



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF}MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR JULY 28, 2019

Dear friends in the Lord,

As you may have seen in the news, Pope Francis has advanced the sainthood cause of Father Augustus Tolton, who is thought to be the first African American priest in the United States and founder of the first black Catholic parish in Chicago.

The decree for Father Tolton's cause recognizes that he lived a life of heroic virtue. Tolton was born into slavery in 1854 on a plantation near Brush Creek, Missouri. After his father left to try to join the Union Army during the Civil War, his mother fled with her three children by rowing them across the Mississippi River and settling in Quincy in the free state of Illinois.

There, the young Augustus was encouraged to discern his vocation to the priesthood by the Franciscan priests who taught him at St. Francis College, now Quincy University. However, he was denied access to seminaries in the United States after repeated requests, so he pursued his education in Rome at what is now the Pontifical Urbanian University.

Father Tolton was ordained for the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1886, expecting to become a missionary in Africa. Instead, he was sent to be a missionary in his own country and returned to Quincy, where he served for three years before going to the Archdiocese of Chicago in 1889. Despite rampant racism and discrimination, he became one of the city's most popular pastors, attracting members of both white and black Catholic communities. He spearheaded the building of St. Monica Church for black Catholics and worked tirelessly for his congregation in Chicago, even to the point of exhaustion. On July 9, 1897, he died of heatstroke on a Chicago street at the age of 43.

A wonderful short documentary film has been produced on Father Tolton's life and cause for canonization. It can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJlKN2x87gk.

Augustus Tolton, pray for us!

Your brother in Christ's word and work,