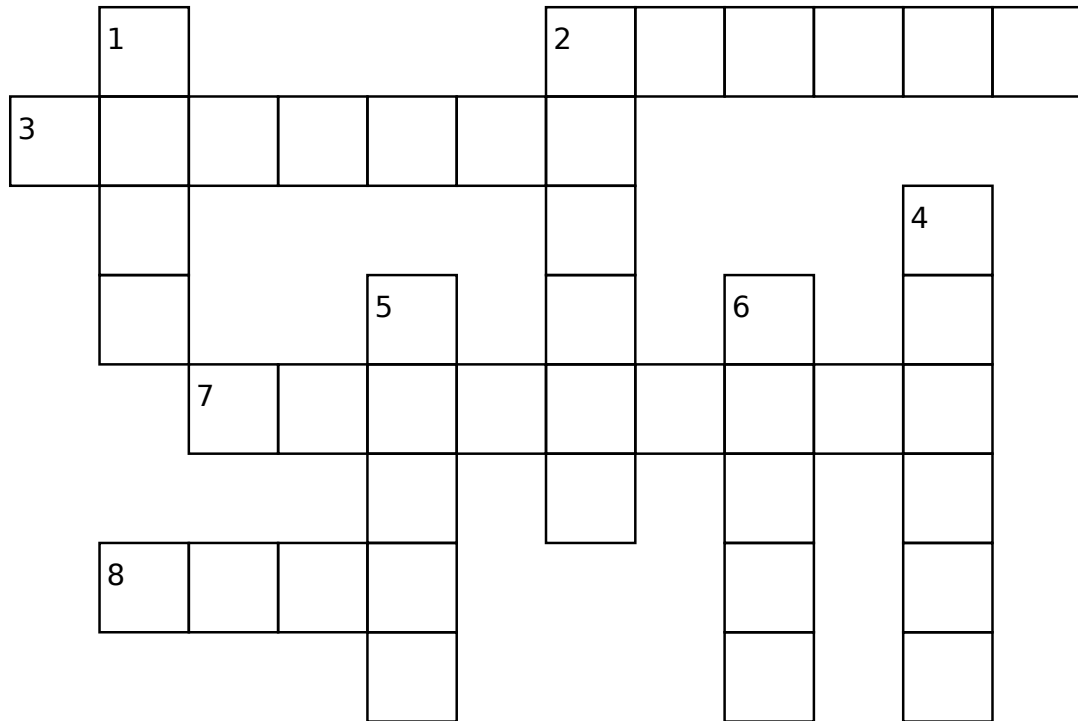


Venerable Augustus Tolton



Down:

1. His parishioners called him _____ Father Gus.
2. The name of Augustus Tolton's parish in New York was St. _____.
4. Father _____ was an ally and a mentor to the young Augustus Tolton.
5. Augustus and Ann Tolton attended St. _____ school.
6. Augustus Tolton's family escaped enslavement during the _____ War.

Across:

2. The name of his mother, who led her family to freedom.
3. As a child Augustus Tolton worked in a _____ factory to help his family.
7. Fr. Tolton was known for excellent _____ and good works.
8. This is where Augustus Tolton studied to become a priest.

Venerable Augustus Tolton (1854-1897)

John Augustus Tolton was born to Catholic parents, in Brush Creek, Missouri on April 1, 1854. He was born into a family that was enslaved by white Catholics. BUT, if you know U.S. history, then you know that less than a decade after his birth, the U.S. Civil War began—the war that would make human slavery illegal in the U.S. John Augustus Tolton’s father, Peter Paul Tolton, escaped from his enslaver to join the Union Army, and then fought for the freedom of all people. One year after the war began, led by his mother, Martha, the young Augustus Tolton’s family escaped into Illinois, a free state. There, Augustus and his sister, Ann, became the first Black students to attend a St. Peter’s Catholic school. At St. Peter’s, Tolton was mentored by Fr. McGirr, the school’s chaplain, and mastered Latin, Greek, and German. Even though he was able to attend Catholic schools, he and his sister worked in a tobacco factory to help support their family, and sometimes Tolton worked as a church janitor.

Inspired by the faith of his family, and of his mentors, the young Tolton grew in faith. When he reached his teen years, he felt God tugging at his heart, calling him to the priesthood. He earned his high school diploma, then a degree from the Franciscan Quincy College, then applied to seminaries. Unfortunately, in the nineteenth century, many seminaries upheld racist policies, and the U.S. seminaries to which Tolton applied refused to admit him. But John Augustus Tolton



persevered, and with the support of his mentor, Fr. McGirr, he was accepted to the Pontifical Urban University in Rome. In 1886 he was ordained a priest. While he wanted to serve in Africa, he was sent serve in the U.S., becoming the first “out” African American priest to serve in the U.S.

Yet, even after the Civil War, racism plagued many U.S. institutions, including places of worship, and some white clergy resented his ability to draw new parishioners, black and white, to his parish. So, the young Fr. Tolton was transferred to Chicago, to serve Black American Catholics at St. Monica’s Catholic parish, where he developed a reputation for excellent preaching, good works, and helping to build the community from a handful of 30 parishioners, to over 600. His parishioners and neighbors came to call him “Good Father Gus.” While Good Father Gus died at the young age of 43, his legacy lives on memories of the people whose lives he touched. Today, in Chicago, Illinois, Fr. Tolton Catholic Academy is named for him, as is Fr. Tolton High School in Columbia, Missouri.

Learn More:

Baur, Roy. *They Called Him Fr. Gus: The Life and Times of Fr. Augustine Tolton, First Black Priest in the U.S.A.* Quincy: Quincy University Press, 1999.

Brown, Camille Lewis. *African Saints: 40 Holy Men and Women.* Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2008.

Notre Dame Alumni Association. “Venerable Augustus Tolton.” University of Notre Dame, <https://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/interior.aspx?sid=1210&gid=609&pgid=44639>.