

## **Hidden Figures**

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Fr. Tony Davis

The 2016 movie *Hidden Figures* tells the story of three African American women working for NASA and playing a significant role in the early days of the United States Space Program. Their names are Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. All of them, and many others like them, specialized in mathematics and did many of the calculations by hand before the invention of the computer. In the movie, Katherine, in particular, was highly involved in correcting the math of many of the men working on the space launches as well as present in the control room when John Glenn circled the globe. The entire plot of the movie, however, is that these three women had to work behind the scenes. This is because at that time, only white men held important positions in society, including at NASA, and the United States was still segregated. Thus, these African American women did the work, but they were hidden. That is why the movie is called, *Hidden Figures*.

It is unfortunate that these women did not get the credit they deserved. They were smart, committed, and determined. Towards the end of the movie, which is based on a real story, these women start to get more attention by NASA, but it was only a start.

These women remind me of today's Gospel. Three times, Jesus told his followers to work in secret- "when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your almsgiving may be secret...when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door,

and pray to your Father in secret...when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is hidden.” In all three cases, Jesus tells us that we are not to do something because of the recognition that comes along with it, but because it is the right thing to do.

These women weren't working at NASA for the recognition. If they wanted recognition, they would have quit early on or purposely done their job poorly. They were there and did their absolute best because they believed in the mission of the Space Program. They believed that it was important to reach for the stars and do the impossible.

As Christians, we are called to be like these African American women. We are called to do the hard and difficult work behind the scenes of praying, fasting, and almsgiving. We are called to be the ones in the background begging God for mercy and showing that mercy to others. We are called to support the mission of the Church, even if we don't get the credit we deserve.

During this season of Lent, let us see ourselves as *Hidden Figures*, for 'your Father who sees in secret will repay you.'