

*“American Holy Ones Hand in Hand”*

Bishop Joseph N. Perry

Here and there, in the course of the business sessions of the US Bishops Conference (USCCB), a Diocesan Bishop rises to commend to fellow bishops the life of a Catholic man or woman whom he wishes to pass to the Congregation for Causes of Saints in Rome for consideration for the church’s highest honors of beatification and canonization. These are solemn moments in the course of the bishops’ proceedings bringing assurance to the pastors of the church that holiness is alive and well within the churches, that the gospel has indeed been sown in the soil of this land as represented by individuals who have taken the gospel of Jesus Christ and lived it with heroic seriousness.

As of this writing we have an impressive listing of people so cited: Canonized *Saints* in persons like Elizabeth Ann Seton, Frances Mary Cabrini, John Neumann, Theodore Guerin, Damien DeVeuster, Marianne Cope, Junipero Serra, Mother Katharine Drexel, Kateri Tekakwitha, and Stanley Rother. 17 Declared *Blessed*, the last step before declared sainthood, among them, Francis Xavier Seelos and Solanus Casey. 18 Declared *Venerable*, among them, Fulton Sheen, Samuel Mazzuchelli, Michael McGivney, Fredric Baraga, Patrick Peyton. And, 31 dubbed *Servants of God*, among them Terence Cooke, Dorothy Day, Emil Kapaun.

Despite the young age of the nation, the Church in the United States has added to the great roster of *sancti et beati, venerabili et servi Dei* our own contributions to *the huge crowd which no one could count from every nation, race, people and tongue ... before the throne and the Lamb, dressed in long white robes and holding palm branches in their hands.* {Rv 7}. These holy men and women have built up the church in this country and leave behind legacies of great stature and inspiration. They are representative of the marvelous multicultural portrait of American Catholicism.)

These holy men and women have built up the church in this country and leave behind legacies of great stature and inspiration. They are representative of the marvelous multi-cultural portrait of Catholicism in this country. It stirs our souls to see these great ones depicted in art, statuary and stained glass in our churches

and shrines and titled to the places where we school, pray and worship and serve in Christ-like charity.

I have the distinct honor of being vice-Postulator for the Cause of the Servant of God Father Augustus Tolton (1854-1897), a former slave who is acknowledged as the first priest of African descent to serve in the United States. His *positio* has been approved by the Roman Historical Commission as of March 8, 2018. The Congregation now moves to examine proposed miracles attached to his Cause. The African American community in recent years has recommended individuals arising out of the sagas of slavery and legal segregation in this country. Pending are such Causes as, Venerable Pierre Toussaint of New York, Henriette DeLille of New Orleans and Servants of God, Mary Elizabeth Lange, Augustus Tolton, Julia Greeley, and Thea Bowman just commencing.

With great hope we wait to see which one of the African American candidates will surface as the first of our ethnic stripe to be so beatified and canonized. We need one. Such a nomination will mean that African American Catholics will finally have arrived alongside others of a variety of backgrounds who have crowned Catholicism in America. Just one will bring forward to the ears of our vast populace the noble narrative of blacks and their long sojourn of faith through enslavement, segregation, the Civil Rights struggle and the current era of questions about dignity and participation in a nation still ambivalent about the contribution of its black neighbors. Nevertheless, with all our candidates for sainthood of whatever racial or ethnic background we look forward to an improved era of peace, hope and forgiveness in America. ♦