

PRAY Jesus, our brother and friend, you know what rejection feels like. Your neighbors heard your wisdom but couldn't see a prophet in the man they knew as a carpenter. Help us listen and learn who others really are. Amen.

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SPiRIT

By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

The baptismal record of the first full-blooded African American priest in the United States reads: *A colored child born April 1, 1854, son of Peter Tolton and Martha Chisley, Property of Stephen Eliot.* Augustus Tolton's story begins in slavery



Father Augustus Tolton

and ends in early death, but reveals a courageous response to God's call.

The Toltons were Catholic because the families who owned Martha Jane Chisley and Peter Paul Tolton were Catholic and had their slaves instructed and baptized.

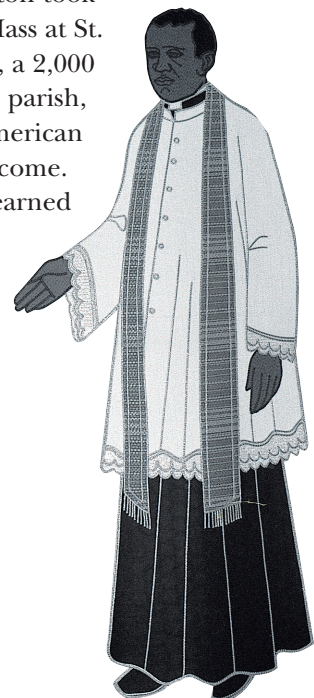
When the Civil War began, Peter Tolton escaped from slavery to join the army. Before her children could be sold away from her, Martha slipped away with Charles, nine; Augustus, eight; and Anne, not quite two. They left their owner's farm in Ralls County, Missouri, and walked toward the Mississippi River and the free state of Illinois on the other side.

In Hannibal, Missouri, slavehunters recognized and tried to capture the Toltons. Federal soldiers rescued them and pointed them towards the Mississippi. There Martha found an old rowboat and rowed her family across the Mississippi with slavehunters firing at her from the shore. When they reached the Illinois

shore, sympathetic people showed them the road to Quincy where they found a welcoming African American community.

Martha, Charles, and Augustus got jobs in a Quincy tobacco factory. They worked from eight until six, six days a week, in the midst of nicotine fumes, for the nine-month season. Mrs. Tolton took the children to Mass at St. Boniface Church, a 2,000 member German parish, where African American Catholics felt welcome.

Mrs. Tolton learned through the long lists of Civil War



When have I experienced prejudice against me?

When have I experienced privilege I didn't earn?

Check the statements below that are true for you.

- My neighbors accept me.
- I go shopping without being followed or harassed.
- My history textbook includes what people like me have contributed to our country.
- I am never asked to speak for the people of my race, gender, or religion.
- I wish more people in my class looked like me.
- My family can live wherever we want.
- I don't have to worry about police stopping me unless I'm speeding.
- People cross the street when they see me coming.
- I can buy make up and bandages the color of my skin.

WHY NOT
become a priest?



dead that her husband had died in St. Louis. In 1865, Charles died of pneumonia. Mrs. Tolton, with the support of Father Schaeffermeyer, the pastor of St. Boniface, enrolled Augustus, now 11, in the parish school during the three months the tobacco factory was closed. But white parishioners objected and some children treated him cruelly. Finally Augustus withdrew.

Mrs. Tolton decided to attend Mass at St. Peter's Church, so the family would not cause Father Schaeffermeyer any more trouble. The Irish priest there, Father Peter McGirr, quickly enrolled Augustus in the parish school and taught him to



be an altar boy. For the next five years Augustus served early Mass, worked at the tobacco factory, and attended St. Peter's school in the off months.

Augustus completed St. Peter's in 1872, at age eighteen, and was confirmed. That was the moment when he asked his two priest friends, Father Schaeffermeyer and Father McGirr, a question he had long had himself. Did they think he

could ever become a priest? Both priests knew what a good Catholic and intelligent young man Augustus was, so they both said, "Why not?"

When the two priests tried to help Augustus find a seminary at which to study, they realized he needed more formal education. So Augustus went back to the tobacco factory, this time making cigars at nine dollars a week, and studied evenings with the new assistant pastor at St. Boniface, who tutored him and two white boys. But even with the proper academic qualifications, Augustus could find no seminary or religious community that accepted African American candidates. His letters of applications were ignored or returned with a "No Blacks accepted" reply.

Augustus ministered among African American people before he became a priest. He helped the new pastor at St. Boniface, Father John Janssen, start a school for the African American children of Quincy. He did the work of a social worker or street priest today. He rounded up stray kids to come to his school, visited children's families, and invited African American Catholics who had drifted away from the Church back in.

In 1879, when he was twenty-five, Augustus was accepted to one of the finest seminaries in the world—the Pontifical College of Sacred Propaganda in Rome, a seminary for training missionary priests. Augustus's seven years of perseverance paid off. He left for Rome expecting to become a missionary in Africa, but at the end of five years, when Augustus was ordained, his teachers decided African Americans needed priests and assigned Father Tolton to his hometown of Quincy.

Reluctant to return where he had been a slave and where no seminary or religious community had wanted him, Augustus had nonetheless promised to go where the Pontifical College sent him.

A delegation of African American and whites headed by Mrs. Tolton

and Anne met Augustus's train at the Quincy station and ushered him into a flower-draped carriage. A brass band marched before it, playing "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name." People streamed into St. Peter's, the church where Augustus had received First Communion and Confirmation, to receive the first blessing of their new priest.

Augustus's adult troubles began where his childhood troubles left off. Protestant ministers, who had churches for African Americans in Quincy, feared this priest from Rome would lure their members to the Catholic faith. A new pastor at St. Boniface came to resent Augustus because too many white parishioners went to hear him preach and put their money in his collection basket. Augustus heard the sneer "nigger priest" from a fellow priest and finally asked to move to Chicago, where he knew he was wanted.

Father Tolton became pastor for the Chicago Black Catholics in 1889; they numbered 30 members and met in the basement of St. Mary's Church at Ninth and Wabash Streets. They called themselves the St. Augustus Society after the great African bishop. Soon 19 adult converts Father Tolton had made in Quincy joined him. The church moved into a storefront and grew to over 100 people.

When a woman donated \$10,000 towards a new church for the African American Catholic community,



SUNDAY GOSPEL

5th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus calls three to fish for people.

NARRATOR 1: One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Galilee, and people were pushing close to listen to him. He looked around and saw two fishing boats pulled up on the shore. Their owners were busy washing their nets.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus got into one of the boats—the one belonging to Simon—and asked him to row out a little from the shore. Then he sat in the boat and taught the crowd from there. When Jesus had finished teaching, he said to Simon:

JESUS: Row out into the deep water and put out your nets again.

SIMON: Master, we fished all last night and didn't catch a thing, but if you say so we will try again.

NARRATOR 1: So Simon put out his nets and caught so many fish that the nets began to break. He called out to his partners to come and help him.

NARRATOR 2: Between them they filled both boats so full of fish that they were about to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell on his knees before Jesus.

SIMON: Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man.

NARRATOR 1: Simon was absolutely amazed at all the fish they had caught. So were his partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

JESUS: Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people instead of fish.

NARRATOR 2: Peter, James, and John pulled their boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

Luke 5.1-11



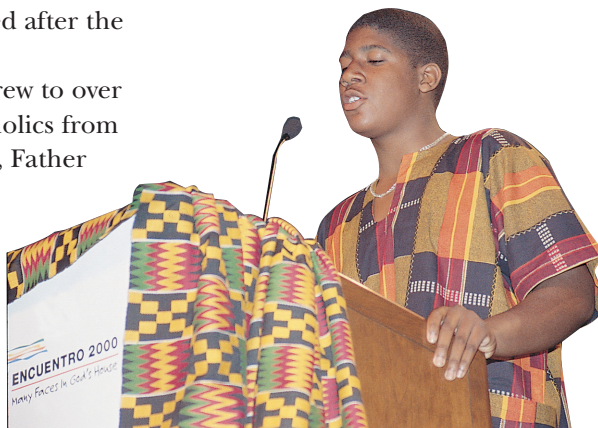
through his parish, preached wonderful sermons, and passed on his excellent education. He often found it discouraging trying to help people spiritually who had so many material worries.

Augustus died suddenly on July 4, 1897 from heat exhaustion. His hard life as a boy slave, as a worker in the tobacco factory, and the many disappointments he suffered as a priest had worn him out. He had served as a priest for 12 years.

Father Tolton was buried where he asked to be—in the priests' lot in the St. Peter's cemetery in Quincy, but later another priest was buried on top of his grave. Tolton's

they purchased a lot at 35th and Dearborn. Mother Katharine Drexel, foundress of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, helped financially, too. The community hired an African American architect, African American contractor, and African American workers to build St. Monica's Church, named after the mother of St. Augustus.

As St. Monica's parish grew to over 600 African American Catholics from all over the city of Chicago, Father Tolton worked hardest at what he believed in most—education, adult instruction, and works of mercy. He made daily rounds



name appeared only on the back of the gravemarker. This pioneer African American priest experienced racial prejudice in life and in death. Today many other African American men have responded to God's call to become priests. At present there are 16 living African American bishops in the United States, 9 of whom remain active.

QUESTIONS

- 1 What are Augustus Tolton's greatest achievements?
- 2 How does Augustus experience God's call?
- 3 What racism did Father Tolton encounter? What racism persists in the Church today?
- 4 Why has the Church grown?
- 5 What do the deep waters symbolize? The large catch of fish?
- 6 When does Peter fish for people?
- 7 To what does God call you?

Jesus, truly human, truly God

In AD 451, the Council of Chalcedon proclaimed that the Church believes Jesus is truly human and truly God, two natures, one divine person. This doctrine doesn't mean Jesus is half God and half human or sometimes God and sometimes human. It means Jesus is 100% human and 100% divine. Many people find believing Jesus is divine easier than that he is human, but the doctrine holds both are true.

We humans are mystery to ourselves. We can't explain where we come from, why we are here, where we are going, but we have an infinite capacity to wonder the questions. We are open at the heart of our being to transcending ourselves, to relationship with God.

In his humanity Jesus is like us. He must reflect to discover who he is. He is born of Mary and grows in grace and wisdom. He gets interested in God's business as a teen talking with teachers in the temple. He wrestles with temptation. He prays that the cup of suffering pass from him.

Jesus has feelings; he weeps when he finds Lazarus dead. He sometimes finds his disciples' lack of comprehension frustrating. He dies powerless on the cross, having to entrust himself to God as every other human must.

Jesus is also God's Son, revealing in his every word and action what God is like and what his relationship with God is. Jesus puts a human face on the mystery of God. He reveals that God is love. He heals people who are sick and forgives people who are broken and estranged from others. He frees people who have lost themselves to unholy drives and addictions. He reaches out to the poor, the lost, the excluded, and the forgotten.

Jesus lives in relationship with God. The Spirit fills him and drives him to show us God present as one of us. Jesus takes time alone to be in communion with God and gathers with his community to worship God on Sabbath.

The Second Vatican Council describes beautifully the union of the divine and human natures in the Son. "For by his incarnation the Son of God has united himself in some fashion with every human. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind, acted by human choice, and loved with a human heart. Born of the Virgin Mary, he has truly been made one of us, like us in all things except sin" (Gaudium et Spes, #22).

Did Jesus know he was God's Son? This is a modern question. To us a person is a self, an ego, a conscious center, an I with feelings and memories. At Chalcedon, the bishops used the Greek word hypostasis for person. It did not mean person in our sense of the word but rather the root or underlying reality. The council insisted the Son of God assumed a human nature in Jesus.

A few years ago singer Joan Osborne raised questions about God that people heard on their radios, in stores and elevators.

*What if God was one of us,
a slob like one of us,
just a stranger on the bus
trying to make his way home?*

The mystery of the incarnation says God is one of us. Because God became human in Jesus, we see the holy in every slob, in ourselves. This mystery gives human beings great dignity. For as one of us, Jesus revealed our capacity for knowing and loving God and knowing and loving one another.

Jesus the Master of Both-And (acrylic on canvas), by Nancy Earle, OSF, 2008



In the Old Testament the prophets announced that the Spirit of the Lord would rest on the hoped-for messiah for his saving mission.

Catechism of the Catholic Church #1286

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 Check out the news. Make a list of ways Christians are continuing Jesus' message of good news to the poor.
- 2 How does God becoming one of us affect our human dignity? What vision of the human person does Jesus give us?
- 3 Imagine Jesus seated beside you on a bus, and as you talk, he describes why he came. What does he say?

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