We’ve Come this Far By Faith
By Dr. Ansel Augustine

These have been a very interesting few months within the Catholic community, specifically in the Black Catholic community. Two of our “fathers in the community” have transitioned on to their next chapter in life. One has passed into heaven and the other has retired. Father Cyprian Davis OSB, the author of many books, specifically THE HISTORY OF BLACK CATHOLICS IN THE UNITED STATES, was very active in helping to tell the story and contributions of Black Catholics. He was also an instructor at the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University of Louisiana during the summer over the past 35 years. More about Fr. Cyprian can be found at http://ncronline.org/news/people/benedictine-fr-cyprian-davis-top-chronicler-black-catholic-history-dies

Dr. Norman Francis, the longest serving College/University president announced officially stepped into his, well deserved, retirement this month. He helped transformed Xavier University of Louisiana into a world leader for education. Xavier University is ranked #1 in getting African Americans accepted into, and completing, medical school. By being the ONLY HBCU (Historically Black College or University) that is Catholic and the only Catholic University founded by a Saint – St. Katharine Drexel – Xavier University is a unique jewel in our New Orleans scene. We thank Dr. Francis for his years of service to help generations of young adults fulfill their potential to make society a better place. More can be found about Dr. Francis at http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/09/norman_fran_c_to_retire_after.html

But we should not be saddened by their transition, but we should celebrate the life they shared with us. These men have made a great impact, internationally, with how they put their faith into action and we are called to do the same. As we look around, many of our elders in faith are passing on or are growing even more tired than they already are. We must uplift and challenge our youth and young adults to take up leadership roles in our churches, but we must also step back and let them lead in the way that they are comfortable. The gift of Fr. Cyprian and Dr. Francis is that they recognized that they needed to do “something different” to make a great impact in their respective fields, and through their courage, encouraged by their faith, they did. We too must encourage our young people and young adults to use their faith to encourage them to use their God-given gifts to make a positive impact in society. It might not look like the way that you and I are used to leading, but it is ok, but God is directing it all.

I can never thank you enough for your enthusiasm and joy of being welcomed back to New Orleans as your Auxiliary Bishop. The whole Catholic Community of the Archdiocese has proven over and over again their excitement for another homeboy to lead them in Christ. As I join Archbishop Gregory Aymond in shepherding the flock, I want to share my praise to God for blessing me with a wonderful people of true faith and devotion. I stand in awe when I think about the goodness of the Lord you have showered upon me. May God keep us united in the Holy Spirit and enable us to progress in faith as we build the Body of Christ among all the people of the Big Easy. Please keep Archbishop Aymond and me in your prayers as the “saints go marchin’ in.”

Peace & All Good,
+Bishop Fernand Cheri, III, OFM
A Dream Deferred
By Deacon Kenneth S. Smith

I am Deacon Kenneth Sims Smith, I was born in St. Louis, Missouri on July 1, 1960 to Opal Sims Smith and Carter A. Smith, who was a New Orleans native. When I was two years old, my father died from kidney failure at the age of 29. At the time, my mother was 5 months pregnant with my younger sister, Edith.

After thirty years in the restaurant industry, where I had achieved the position of executive chef at the Upperline Restaurant, I finally took a step I had dreamed of since I was a child and entered Notre Dame Seminary to begin priestly formation. As Langston Hughes wrote: “What happens to a dream deferred?”

In my case what happened was God sending Archbishop Gregory Aymond to the restaurant the night before he was to be installed as Archbishop of New Orleans. The owner of the restaurant brought Bishop Aymond into the kitchen to meet me. That one evening led to many more visits with the now Archbishop. Ultimately, I became confident enough in my friendship with the Archbishop to confide in him that I had felt a reawakening of my desire to become a priest. For years, I had deferred my dream because I felt that I was not good enough academically to succeed in the seminary. The Archbishop assured me that he would continue to provide me with tools that would help me academically.

My first few years at the seminary were sometimes a struggle because of my age and the fact that it had been many years since I had attended school. Spiritual direction became a blessing to me and provided God’s grace, helping me overcome all of my self-doubts.

I now know that I am where God wants me to be. I am proud of the fact that my culinary skills have afforded me the opportunity to raise funds for the seminary through Gala auctions and the Priests’ Christmas lunch.

I was ordained to the Order of the Diaconate on May 23, 2015 and pray that I will be ordained to the Order of the Presbyterate in June of 2016. One way the community can help me in the coming months is with something that the black community is very familiar with, old fashioned prayer, just keep me in your prayers.

The Witness to my Witness
By Shelbie DeBose

As a young adult, I’ve always struggled with my faith, especially when it comes to a discussion with my peers. I’ve never wanted to pressure people into talking about something that would make them uncomfortable, but I’ve always sought to have an open and engaging relationship with people my age about my faith. Joining the Young Adult Ministry program at my parish has afforded me that opportunity. I have been given the opportunity to express what I thought my faith meant and how I’ve strived to keep the spirit of Jesus going in my life.

Today’s world, where young people are so often criticized for their actions and knowing that young people are more uninvolved in the church than ever, it is very rewarding to stand before my congregation and profess my faith. To be a positive symbol when everyone is being characterized negatively gives me a sense of pride and allows me to show people that there are young adults involved in the church who are striving to live a good life worthy of God’s love. Plus, to receive a standing ovation for what I believe to be something very special further solidifies my mission to be completely for my God.

I want people to be challenged to think differently about me and my culture. I want people to be challenged to engage with the whole person and not be afraid to have these conversations. I want people to be challenged to embrace the fact that the black community is not limited in any way, shape, or form. That I have a voice and a message is something that I want to be very clear about.

The Call of Tony

I was sittin’ on the step of my uptown house when the words of Lord came to me.

“Go out to the peoples,” declared the Lord “and tell how I set captives free.”

“It ain’t gonna be easy, the road may be tough for many will turn you away. But hold on to the plow as you speak to them and I’ll give you the words to say.”

I cried, “Lord I’m not worthy. I’m a simple boy. Can’t you find someone other than me?”

But, the Lord wouldn’t here my unworthy stuff for he set other captives free.

So he took his hands and touch my mouth and his words fill the chambers of my heart. It was at that moment, on the steps of that house that my service to God got its start.

It took quite a while, for me to figure-out the part in my life God would play. Back on those steps I’d never believe I’d be preachin’ from a pulpit today.

Just Twenty Years ago, at the St. Frances Cabrini the Archbishop laid his hands on me. Now I stand in your presence, as a Minister of Christ to proclaim that the captives are free.

My Brothers and Sisters, I come today not to speak on my own accord. In the Power of the Spirit and the Joy of the Father I’ll share with you the words of the Lord.

So be attentive, as the elders would say, sit-up and lend your ears to me. As I declare to you on this Blessed Morn, Jesus set all the Captives Free.

And those former captives are you and me.

Written by Rev. R. Tony Ricard, M.Th., M. Div. Campus Minister, St. Augustine High School Celebrating Twenty Glorious Years as a Priest
Black Catholic Young Adults and the USCCB  By Ryan Adams

This spring, I was blessed to be selected to attend a Listening Session for Black Catholic Young Adults sponsored by the USCCB African American Subcommittee. This event was planned for young adults to assist the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops by coming together to discuss their experiences and roles in the Catholic Church. This experience really opened my eyes. During the weekend we all took time to grow in our own faith and learn that we need to stand together to help cultivate an evangelizing spirit within the Young Black Catholic community.

In those 48 hours together, a great bond was created. A family was formed of people who were already brothers and sisters in the faith. Now we have names and faces. We challenged ourselves to travel back to our hometowns and share our experience of growth, faith and love.

I hope to help the Archdiocese of New Orleans build on the potential that I see is here. Things may seem bleak to us at times, but after listening to my new family, we have it better here in New Orleans than most do in their respective cities. Let us Black Catholic Young Adults here in New Orleans come together and make a family of the brothers and sisters in faith we already have. We need Friendship AND Fellowship. This is Non-Negotiable.

- Ryan Adams is a parishioner at St. Gabriel the Archangel Parish and is active in various activities with the Office of Black Catholic Ministries and the CYO Youth and Young Adult Ministry Office.

Why choose the Sacrament of Matrimony?  By Tolliver and Mia Washington

In September 2004 we were undergrads in New Orleans who met at a college party. Little did we know then that we would one day decide to spend the rest of our lives together. As we prepared for our wedding day we found it a struggle to accommodate each others’ unique upbringing, and remain open-minded about each others’ usual routine. The grace in this is that we are learning new and unique things about each other and God is revealing a new way to look at life via our daily encounters.

It was important for us to be married in the church, to receive the Sacrament of Matrimony, because we just did not want to have contract, but a Covenant with God at the center. We both believe that with God at the center our love will be even more sacred and unbreakable no matter what life might throw at us. We are truly excited about the new role we have taken on as husband and wife and look forward to building a family unit together with God as the head. Please pray for us.

-Tolliver Washington is a Baton Rouge native who moved to New Orleans in 2004 and has served 12 years in the Army National Guard with 8 more years to go. He recently did a tour in Afghanistan. Mia Washington is from New Orleans and graduated from Xavier University of Louisiana and has been working in education since 2008. They were married this past July at St. Raymond-St. Leo the Great Parish.

Connected  By Anissa and Kevin Coleman

It’s pretty simple right – fall in love and share your life together. Our great grandparents did, our grandparents did, and for many of us, our parents did as well. That concept from 50 years ago seems like a fairytale nowadays. Components such as new technology and new ways to communicate, the ever-rising cost of living, and unique family dynamics have resulted in marriage being redefined.

In our marriage, those same components call for a constant dialogue between one another. Technology is probably the biggest “blessing and curse.” It’s great but it has its drawbacks. Sometimes we can be in the same room, but it can feel like we’re in different worlds.

Family rules help; we don’t use phones during dinner (calls, texts, etc.). Our dinnertime is a key component to keeping our marriage and family together. Starting with our daughter, we each discuss our day - crazy stories, highs, and lows. We share advice on how to manage certain situations and we celebrate our successes.

We also attend church together every Sunday. It’s there that we are able to reflect on the word of God and apply his teaching to our marriage. We know that marriage is a work in progress but more importantly, we fully recognize that a marriage with God at its center will withstand the test of time.

- Anissa and Kevin Coleman have been married for three years. They are members of St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Marrero.
Upcoming Events with the Office of Black Catholic Ministries

July 18 & July 19, 2015: Black & Indian Mission Fund
2nd Collection at all Masses

August 5, 2015: UNITY SKATE PARTY VIII
6:30pm Skate Country Westbank

September 19, 2015: GOSPELFEST
6pm Carver Theater

November 14, 2015: Black Saints Celebration
10am Our Lady Star of the Sea

For more information about these and other events sponsored by the Office of Black Catholic Ministries, go to http://obcm.arch-no.org