

Catholic Cultural Diversity Network Convocation

Opening Prayer: A Vision of Our People

May 6, 2010

## **Traveling through Holy Time**

African American Catholics

### **HISTORY**

*We have come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord.* We are the ones who have followed the sacred footprints of faith of our ancestors who came out of Africa. We are the ones who continue that long march of faithfulness, moving through sacred history and holy times, holding on with great expectancy that our God will lead us to place of spiritual ascension.

We are the ones who hear Saint Augustine of Hippo, one of the great Doctors of the Church say, *"You have made us for yourself O Lord and we are restless until we rest in thee."* We know of the fervent urgency of the prayer of a mother for her son as St. Monica prayed unceasingly for Augustine.

Our hearts and our souls move with the sturdy stride of faith, always drenched in the amazing grace that God's promise would not leave us or abandon us, for *"the word became flesh and dwelt among us"* (John 1:14).

*We've come this far by faith*, souls moving forward in holy time. *This is our story, this is our song* and it is Mother Church's story every time we unite in prayer calling out the holy names of Felicitas and Perpetua during the Eucharistic Prayer

As we move through holy time, God hears each one of us as we pray: *lead me, guide me along the way.* A tapestry of sanctifying testimonies was woven as the pilgrimage of holy time was established.

Servant of God, Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange saw the finger of God upon her leading her to establish the Oblate Sisters of Providence.

Venerable Henriette Delille heard the cry of the poor and did not turn her back to them nor was she deaf to their call.

Fr. Augustus Tolton became a priest in 1886 even if he had to cross the Atlantic to receive the holy oil of ordination.

As Harriett Thompson recognized that she was moving through holy time, she gathered Black Catholics of New York to send a letter to Pope Pius IX seeking justice so that her people could achieve that spiritual ascension that God intended for them.

Daniel Rudd followed those footprints, and said, yes, I'm moving through holy time and now is the appointed hour in 1889 for us to gather and carve out a spiritual destiny

in the Catholic Church. Rudd gave birth to the National Black Catholic Congress movement.

## GIFTS, DEMOGRAPHICS, CONTEXT

Embedded in our steps along this holy journey is the *blessed assurance* that each of us can dare say, *Jesus is mine*. We know this for sure in our families – those by blood or by experience – for it was Jesus who said to us “*where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst*” (Matthew 18:20).

We want to be intimate with this Jesus, the miracle maker, the wonderful counselor, the peace builder, the great liberator. We move through holy time with a yearning to know Jesus through sacred scripture, an outpouring of compassion for the poor as Jesus would, through our spontaneous prayer, storytelling and sacred song.

As we enter into this present holy time, travelling in the light of Jesus we are 3 million strong, with 250 African American priests, 75 men of African ancestry in the seminary, 450 Deacons, 400 African American religious women, 50 religious brothers and 798 predominantly African American parishes. Most of those with whom we share our history and heritage are not Catholic, but we are convinced that God is still calling our people into the one holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church established by Jesus Christ himself, for there is *plenty good room in Our Father's kingdom*.

## CHALLENGES AND OBSTACLES

This holy journey has had many dark places and slippery corridors. We all have prayed, *Lord help me to hold out, until my change comes*.

Help us to hold out for we still hear the cries of horror from our ancestors who endured slavery and the Middle Passage. Help us to hold out as the pain deepens under the realization that religious men and women owned slaves. Help us to hold out under the burden that many Catholic leaders in America were silent as our people were paraded with shackles around the feet and neck, stripped from their families. Help us to hold out for the ugly scars of racism, the open wounds that come about from the infection of intentional dosages of inferiority, the fever that rises due to the lack of affirmation that we are God's children still warrants spiritual laser surgery and authentic antibiotics of inculturation to heal wounds and affirm the value of us and what we bring to the Church of America.

## CONCLUSION AND VISION

*This is our story. This is our song.* Our hope to broaden our participation in the Church, increase evangelization efforts, promote and support vocations, so that the Church may be what she says she is- Catholic, culturally diverse, with all God's children working in His vineyard and unified at the Eucharistic table is our beatified vision as we walk into the future.

This is the song we sing now in this holy time and we ask our brothers and sisters everywhere to *lift ev'ry voice and sing till earth and heaven ring; ring with the harmonies of liberty*— ring with the good news that, for our sake, Jesus Christ has died, Jesus Christ is risen, and Jesus Christ will surely come again. Hallelujah!

**Therese Wilson Favors**