



SERVANT OF GOD SISTER THEA BOWMAN

A self-proclaimed “old folks child,” Thea Bowman was born Bertha Elizabeth Bowman in 1937, the daughter of a doctor and a teacher. She was raised in Canton, Mississippi. As a child she converted to Catholicism through the influence of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity, who taught her and nurtured her faith.

Growing up, Thea listened and learned from the wit and wisdom of family members and those in the community. Ever precocious, she would ask questions and seek new insights on how her elders lived, thrived, and survived. From them she learned survival skills and coping mechanisms. She was exposed to the richness of the African American culture: its history and stories, music and songs, customs and rituals, prayers, and symbols.

Thea was cognizant that God was indeed the God of the poor and oppressed. Her community instructed her, “If you get, give—if you learn, teach.” She developed a deep and abiding love and faith in a God who would make “a way out of no way!”

She left an indelible mark on her community and on her Church. She lovingly taught young people about the joy of being Christian, she challenged her church to accept her as “fully black and fully Catholic,” she embraced her suffering with a willing spirit, and she called all to a living faith.

In November 2018, Bishop Joseph Kopacz presents the edict opening the formal investigation into her cause and it is approved and supported by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. In June 2018, Sister Thea is declared a Servant of God.



VENERABLE HENRIETTE DELILLE

Henriette Delille was born in 1812 in New Orleans, Louisiana, as a free woman of color. When she was 24, she experienced a religious conversion and proclaimed: “I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God.”

Henriette eventually founded the Society of the Holy Family, responding to the need of treatment for the enslaved, elderly, and sick, and care and education for the poor.

Henriette received tribute for her life’s work in these words from her obituary: “[Henriette] devoted herself untiringly for many years, without reserve, to the religious instruction of the people of New Orleans, principally of slaves...” The last line of her obituary reads: “...for the love of Jesus Christ she had become the humble and devout servant of the slaves.”

Archbishop Philip M. Hannan began the canonization process for Henriette DeLille in 1988. A special commission in Rome gave approval in 1988 after a review process. As of this time, an alleged miracle attributed to Henriette is being tried in a Catholic Tribunal, and the decree of judicial validity was issued in the investigation of her life, virtues, and reputation of sanctity. Henriette was declared Venerable by Pope Benedict XVI in 2010.

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VENERABLE PIERRE TOUSSAINT

Pierre was born in 1766 modern-day Haiti as a slave but died in New York City as a free man and a well-known Catholic.

Pierre Bérard, Toussaint's master, allowed him to be taught how to read and write by his grandmother. In his early 20s, Toussaint, his younger sister, his aunt, and two other house slaves accompanied their master's son to New York City because of political unrest at home. Apprenticed to a local hairdresser, Pierre learned the trade quickly and eventually worked in the homes of rich women in New York City.

When his master died, Toussaint supported his master's widow and the other slaves himself and was freed shortly before the widow's death in 1807. Four years later, he married Marie Rose Juliette, whose freedom he had purchased. They later adopted Euphémie, his orphaned niece. Both preceded him in death.

Even during his lifetime, Toussaint enjoyed the reputation of an exceptionally devout and charitable person within the Catholic community. Every day he attended the 6:00 a.m. Mass in St. Peter's Church, where he was a pewholder for many years. He also raised funds to build the original St. Patrick's Cathedral and St. Vincent de Paul Church.

Toussaint donated to various charities, generously assisting blacks and whites in need. He and his wife opened their home to orphans and educated them. The couple also nursed abandoned people who were suffering from yellow fever. Perhaps his favorite charity was St. Patrick's Orphan Asylum, an institution that he often visited. Urged to retire and enjoy the wealth he had accumulated, Toussaint responded, "I have enough for myself, but if I stop working I have not enough for others."

In recognition of Pierre Toussaint's virtuous life, the late Cardinal Terence Cooke introduced Pierre's cause for canonization at the Vatican in 1968. In December 1989, the late Cardinal O'Connor had the remains of Pierre Toussaint transferred from Lower Manhattan to St. Patrick's Cathedral in midtown Manhattan where he is currently buried as the only lay person alongside the former cardinal archbishops of New York City. On December 17, 1997, he was declared Venerable by Pope John Paul II.

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SERVANT OF GOD MOTHER MARY LANGE

Elizabeth Lange was born around 1794 in Santiago de Cuba, where she lived in a primarily French-speaking community. She received an excellent education and in the early 1800s she left Cuba and settled in the United States in Baltimore. Elizabeth was a courageous, loving, and deeply spiritual woman. There was no free public education for African American children in Maryland until 1868, so she responded to that need by opening a school for the children in her home in the Fells Point area of the city.

Providence intervened through the person of Reverend James Hector Joubert, SS, who was encouraged by James Whitfield, Archbishop of Baltimore to present Elizabeth Lange with the idea to find a religious congregation for the education of African American girls. Father Joubert would provide direction, solicit financial assistance, and encourage other “women of color” to become members of this, the first congregation of African American women religious in the history of the Catholic Church. Elizabeth joyfully accepted Father Joubert’s idea. On July 2, 1829, Elizabeth and three other women professed their vows and became the Oblate Sisters of Providence. Elizabeth, the foundress, and first superior general, took the religious name Mary.

William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, opened a formal investigation into Mother Lange’s life and works of charity in 1991. The Vatican’s Congregation for the Doctrine for the Causes of Saints approved the cause of her sainthood in 2004, and Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore celebrated a canonical celebration at the transfer and blessing of Mother Lange’s remains. The faithful venerated the relics before they were sealed in a reliquary and sarcophagus in the chapel’s oratory.



VENERABLE FR. AUGUSTUS TOLTON

Augustus was born in the U.S. to two slaves, Peter Paul Tolton and his wife Martha Jane, on April 1, 1854. With the outbreak of the Civil War, Peter Paul hoped to gain freedom for his family and escaped to the North where he served in the Union Army and was one of the 180,000 blacks who were killed in the war. His widow decided that she would see her husband's quest for freedom realized in his children. After she managed to cross the Mississippi River, she made her way to Illinois and settled in the small town of Quincy. When her children attempted to attend Catholic school to be educated by the Sisters of Notre Dame, parents of the other school children were not happy. So, the Sisters of Notre Dame decided to tutor the Tolton children privately.

As Augustus grew older, he began to display an interest in the priesthood. His parish priests, Fathers McGuire and Richardt, encouraged the young man in this aspiration and tried to enroll in several diocesan seminaries, but without success. They then decided to begin Augustus' education in theology themselves. Finally in 1878, the Franciscan College in Quincy accepted Augustus, and two years later he was enrolled at the college of the Propaganda Fidei in Rome.

After completing his courses in Rome, Augustus Tolton was ordained on April 24, 1886. His first assignment was Saint Joseph parish in his hometown of Quincy, where he served for two years and gained enormous respect from many of the German and Irish parishioners. He was later given a parish on the south side of the city, Saint Augustine, which later became Saint Monica. This would be Fr. Tolton's parish for life, and the center from which he ministered to all the Black Catholics of Chicago. He addressed the First Catholic Colored Congress in Washington DC in 1889.

The cause for Fr. Tolton's canonization was begun in 2010. In 2015, the cause received affirmation of the juridical validity of the Archdiocesan inquiry into his life and virtues by the Congregation for Causes of Saints, and so Fr. Tolton received the distinction of Servant of God.

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SERVANT OF GOD JULIA GREELEY

Denver's Angel of Charity was born into slavery at Hannibal, Missouri, between 1833 and 1848. As a young child, Julia's right eye was destroyed by a cruel slave master's whip.

Freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Julia subsequently earned her keep by serving white families in Missouri, Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico—though mostly in the Denver area. She spent whatever she could spare to assist poor families in her neighborhood. When her own resources were inadequate, she begged for food, fuel, and clothing for the needy. To avoid embarrassing the people she helped, Julia did most of her charitable work under cover of night through dark alleys.

Julia entered the Catholic Church at Sacred Heart Parish in Denver in 1880. The Jesuits who ran the parish considered her the most enthusiastic promoter of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus they had ever seen. Every month she went on foot to every fire station in Denver and delivered literature of the Sacred Heart League to the firemen, Catholics, and non-Catholics alike.

Julia had a rich devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin. She was a daily communicant and continued her prayers while working and moving about. She joined the Secular Franciscan Order in 1901 and was active in it until her death in 1918.

To the present day, many people have asked that her cause be opened for canonization. This request was finally granted in the Fall of 2016. As part of the Cause for Canonization, Julia's mortal remains were transferred to Denver's Cathedral Basilica of the Immaculate Conception on June 7, 2017.