

in a

Word™

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NOVEMBER
IS
BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY
MONTH

Photo by: Father James Pawlicki, SVD



Remembering Saints of Africa During Black Catholic History Month

Many men and women recognized as Saints in the Catholic Church come from Africa. The following list points to just a few of the holy men and women designated as African Saints. Perhaps your Church is named after one of those mentioned on these pages.

Charles Lwanga and the Martyrs of Uganda

Charles Lwanga was a Ugandan Catholic catechist martyred for his faith and revered as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church. He was born in the kingdom of Buganda in the southern part of modern Uganda, and served as a page and later major-domo in the court of King Mwangi II. As part of the king's effort to resist foreign colonization, he had begun to insist that Christian converts abandon their new faith, and executed many Anglicans and Roman Catholics.

The persecution started in 1885. After a massacre of Anglican missionaries, the leader of the Catholic community, Joseph Mukasa—who was then major-domo of the court, as well as a lay catechist—reproached the king for the deed against which he had counseled him. Mwangi had Mukasa beheaded and arrested all of his followers. This took place on November 15th. The king then ordered that Lwanga, who was chief page at that time, take up Mukasa's duties. That same day, Lwanga sought baptism as a Catholic by a missionary priest.

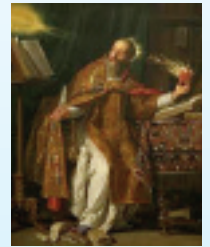


On May 25, 1886, Mwangi ordered a general assembly of the court while they were settled at Munyonyo, where he charged two of the pages, whom he then condemned to death. The following morning, Lwanga secretly baptized those of his charges who were still only catechumens. Later that day, the king called a court assembly in which he interrogated all present to see if any would renounce Christianity. Led by Lwanga, the royal pages declared their fidelity to their religion, upon which the king ordered them bound and condemned them to death, directing that they be marched to the traditional place of execution. Two of the prisoners were executed on the march there. When preparations were completed and the day had come for the execution on June 3rd, Lwanga, as he was being burnt, said to the guards, "It is as if you are pouring water on me. Please repent and become a Christian like me".

Charles Lwanga and the other Catholics who accompanied him in death were canonized in 1964 by Pope Paul VI. Ugandan martyrs feast day is June 3.

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 him as Father of the Church and as a saint. Augustine was born in the little town of Tugaste, Africa, on November 13, 354. He claimed that he learned the love of God from his mother Monica, 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." St. Augustine's feast day is August 28th



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 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's feast day is April 4th.

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 a Spanish nobleman, and 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".

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. 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 Tegaste 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 and 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.

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.

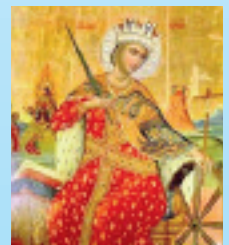


Saint Victoria

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.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria

Blessed with physical and spiritual beauty, Catherine was a highly educated woman who used her considerable erudition and influence to spread and defend the Christian faith. Inspired by her heroic example, and by her public and courageous teaching during a time of persecution in Alexandria, many of her contemporaries, including the emperor's wife, came to accept the truth of the Gospel. Catherine was put to death by order of the Roman Emperor Maximinus II in 307, on November 24th, which is the day of her early memorial. Tradition states that she was placed on a spiked wheel to die. The wheel broke and subsequently Catherine was beheaded. In the 8th century her earthly remains, rediscovered by the Christians of Egypt--who, since 641, had come under the rule of Islam--were transferred for safekeeping to the famous monastery on Mount Sinai which bears her name.



in a word or two

WHAT SHOULD THE LITURGY TEACH US?

by
Father Jerome LeDoux, SVD

As the zero hour for implementing the revised Roman Missal heaves into view, many folks are getting antsy. Actually, there is nothing to get bent out of shape about. If you understand what liturgy, the action of the people, really is, you will adapt easily.

Since liturgy is the action of the people, and since the supreme rule of liturgy is to bring people closer to God, we cannot miss in enacting the liturgy unless we simply do not want to do it meaningfully. In fact, meaning is the key word in all we should do.

While Church authorities present the Roman Missal to give us the parameters and general scheme of worship, we the people – without whom there would be no worship – must put body and soul into those parameters and that scheme of worship. How we go about doing that must rise meaningfully from our culture, language and customs.

“The great challenge of our generation is not just to ensure correct and dignified liturgical celebration according to the approved forms, but to be open in a spirit of prayer to the great mysteries of our redemption in Christ that the liturgy makes present ever anew,” are the introductory words of the Congregation For Divine Worship.

I would amend that to read, “The great challenge of ours or any other generation is to become like the gentle, humble Jesus, who came not to be served but to serve.”

Yet, this foreword of the Roman Missal nails the great difficulty of being correct and dignified, yet open to the fiery movement of the Holy Spirit. Frankly, most church communities tend to be correct and dignified but very dull and uninspired in their manner of praying and singing. Their last worry is overdoing anything fired by the Holy Spirit.

Correctness and dignity have their place in church, but they are so staid and stuffy that they can easily be and usually are the bane of meaningful, inspiring liturgy. Since when has the Holy Spirit been known for dignity? What dignity was there in Acts 2 when the apostles charged out of the upper room ablaze with the tongues of fire?

They were so animated that some of the people thought they were drunk. Speaking in the various tongues of the sundry nations gathered there did not help the situation, but rather made them look and sound even more out of control. Nothing was dignified but sanctified that fiery morning of the first Pentecost Sunday, the birthday of the Church.

Why has a Church that was born amid the dancing fire of the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues and mesmerizing thousands of people at one time become humdrum, listless, dull, uninspired and bound slavishly by the hands of a very limited time clock? Shifty worshipers have lots of time for recreation, all sports – anything but engrossing worship.

Such worshipers are one of the main reasons why it is so hard to put together a lively, meaningful liturgy for each round of worship. Most people demonstrate over and over again that they want short worship, but long ballgames, picnics and leisure time.

Unintentionally, this worship malaise is encouraged by Church leaders who forget the multicultural power of Psalm 117, “Praise the Lord, all you nations! Praise him, all you peoples!” and Psalm 150’s joyous noise, “Praise God... with blasts upon the horn... with harp...lyre...tambourines ... dance... flutes... trings... crashing cymbals!”

Out of these psalms we hear Revelation 7:9, “There was an enormous crowd – no one could count all the people! They were from every race, tribe, nation and language!”

And out of that crowd, across the plains, over the hills, mountains and everywhere we hear the joyous Mariachi, scores of African nations with drumbeat and polyphony, the three-part harmony of Indonesia and other oriental lands, the fetching folk music of the Caribbean and the lower Americas. They join the Old World in high praise of God.

Yes, that is what the Roman Missal word changes, rephrasing and new translations are supposed to be about – a great attitude, a better way of thinking, talking, preaching, praising, singing and dancing in thanksgiving for all God has done for us.

No matter what the verbal changes, our one focus must always be to wish each other the very best in everything, and that is God, “The Lord be with you!” Through the liturgy, we, the live action of the people, bring one another closer to God by remembering that each wish such as “And with your spirit!” means, “I love you! Thank God for you!”

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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