

Greeley found great joy in her love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which she saw as the source for her many charitable and service-oriented ministries. She was known to spread the devotion, even using it as a tool to evangelize Denver's firemen. From her heart flowed the love of Christ's heart.



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Greeley took on a life of poverty, living in union with the poor of Denver. Taking on odd jobs like cooking and cleaning, she used her meager salary to finance a ministry to the poor while suffering from painful arthritis. She could not write, read, or count, but wearing her trademark floppy hat Greeley could show Christ's love. She dragged a red wagon filled with goods to distribute to the poor, and, at times, she even begged for them. Many of those she helped were among the nearly 1,000 mourners who attended the funeral after her death on June 7, 1918. Her canonization cause was opened in 2016.

Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman 1937–1990

Born in Mississippi on December 29, 1937, Bertha Bowman converted to Catholicism at the age of nine. Missionary priests and sisters began a Catholic school in her hometown to provide a better education for black children, and it did not discriminate. The Gospel-filled joyfulness of those missionaries attracted the young Bowman to the

Faith. This same joyfulness became a hallmark trait of hers later on. Bowman was so attracted to their way of life that at fifteen she went on a hunger strike to get her parents' permission to enter as an aspirant with her teachers' order, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Life in the convent did not protect her from racial prejudice, but she won people over with her joyful, outgoing demeanor and love for Christ and the Church. The daughter of a doctor and a teacher, Sister Thea, her name given upon taking religious vows, was intellectually gifted. She earned a doctorate in English at The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., and subsequently served in a variety of teaching roles.

After she, as the only child, returned home to take care of her parents in 1978, Sister Thea served as director for intercultural affairs in the Diocese of Jackson. She dedicated herself to overcoming divisions in the Church and society in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and the racial strife of the 1960s. As a writer, teacher, musician, and evangelist, Sister Thea preached the Gospel to clergy and laity alike, promoting ecclesial and cultural harmony and reconciliation as a tireless spokeswoman for the black Catholic experience. Pledging to "live until I die," Sister Thea remained wholeheartedly committed to her ministry while battling breast cancer for several years. She died on March 30, 1990, and her cause for canonization was opened in 2018.



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LET US PRAY!

Lord God, you are praised, adored, and loved through the lives and example of your servants. May it please you to work wonders by the intercession of these servants through whom your glory shines. In them we see humanity's true greatness, a sign of your favor and blessing. Through them we are drawn more deeply into the mystery of your Son's saving love.

Even as we pray that the Church will one day designate them as canonized saints, may their witness bring transformation to our lives. Like Mother Mary Lange's, may our faith shine brightly amid hardship so that we will trust always in your providence. Like Julia Greeley's, may our hope remain intact despite the darkness and pain in our lives. Like Pierre Toussaint's, may our hearts be aflame with charity for all your children. Like Father Augustus Tolton, may we be instruments of unity and reconciliation, not embittered by our sufferings. Like Mother Henriette Delille, may we persevere in our calling, no matter the obstacles, so that we may serve all in your name. Like Sister Thea Bowman, may we sing your wonders tirelessly, to greatest and least alike.

And above all else, Lord, help us to follow your Son each day. Through him, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, may we come to worship you with all the angels and saints for ever and ever. Amen.

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HOLY BLACK CATHOLICS

A glance at six African American candidates for canonization



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We are greatly blessed by the contributions of black Catholics in the Church in the United States, particularly their illuminating legacy of holiness. The struggles and pain faced by the African American community are succinctly captured in the lives of these six black Catholics now being considered for canonization. In them we can find the greatest of human characteristics, truly men and women for our times.

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**Venerable Pierre Toussaint
1766–1853**

Born a slave in Haiti, Toussaint came to New York as property of a French Haitian family, who later freed him in 1807. Establishing himself as a successful hairdresser, Toussaint earned a sizable salary, which he put to use for the good of others, beginning with the purchase of his sister's freedom as well as that of his future wife, Juliette. Together the Toussaints spent their lives in service to the poor and needy. When urged to retire and enjoy his remaining years, Toussaint is quoted as saying, "I have enough for myself, but if I stop working, I have not enough for others."

Toussaint's great charity and works of mercy were fueled by an abiding faith. A daily Mass attendee for more than sixty years, Toussaint lived as he worshiped. Not embittered by the hardships he endured because of his race and his Catholic Faith, the model layman gave of himself to others. Toussaint and his wife adopted his niece, took in orphans and funded orphanages, operated a credit bureau, established hostels for priests and refugees, and generously supported the Church and other institutions. Toussaint attended to the sick and suffering, too, even strangers whom he helped nurse to health.

Toussaint died on June 30, 1853. In 1990, his remains were

moved to a niche in the bishop's crypt at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City — a rather poetic postscript to the life of a man whose race once prohibited him from entering the city's Old St. Patrick's Cathedral. He was declared venerable in 1996.

**Venerable Mother Henriette Delille
1812–1862**

The illegitimate daughter of a Frenchman and a free woman of color, Henriette Delille spent all her life in and around New Orleans' French Quarter. A cultured young woman of high society, Delille was expected, like the women of her family, to form a liaison relationship with an eligible white man. After receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation, however, Delille clearly became a woman committed to the Lord. Her guiding motto, written in a prayer book, captures what defined her heart and spurred her vocation: "I believe in God. I hope in God. I love. I want to live and die for God."

Prevailing racist attitudes, even within the Church, made Delille's pursuit of a religious vocation painful and difficult, and two congregations denied her admittance. Undeterred by the rejection, Delille persevered to establish a religious congregation herself in 1836. Using inheritance from her mother, Delille began what became known as the Sisters of the Holy Family with the aim to serve the poor, sick, and elderly, and to teach the Faith to both slave and free children.



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Delille's generosity and love was known to everyone who knew her. She was a mother to all she encountered, and sacramental records show she even served as godmother and marriage witness to many. She died on November 16, 1862, at the age of forty-nine. An obituary summed up her calling: "For the love of Jesus Christ she had become the humble and devout servant of the slaves." Delille's cause for canonization opened in 1988, and she was declared venerable in 2010.



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**Venerable Father Augustus Tolton
1854–1897**

Augustus Tolton, born the son of slaves on April 1, 1854, was the first black individual from the United States to be ordained a priest. But his path to priesthood was not easy.

After a harrowing escape from their Missouri home, Tolton's family settled in freedom in Quincy, Illinois, where the pastor accepted him into the parish school despite much opposition from parishioners. Later, as Tolton began to pursue a priestly vocation, seminaries across the United States rejected his applications out of prejudice.

With heroic determination, Tolton pressed on toward his calling. He was accepted to a seminary in Rome and was ordained there in 1886. Though Tolton expected to serve as a missionary in Africa, he soon found out that he was destined for service back in the United States. "America has been

called the most enlightened nation; we will see if it deserves that honor," said Cardinal Giovanni Simeoni, prefect of the Holy See's Congregation for Propagation of the Faith, which oversaw Tolton's seminary. "If America has never seen a black priest, it has to see one now."

Upon his return to Quincy, Father Tolton was met with racial prejudice by laity and clergy alike. An authority even told him not to allow white people to attend his parish. A priest of great humility and obedience, Tolton was invited to minister in Chicago in 1889, and left Quincy thinking he had been a failure there.

In Chicago, Tolton was indefatigable in his efforts to serve a growing black Catholic community and established St. Monica Church for black Catholics. Returning from a retreat by train, Tolton collapsed on a Chicago street amid record heat and died on July 9, 1897, at the young age of forty-three, and his body was returned to Quincy for burial. Tolton's cause for canonization was opened in 2010, and he was declared venerable in 2019.

**Servant of God Mother Mary Lange
c. 1784–1882**

Few details are known about the early life of Elizabeth Lange. Likely born in Santiago de Cuba, she emigrated to the United States with a heart ready for service. Known to be of African descent, Lange once described herself as "French to my soul."

God's providence eventually led Lange to Baltimore, where there was a sizable group of French-speaking Catholics who fled Haiti at the time of their revolution. At that time, no free education existed for black children in Maryland. There, Lange operated a free school out of her home. Financial difficulties eventually forced its closure.

Lange was drawn into further teaching by Sulpician Father James Joubert, who also encouraged her and a few companions to consecrate their lives and work to God as professed religious women. With Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange as the first superior, the Oblate Sisters of Providence were established in 1829 — the first successful congregation for black women in the United States. With Lange's pioneering vision



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and holy example, the Oblate sisters persevered through great difficulties and offered their lives in service to all in need — especially to pupils, orphans, widows, the sick, and those in spiritual need.

With a humble heart, Lange accepted whatever tasks lay before her. In her final years she patiently endured many hardships. Yet, Lange consistently persevered trusting in God's provident hand. She died on February 3, 1882, and her cause for canonization formally was opened in 1991.

**Servant of God Julia Greeley
c. 1840–1918**

Born into slavery in Hannibal, Missouri, Julia Greeley gained her freedom after the Emancipation Proclamation. Her years as a slave left a permanent mark: a drooping eye, received as the result of a beating. After moving to Colorado in 1879, Greeley fell in love with the Catholic Faith. She converted the following year and immediately immersed herself in the devotional and sacramental life of the Church. She attended daily Mass, was devout and pious, and took up intense fasting. When questioned about regularly eating no breakfast, Greeley would respond, "My Communion is my breakfast."

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