

## NOVEMBER – NATIONAL BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH

The National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) of the United States voted on Tuesday, July 24, 1990 while meeting in convention at Fordham University in New York, to establish November as **BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH**.

The reason behind the selection of the month of November was the number of important dates to Catholics of African descent that fell within this month.

- **Nov. 1 All Saints Day** = an opportunity to review the lives of the hundreds of Saints of African descent in the first 300 years of the Church.
- **Nov. 2 All Souls Day** = a time to remember all those African lost to cruel treatment in the Middle Passage crossing of the Atlantic Ocean.
- **Nov. 3 Martin de Porres** became the first black American saint. He was canonized by Pope John XXIII on May 16, 1962. Throughout his life, St. Martin de Porres exemplified God's love for all people, regardless of their level in society.
- **Nov. 13 The birth of St. Augustine** in 354 A.D., the first Doctor of the Church from North Africa.
- **Nov. 20 The death of Zumbi of Palmares** in Brazil, South American founder of a free state for Blacks.

The first celebration of *Black Catholic History Month* began in November of 1990 in various cities in the United States with the celebration of St. Martin de Porres Feast day. The liturgy celebrated the 350th anniversary of St. Martin's transition from this life to eternal life. In Detroit on this day in 1990, Archbishop Adam Maida, the local Archbishop, was the celebrant for the Mass. Also present was the President of the NBCCC, Bro. Roy Smith, OSC. The Mass was held at St. Anthony Church. In the world today there are 270 million people of African descent in the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world.

## November Black Catholic History Month



### History, Heritage and Truth

Black Catholics trace their faith history back to Christian antiquity long before other nations heard the "Good News." Christian Africa was indeed a "leading light" in early Christendom. Black Catholics point to three popes who were born in Africa: Saints Victor I, Melchiades, and Gelasius I. All three shepherded the early church through tough and tumultuous times in history. Black Catholics claim many Black Saints like Saints Cyprian, Zeno, Anthony of Egypt, Moses the Black, Pachomius, Maurice, Athanasius, Pistentius, Mary of Egypt, Cyril of Alexandria, Monica of Hippo, Augustine of Hippo, Perpetua, Felicitas, and Thecla. Some of these mystics, monastics, and martyrs literally made the church what it is today.

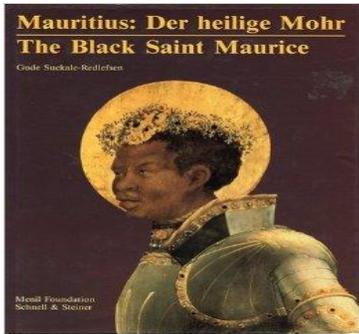
Not many people know that King Nzinga-a-Nkwu Mbemba (Afonso the Good) of the Kongo and his subjects made their profession of faith thanks to the work of Portuguese missionaries one year before Christopher Columbus made his famous voyage in 1492, or that Pope Leo X consecrated the king's son, Henrique, Titular Bishop of Utica in 1518 which was one year before Martin Luther nailed his list of ninety-five theses to the Church in Wittenberg. Bishop Henrique was the first native bishop of West Africa. However, he died in 1531. The Congolese Church and the hopes for an indigenous clergy died with him. Finally, the genocidal slave trade killed true evangelization in sub-Saharan Africa for several centuries.

Black History Month provides opportunities to learn and share the whole history and rich heritage of Christian Catholicism. Ubi Victoria Veritas! The Victory of Truth!

*Excerpts of "History, Heritage and Truth" featured article from National Black Catholic Congress website on National Black Catholic History Month. October 2015 for full article [http://nbccongress.org/features/history\\_heritage\\_and\\_truth\\_01.asp](http://nbccongress.org/features/history_heritage_and_truth_01.asp)*

# he First Black Saint

By: Henry Louis Gates Jr. Oct. 29 2012



## Saint Maurice (born 250 A.D. died in A.D. 286)

Maurice was born in AD 250 in Thebes, an ancient city in Egypt near the site of the Aswan Dam. He was brought up in the region of Thebes (Luxor—Egypt) and became a soldier in the Roman army. He was gradually promoted until he became the leader of the Theban legion, formed of 6600 soldiers. Maurice was an acknowledged Christian at a time when the Church was considered to be a threat to the Roman Empire. Yet, he moved easily in the pagan society of his day.

Maurice was named a saint in the early Middle Ages, and many early depictions were of him as a white man. The first representations of him as a black African appear in the middle of the 13th century, when he is depicted as a black African soldier, in a magnificent stone statue in the Magdeburg Cathedral in central Germany in about 1240 A.D., standing next to the grave of Otto I, Holy Roman Emperor. He is the patron saint of soldiers, sword smiths, armies, infantrymen, weavers and dyers, and is the patron saint of several towns in Europe, including Manresa, Spain, and Piedmont, Italy. ***Feast Day: September 22***



Medieval statue of St Maurice in Magdeburg Cathedral

## Black Catholic History Month is a time for us to celebrate the contributions of Black Catholics to the Roman Catholic tradition.



### Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange (1784-1882) . . .

Mother Mary Lange was the foundress and first Superior General of the Oblate Sisters of Providence (1829-1832), the first congregation of African American women religious in the history of the Catholic Church



### Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897)

He was born into slavery in Missouri. Ordained in Rome in 1886, Tolton was the **first recognized Black American priest**. Pastor of St. Monica in Chicago, Tolton became the spiritual leader of the 19th century National Black Catholic Congress movement.



### Fr. Charles Uncles- (1859-1933)

Ordained in December 1891, Father Charles Randolph Uncles, a native of Baltimore, was the **first black American ordained a Roman Catholic priest in the United States**. He was one of the founders of the St. Joseph's Society of the Sacred Heart, formed to minister to the black community.



### Mother Henriette Delille (1818-1862)

Mother Henriette Delille (1812-1862) A free woman of color in New Orleans, Mother Delille founded the Sisters of the Holy Family in 1842. The congregation ministered to slaves, at a time when educating slaves was illegal. Mother Delille was the first U.S. born African American formally postulated for canonization.



### Pierre Toussaint (1766- 1853)

He was born into slavery in Haiti, Toussaint became a freeman, successful businessman, and philanthropist in New York City. He is the only lay person honored, alongside cardinal-archbishops, with burial in the crypt of St. Patrick Cathedral.