



November 1, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

November is filled with many important celebrations, like All Saints Day, All Souls Day, and Thanksgiving. Every November since 1990 is also when we celebrate Black Catholic History Month, a time of remembering and honoring Black Catholics who have made numerous contributions to our Church, leaving a rich and profound legacy. From our beginnings as a Diocese in 1868 through today, the Church in Harrisburg has also been richly blessed by the faith and culture of our Black Catholic sisters and brothers.

From the earliest days of the Church, Africa has been a beacon of faith and resilience. It is a testament to our belief that the Good News was not confined to Europe or the Americas; rather, it blossomed in the heart of Africa. The first recorded conversion of a Black African is detailed in the Acts of the Apostles (8:26-40) with the conversion of the Ethiopian Eunuch by Philip the Deacon. This story took place even before St Paul's own conversion. We can look to the countless Black Saints who have enriched our spiritual heritage. One such example is Saint Benedict the Moor, who was freed from slavery in Sicily and eventually joined the Franciscan Order; he is honored as a patron saint of African Americans. The USCCB has advanced beatification and canonization causes for six black men and women of African Descent: Servant of God Sister Thea Bowman, Venerable Henriette DeLille, Servant of God Julia Greeley, and Venerable Augustus Tolton were born in the United States; Venerable Mother Mary Lange and Venerable Pierre Toussaint emigrated to America. These saints, and many others, serve as enduring symbols of perseverance and hope for us in our own lives. Please pray for the success of their causes.

The struggle for equality and justice, both within and outside the Church, remains a pressing issue, even in our own Diocese. As Pope Francis said, "We cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life." Racism seeks to deny that a select group of people are also the image and likeness of God. We must continue to acknowledge the challenges that still affect our communities today. As we celebrate the heritage and contributions of our Black Catholics, we must commit ourselves to the work of reconciliation, understanding, and justice.

I encourage all in our Diocese to spend some time this month learning more about both the lives of those six whose canonizations we eagerly await as well as the many Black Catholic Saints who are part of our rich faith heritage. May the witness of their inspiring stories of adversity, dedication, and trust in God continue to inspire us to grow in holiness in our own faith journeys.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Timothy C. Senior
Bishop of Harrisburg