.org/saac/index.htm)

National Black Catholic Congress-[www.nbccongress.org](http://www.nbccongress.org)

Mother of Africa Chapel-[www.nationalshrine.com/NAT\\_shrine/tour\\_c31.htm](http://www.nationalshrine.com/NAT_shrine/tour_c31.htm)

