



Office for Black Catholics  
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA



## *Sharing the Good News*



### *Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary August 15th*

Revelation 12:1

And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.

### *Prayer for the Assumption of Mary*

Father in heaven,  
All creation rightly gives you praise,  
For all life and all holiness come from you.  
In the plan of your wisdom  
She who bore the Christ in her womb  
Was raised body and soul in glory to be with him in heaven.  
May we follow her example in reflecting your holiness  
And join in her hymn of endless love and praise.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen



## *The Ark of Holiness*

The theology and language surrounding the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary are a component of my spiritual context from as early as the age of five. My first educational institution was named in honor of Mary and her glorious Assumption. As early as my first catechetical lessons in kindergarten, Mary, the mother of baby Jesus was already being presented as a miraculous and marvelous example of only what God could do. Even at that very tender and young age, I understood that Mary really was something out of the ordinary. It has been many decades since my first encounter with the language of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. I still marvel at those grace filled moments as a little girl whose mind and spirit was so opened to learn, listen, and embrace the mysteries embedded in the life of a young teen girl who listened to a message from an angel.

Sixty plus years later and multiple theological degrees and courses of study still have not mastered the understanding and awareness of who Mother Mary was to me even at that very early stage of my life. Those early lessons and ability to hear and see the mystical presence of Mary as a guide and protectress never left me. Although I may have struggled in my early twenties with how Mary was projected from a very Eurocentric and linear dynamic—the essence of Mary the young Palestinian Hebrew girl who ran in haste to a place of safety and affirmation, was always with me.

The major context is that her commitment to saying yes to the Holy Spirit earned her God's favor! Her steadfastness in proclaiming justice as eloquently stated in the Magnificat is the fruit of her blessedness in the eyes of the Creator. Mary heard the call, the Word of God and she harkened to it. She opened herself up to be God-bearer Theotakis—"the ark of holiness." Revelations 11:19a, 12:1-10 and Psalms 132, and 45 from the liturgy of the Solemnity for August 15—speak of her greatness and her being at the position of honor in the presence of God.

The image of our Lady of Guadeloupe the pregnant dark-skinned Madonna of the indigenous Aztec culture—has graced me with so many mystical encounters of how the ark of holiness leads us to the authentic witness of her son, Jesus the Christ. It is during these very powerful moments of spiritual guidance and direction that I ask just like Elizabeth, how is it that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

Yet it is for this purpose that she was predestined—so to speak as stated in Romans 8:29-30 NAB. "Those whom God had already chosen, he also set apart to become like his Son, so that the Son would be the first among many believers. And so those whom God set apart, he called; and those he called, he put right with himself, and he shared glory with them. "Yes, her glorious Assumption is for the glory of the Lord.

How great is our God that—the manifestation of the Glory of the Lord, raises up she who is Most Holy among humanity, to not suffer the corruption of the grave but is lifted up to a place of honor. High and lifted up living in the light of His Glory.

Contributing Writer:

Dr. Valerie D. Lewis-Mosley, RN, MAPM, MSJ

Adjunct Professor of Theology Caldwell University,

Xavier University of Louisiana Institute for Black Catholic Studies

# *On the Road to Sainthood*



Venerable Pierre Toussaint

## PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF PIERRE TOUSSAINT

Lord God, source of love and compassion, we praise and honor You for the virtuous and charitable life of our brother in Christ, Venerable Pierre Toussaint. Inspired by the example of our Lord Jesus, Pierre worshipped You with love and served your people with generosity. He attended Mass daily and responded to the practical and spiritual needs of friends and strangers, or the rich and the poor, the sick and the homeless of 19th century New York. If it is Your will, let the name of Venerable Pierre Toussaint be officially raised to the rank of Saint, so that the world may know this Haitian New Yorker who refused to hate or be selfish, but instead lived to the full commandments of heaven and the divine law of love – love for God and for neighbor. By following his example and asking for his prayers, may we, too, be counted among the blessed in heaven. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

Venerable Pierre Toussaint (1766-1853) was born a slave in Haiti and died a freeman in New York City. He is credited by many with being the father of Catholic Charities in New York. Pierre was instrumental in raising funds for the first Catholic orphanage and began the city's first school for black children. He also helped to provide funds for the Oblate Sisters of Providence, a religious community of black nuns founded in Baltimore and played a vital role in providing resources to erect Old Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Lower Manhattan. During a Yellow Fever epidemic when many of the city's political leaders fled the city in search of healthier rural climates, Pierre Toussaint cared for the sick and the dying. He was a successful entrepreneur, who did not hesitate to share the fruits of his labor with others.

In recognition of Pierre Toussaint's virtuous life, the late Cardinal Cooke introduced Pierre's cause for canonization at the Vatican in 1968. In December 1989, the late Cardinal O'Connor had the remains of Pierre Toussaint transferred from Lower Manhattan to St. Patrick's Cathedral in midtown Manhattan where he is buried as the only lay person, alongside the former Cardinal-Archbishops of New York City.

On December 17, 1997, Pope John Paul II declared Pierre Toussaint, Venerable, thus placing him firmly on the road to becoming North America's first black saint. Venerable Pierre Toussaint was a man who was proud of his faith, proud of his culture and committed to serving others.

For further information: [www.obmny.org](http://www.obmny.org)

Archdiocese of New York; Office Black Ministry



# NATIONAL BLACK SISTERS' CONFERENCE



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The National Black Sisters' Conference was founded in 1968 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania under the inspiration and direction of then Sister Martin de Porres Grey, RSM (now Patricia Grey, Ph.D.) and with the generous support and hospitality of the Most Reverend John J. Wright, Bishop of Pittsburgh and the Pittsburgh Sisters of Mercy.

Sister Martin de Porres was the only woman religious to attend the first National Black Catholic Clergy Caucus (NBCCC) held in Detroit in April, 1968. Inspired and encouraged by the vision of African American Catholic priests, she left the Caucus with a heightened awareness of the pressing demand for black religious to address themselves to the urgent need for the Catholic Church in America to develop greater relevancy for black folk, or to risk losing its credibility as a manifestation of Christian unity.

The Holy Spirit moved Sr. Martin de Porres to call all black religious women to share in a task, which would be done only by Black religious women acting together, fully free, and joyously for the coming of the kingdom.

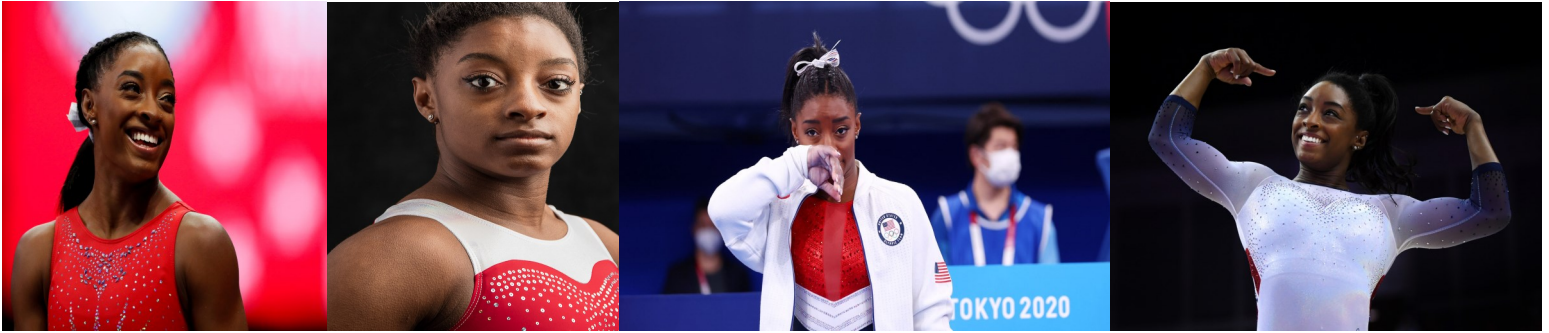
At that first, now historic, meeting in the summer of 1968 over 150 Black Catholic women religious from 79 different national and international congregations, gathered on the grounds of Carlow College. Sister Martin de Porres was elected to serve as president. A board of directors was elected and plans for legal incorporation of the National Black Sisters' Conference were made.

Today, NBSC is a national organization of more than 150 Black Catholic women religious and associates in the United States striving to promote a positive self-image among ourselves and our people. Together, we form a strong and cohesive voice in support of the dignity and rights of women of color, in creating mentoring and support systems for Black women in religious formation, in educating the African American family, and in confronting the sin of racism, which continues to permeate our society and Church as we work tirelessly for the liberation of African American people.

We as black women religious, continue to stand at the forefront in the struggle for justice, giving witness to the saving truth of the gospel and the mission of Christ's Church on earth.

## Taking Care of Self

### Simone Biles



Time heals all wounds, and for Simone Biles this is her story. As a professional athlete in the world of gymnastics, Simone Biles had a wake up call that caused her to step back and realize that it is important to look out for self, to take care of self, and to focus on the spirituality of self fulfillment.

The true victory for Simone Biles came the minute when she realized that something was not right. Recognizing this was the beginning of realizing that her physical, spiritual, and emotional well being were not connected as one. Checking in with who she is gave her the opportunity to ask herself, "is everything okay with me?"

It is Simone's Catholic faith that, I believe helped her on her journey with the support of so many people who continue to believe in her. There is a song, "Somebody Prayed for Me." Yes, she had so many praying for her because we believe that she will get through this storm. In her book, *Courage to Soar*, Simone wrote "I marched into St. James the Apostle Church that Sunday in a line of teenagers with solemn faces... in a way, our procession that no gold, silver, and bronze medals would be given out. Instead, our prize would be something much more powerful: in a few moments, each of us would bow our heads to receive the Holy Sacrament of Confirmation." What a testament to her own faith and belief that the Holy Spirit is always present within her.

Understanding your own mental health especially when you feel you are at your lowest point, does not mean that it's your fault. Remembering your achievements will help you on your way to recognizing that everything is going to be alright. There are times when people will put you on a pedestal and the minute you falter the negativity starts to take over you. That's all you hear. People sometimes forget that it's okay to fall back because with time you will get up again because you were willing to take care of self. Negativity can wear you out to the point you lose balance, you lose focus, you lose hope in all that you have already accomplished. Don't let anyone steal your joy. Joy is a God given gift.

Let us not be afraid to admit that something is not "right." Let us not be afraid to speak up and to speak out! Let us not be afraid to stand up for what is right. When you lead by example, others will take notice. Simone Biles has opened the doors with her courage and because of this many are beginning to see the importance of what it means to take care of self. Always remember, you can't take care of others until you take care of self.

Sister Lynn Marie Ralph, SBS

