**The Importance of Listening to Black Catholic Young Adults**

**A reflection by Nyle Ayana Grimes**

Listening to Black Catholic young adults is not only an act of respect—it is a commitment to the vitality and future of the Church. This is precisely why the Black Catholic Young Adult (BCYA) Listening Sessions held across the United States are invaluable. Black Catholic young adults are heirs to a rich spiritual heritage, carriers of cultural traditions, and crucial partners in shaping the future of Catholic life in this country. In our most recent session in Washington, D.C., participants engaged directly with leadership from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). From this dialogue, three key themes emerged as essential to the continued flourishing of Black Catholic young adults: carrying forward Black Catholic spirituality, building authentic community, and ensuring young adults have an active voice in the growth and life of the Church.

First, **Black Catholic young adults are vital to sustaining Black Catholic spirituality**. This spirituality is far more than Gospel music, liturgical dance, or cultural celebrations like Kwanzaa—it is a living witness of faith forged through centuries of perseverance, prayer, and community. Passed down from generation to generation. I grew up immersed in this tradition watching my mother’s work with the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, as Assistant Director for African American Affairs at the USCCB, and as a Master Catechist. I saw her create many spaces and lead multiple advocacy efforts for young Black Catholics to discover their rightful place in the Church. From my mother, I learned to embrace my cultural identity as a gift to the Catholic Church rather than a challenge. Since her passing, many young adults have shared with me how she personally introduced them to the legacy of Black Catholic saints, the prophetic vision of the National Black Catholic Congress, and the beauty of our liturgical traditions. When young people know they belong to a Church that values their story, they gain the courage to carry this spirituality into the future.

Second, **listening to Black Catholic young adults is essential for building authentic community**. In her book *All God’s People*, my mother wrote, “God acts simultaneously in the hearts of individuals and within the heart of the community, ensuring that those who respond to the invitation to follow Jesus may have full access to his saving vision.” That saving vision calls us to create authentic communities where young people can thrive. Remember, young people crave authenticity and rebuke its absence. Building authentic community requires intentionality—mentoring young leaders, fostering connection between peers and Church leaders, and cultivating spaces where faith is shared and celebrated. When we listen to Black Catholic young adults, we invite the Holy Spirit to ignite one heart after another until the entire community is set aflame. This Spirit-filled community becomes the soil where faith grows strong and lasting. When young adults feel supported, seen, and celebrated, they are more likely to remain engaged and invite others into the life of the Church.

Finally, third, **Black Catholic young adults must have an active voice in the growth and life of the Catholic Church**. They are not only the future—they are the present. Their concerns about inclusion, racial justice, and the intersection of Catholic Social Teaching with today’s challenges must be heard and acted upon. Offering leadership opportunities and a true seat at the table ensures that the Church’s decisions reflect the diversity and richness of the entire People of God.

My own experience—as both the daughter of Donna Toliver Grimes and as a young adult Black Catholic—has shown me that young adult Black Catholics flourish when we are mentored, empowered, and given a true sense of belonging. That is when we are embolden by our faith and active participants in evangelization. By listening to the voices of young adult Black Catholics, building community around them, and encouraging their leadership, the Catholic Church becomes more vibrant, more united, and more faithful to Christ’s mission.