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Holy Comforter-Saint Cyprian Parish

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Holy Comforter-Saint Cyprian Parish's African-American History Commemoration

MOMENTS in BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY

(A Four-Week Historical Perspective)

Introduction for this series: Some people have criticized Christianity as a “white man’s religion and referred to the Roman Catholic Church as a “white” church. These myths and misconceptions are not accurate. In fact, Blacks in Catholic Christianity have a long and vibrant history and we will list some of those facts here weekly during the month of February. *(All information was compiled from websites of the Archdioceses of Washington, Baltimore, Chicago & Newark, the Diocese of Raleigh, the NBCC Newsletter and the books: [African Saints](#) by Frederick Quinn, [The Saints Go Marching In](#) by Robert Fulton Holtzclaw, [Blacks Who Died for Jesus](#) by Mark Hyman and [The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930](#) by Louise Daniel Hutchinson).*

DID YOU KNOW...? ...that even though he was born into a rich, noble family of African descent in Spain, Saint Peter Claver chose to spend his life serving the sick and downtrodden in South America? He treated people with the dreaded disease leprosy. Saint Peter Claver met all of the slave ships from Africa right on the docks in Colombia. He ministered to their diseases, comforted and baptized them. Saint Peter Claver also served the neglected and abused Native Indian people in Colombia. Overall, Saint Peter Claver touched some 50 thousand African slaves. One hundred years ago, the Catholic organization, called the Knights of Saint Peter Claver was founded in his memory.



DID YOU KNOW...? ...that a canonized saint who described herself as “the mother and servant of the Indian and Negro races” helped found Holy Redeemer Parish and School in DC? In 1858, Saint Katherine Drexel was born into great wealth in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As she grew up, Saint Katherine’s parents taught her that their money was meant to be shared with others. Saint Katherine took this to heart throughout her long life, especially in service to suffering Native and African Americans. She gave more than 21 million dollars of her own money to help found dozens of churches, schools and hospitals across the United States. Besides founding her own religious congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, Saint Katherine also established Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana. It’s the only Catholic African American College in the country. Saint Katherine Drexel died in 1955 and was canonized a saint in the year 2000.



DID YOU KNOW...? ...that the very first African American priests in the United States were three brothers born of a slave mother and fathered by a Georgia plantation owner? The Healy brothers: James, Alexander, and Patrick were sent north for their education and freedom. Because of the adverse racial climate in 19th century America, the Healy brothers had to be ordained in Europe, beginning with James in 1854; Alexander in 1858; and Patrick in 1864. James Augustine Healy later became our nation’s first African American bishop in Portland, Maine, in 1875. A year earlier, his brother, Patrick Francis Healy, became the highly regarded president of the Catholic institution, Georgetown University, here in Washington, DC. Ironically, Georgetown did not admit students of color, until the mid-1900’s.

DID YOU KNOW...? ...one of the first foreigners mentioned in the Bible to be baptized was an African? In the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8: 26-40, we read the account of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was a black person baptized by Philip. The Ethiopian eunuch was a 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.