



GONNA MOVE WHEN THE SPIRIT SAY MOVE: Black Spirituality as Resistance and Resilience

by **Dr. C Vanessa White**

*I'm Gonna Move When the Spirit Say Move
I'm Gonna Move When the Spirit Say Move
When the Spirit Say Move, I'm Gonna Move O Lord
I'm Gonna Move When the Spirit Say Move.*
-African American spiritual



Black people are a Spirit-filled people. Black spirituality has been instrumental in giving black people the spiritual and cultural elements to liberate themselves from those internal tyrannies that sequester the soul and destroy the mind. It is the sense of this Spirit that has helped Black people to survive centuries of oppression, racism, lynching, discrimination, human devaluation, Jim Crow laws, segregation, violence against black bodies, the New Jim Crow/criminal justice system, killings of unarmed black men and women at the hands of police, as well as a history of inadequate health care, job insecurity and closing of schools and parishes within the Black community.

As Diana Hayes states “Black spirituality is grounded in a devotion to the Holy Spirit and her ability to create possibility in the face of denial . . . It is a spiritual story of hope in the face of despair, of quiet determination in the face of myriad obstacles, of a quiet yet fierce dignity over against the denial of humanity. Ultimately Black spirituality is a spirituality of resistance and resilience. Let’s take a moment and look at this spirituality that has sustained Black people for centuries.

Characteristics Of Black Spirituality

1. GOD CENTERED: God of Our Mind

God is central in the life of many people of African descent. This God is one who is both immanent and transcendent. God dwells within as well as sits on the throne. As Diana Hayes states the immanent God loves us and nurtures us like a parent bending low over a child, yet as transcendent God is free to judge those who oppress us and to call us forth into freedom. The relationship that black people have with Jesus is also an example of the personal and immanent God. It is not uncommon for black people to wake up in the morning and their first thought is to say, “thank you Jesus.”

The ancestors, the grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles, have testified to the power of God in their lives. Such phrases as “God don’t ever change” and “there will always be God” infuse the language and speak of black people’s concept of God. African Americans furthermore have always relied on the belief of a God of sanctity, mercy and transformation. This firm belief in God has historically led to a practice of mercy to white racists as well as acceptance of discriminatory practices within the Catholic Church.

2. BIBLICALLY ROOTED: People of the Book

Fr. Cyprian Davis, the author of the History of Black Catholics in the United States, writes that black spirituality is a spirituality of the Word. Any serious discussion of African American spirituality must consider the importance of Christian scripture in the identity, formation and empowerment of black life. The African Americans’ sense of self is based upon their understanding and integration of the sacred scripture. Even during the times of enslavement, the Bible was not foreign to the experience of African Americans. The stories were told and retold in sermons, spirituals and shouts. African Americans have a personal relationship with scripture. The Bible is not foreign to the lives of black people. It has had both a liberating and humanizing function in African American life as well as remaining a reliable source of information for black survival.

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3. JOYFUL, CONTEMPLATIVE & HOLISTIC: Full of the Spirit

Joy is a hallmark of black spirituality. As fruit of the spirit, this sense of joy among peoples of African descent has sustained them even during the most difficult of times. African American people are able to experience joy even in the midst of suffering. The experience of funerals in the black community is one of sorrow, as well as a celebration that the person has finally “made it over”. This does not negate the suffering of individuals but is focused on the belief in the hope of Jesus Christ. This joy is expressed in movement, dance, song, art, and sensation as well as in thanksgiving and exultation. Black spirituality has taught black people what it means to “let go and let God” and to “lean on the Lord.”

Black spirituality is holistic. Feelings are not separate from intellect, and the heart is not separate from the soul. Black people use their entire bodies to express their love of God. As noted by the Black bishops, “Divisions between intellect and emotion, spirit and body, action and contemplation, individual and community, sacred and secular, are foreign to us.”

African American people are also a contemplative people. Contemplation has to do with an awareness of the presence of God apprehended not by thought but by love. For African American people, God’s presence is experienced at all times and in a variety of different ways. It is not uncommon to hear African Americans speak of “resting in the Lord” or being “Led by that Sweet Holy Spirit” or to observe the elders rocking or humming in deep prayer. Today the emergence of cell phones, zoom meetings and the deluge of emails have created an environment which disrupts the ability to listen and dwell in the spirit of God. This lack of contemplative abiding time has created a restless longing in black people.

4. PERSON AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED: All are Welcome

Individual identity is found in the context of communal reality in the Black community. The communal aspect of Black spirituality is quite evident in black churches, worship and Eucharistic celebrations in the African American community. One cannot enter an authentically black church and not feel welcomed. No one stands alone in prayer. Hospitality and community are gifts of black folk. All are welcome in the House of God. This communal aspect of spirituality shapes the community and in turn, is shaped by the community.

5. JUSTICE AND LIBERATION ORIENTED: Called to Do Justice

African American spirituality leads to freedom. The journey in the spiritual life and closer union to God not only leads to personal freedom and authenticity but invokes a community to strive for freedom from oppression in all its forms. Authentic black spirituality leads to prophetic action on behalf of justice, a justice that requires liberation from sin and its effects. The community and person focused nature of African American spirituality profoundly affects how black people treat one another. It affects the quality of one’s life and the way one relates to others. It infuses ones with a sense of social concern and a spirituality that moves the person and community to action. This sense of right relationship – inspires the African American to do right, act right and be right.

Black Spirituality and Our Black Catholic “Saints”

As black people journey on the road towards wholeness, a retrieval of those spiritual gifts that sustained the black community is needed. The example of the six holy men and women of African descent in the United States, whose cause for sainthood have been opened by the Catholic Church, may provide a guide for providing that Sankofa moment. The lives and spiritual stories of Mother Elizabeth Lange (Foundress of the Oblate Sisters of Providence), Venerable Pierre Toussaint (layman & philanthropist), Venerable Henriette DeLille (Foundress of the Sisters of the Holy Family), Venerable Augustus Tolton (First recognized Black priest in the United States), Julia Greeley (laywoman devoted to the Sacred Heart of Jesus) and Sr. Thea Bowman (Franciscan sister who promoted justice and inculturation in the Catholic Church) highlight the spiritual characteristics of Black spirituality. Their lives witness to the power of Black spirituality in providing the necessary resources to resist racist structures as well as the spiritual power of resilience to journey as persons of hope. Let us learn from their stories and spirituality as we enter this season of Lent.

Dr. C. Vanessa White is Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry as well as the Director of the Certificates in Pastoral Studies and Black Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union. She is the co-editor of the book (with Dr. Cecilia Moore and Fr. Paul Marshall, SM), *Songs of the Heart and Meditations of the Soul* and is Past Convener of the Black Catholic Theological Symposium, a theological association of Black Catholic theologians and scholars as well as a member of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality. A Secular Franciscan (over 30 years), Dr. White works with Bishop Joseph N. Perry (postulator for the cause) promoting the cause of Fr. Augustus Tolton.



Connecting With God Through Fasting

by Cheryl Cattledge



There is an upward movement of people improving their health: restaurants are introducing more plant-based and heart-friendly items on their menu; more people are exploring the vegan diet; community gardens are popping up in several neighborhoods; accessibility of mental health preservation is growing. However, besides physical and mental health, another area that needs to be nurtured is spiritual health.

Fasting is a fairly ancient practice used since around the 5th century BCE. Back then, it was a means to rest certain types of illnesses. People were essentially told not to eat or drink some or all things for a specific length of time, or at certain times regularly. Through the years people chose to fast for different reasons. Dick Gregory promoted social justice and awareness through fasting in 1981. Also, St. Martin de Porres lived in self-imposed austerity, never ate meat, fasted continuously, and spent much time in prayer and meditation.

Fasting provides the physical benefit of allowing the human body the chance to detoxify itself from all the toxins that come from processed foods, sugar-packed beverages, and rebuild its defense systems. In addition, the human body will start to adapt to the fasting process and release feel-good chemicals like adrenaline, norepinephrine and dopamine which in-turn will optimize brain function.

However, the true purpose of a spiritual fast is not solely about physical sacrifices and benefits, but it is mainly about making room for an ultimate sustainer. Our world has suffered from so much tribulation: poor economy, racial disharmony, pandemic woes. Our souls are consistently aching for peace and connection with God. Fasting presents an opportunity to exchange what humans need to survive (food) for what humans need to live—more of God. It is an opportunity to supercharge our walk with God and gain renewed insight and peace.

When dependency is put on God, and a connection is made with Him through prayer and meditation, the fruits of His Spirit are more apparent, just as Paul stated in Galatians 5:22-25: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

The Daniel Fast is based on verses from the Bible found in Daniel 10:2-3: “At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over.”

The Bible also states in the first chapter of Daniel that he and his companions are captured by the Babylonians and inducted into the service of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:3). The Babylonians offered Daniel and his men rich food (“the King’s meat” and wine), but Daniel was wary of God’s prohibition of “unclean foods.” Daniel said he and his friends would eat a diet of only vegetables for three weeks. His diet became a small demonstration of his opposition to the King’s power.

So, the Daniel Fast is a 21-day partial fast. Although, there are many forms of fasting (including the growing trend of intermittent fasting), the Daniel Fast is a method of fasting that people all over the world are using as they enter into the spiritual discipline of prayer and fasting.

This partial fast requires 21 days of eating only the following:

1. Only fruits, vegetables, beans, herbs and nuts;
2. Only water for a beverage;
3. No meat, sweeteners, dairy products, eggs nor breads.

Another biblical reference pertaining to fasting is from the book of Matthew (Matt 4:1-2) which states that Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to fast for forty days and nights and also repeatedly tempted by the devil. This testing time prepared Him for the three-year ministry that would change the world. Jesus used the Word of God, not His own strength, to defeat those temptations and remain victorious over sin. He demonstrated for us that fasting can strengthen us spiritually when we use it to draw closer to God.

I started participating in the Daniel Fast in 2013 (introduced to me by my former grade school teacher and currently my spiritual aunt, Sr. Mary Claudia Sanz, O.S.P.). The first year I participated alone. The next year, I invited a friend to participate with me. Each year afterward, I invited several people to join and in 2022, 192 people signed up to join. In 2021, I re-named the ministry to be the Spirit of Daniel Ministry. So, the Spirit of Daniel ministry has been a communal fasting ministry for 8 years. It is my hope that everyone who has been on this journey has gotten to know God better and will get to know one another and support one another often throughout the year.

Some testimonies of how the Spirit of Daniel ministry has affected people are listed below:

“This fast has been transformative for me.” – V.W.

“I had a special intention for this fast regarding an issue. My peace and trust in God never wavered, and the issue turned out much better than I could have ever imagined or asked for! I truly believe that ‘all things work for good for those who love God’ (Romans 8:28) and that hope was so evident to me these past weeks!” – B.K.

“Oh Sistah!!! You may not see it this way, but you are literally saving lives by leading this fast each year. You give us strength through community to push through life’s tough moments. We are all building spiritual muscle (and some are even losing physical fat...including me). I really needed this fast at this exact time. I ask that God rewards you heftily for the work you are doing (seen and unseen).” – A.J.

Therefore, the spiritual discipline that comes from fasting gives individuals the opportunity to supercharge their walk with God. Growing and maturing with self-control fosters a more intimate relationship with God.

Sankofa Spotlight: Looking Back to Look Forward



Dr. Opal Easter-Smith is a tireless and dedicated person of faith and a huge advocate for Black Catholic progress. Currently a parishioner at Holy Name of Mary parish in the Morgan Park neighborhood, Opal has traveled a unique path but at the same time having a similar experience that many Black Catholics have in this faith tradition. And as she travels in this faith journey, she is always willing to help others understand the same journey she walks.

Her Catholic journey started at 8 years old. The child of Protestant parents, Opal expressed a desire to be baptized into the Catholic faith. Her reasoning for this was her love of the Eucharist. At that point, Opal would be baptized into the faith at Holy Angels parish in Bronzeville.

She would continue her education at Catholic institutions where she graduated from Holy Angels for her primary education, Loretto Academy for high school, obtained a Bachelor of Science in Business Education at DePaul University, and a Masters in Pastoral Studies at Catholic Theological Union. She would earn a Master of Science in Adult Continuing Education and a Doctorate of Education from Northern Illinois University.

Opal would use her education and skills to serve many roles within her parish and the Archdiocese of Chicago. At her home parish of Holy Name of Mary, she has worn many hats. She is currently an Extraordinary Minister of Communion, Minister of Care, bulletin editor and a volunteer at the parish diner that feeds the needy. She received the Bishop Quarter award in 2019 for her work in Vicariate VI. Opal is also a Lay Associate of the Oblate Sisters of Providence, the first order of religious of women of African descent in the United States and the world.

Her time at Catholic Theological Union as Director of Continuing Education and Ministerial Formation was very important to her. Opal called her many years at CTU as her 'Dream Job' because she was able to combine the work she had done in her professional life and as a volunteer with the Archdiocese to help prepare CTU students for ministry in the Church.

As with many Roman Catholics, especially Black Catholics, Opal spent some years away from the Church because of a failed marriage. She returned when her spouse died. She asserts that it was her hunger for the Eucharist that brought her back.

Opal shares the sentiments of many Black Catholics when it comes to its relationship with the institution. Opal feels that more Black Catholics are needed at all administrative levels in the Church. In essence, Dr. Opal Easter-Smith feels that more of us are needed at the table and have many gifts to bring. The Church must intentionally seek out Black Catholic candidates for positions and hire more. She is hopeful that this will come about.

Dr. Opal Easter-Smith encourages young adults to consider ministry in the Church as a career choice. She stresses to our youth the importance of maintaining a relationship with and trust in God. That should be the most important thing to them.

Contributing Reporter Gardis Watts



Jasmine Thomas worships at St. Moses the Black Parish (formerly St. Columbanus Church), located at 331 E. 71st Street.

She feels that she has been Catholic all her life because of her parents being in the faith since before she was born. However, officially she was baptized into the faith at age 8 or 9 and attended St. Dorothy church and grade school. She went on to Mother McAuley for high school and is currently a sophomore at Richard J Daley College where she is majoring in political science with a minor in chemistry. Two awards she received while in high school were the Marian Award and the Spirit Alive. Jasmine is also a member of the Knights of Peter Claver Ladies Auxiliary Court #158.

She recalls that around the time when she was to be confirmed at age 12 or 13, that she was not really "feeling" the Catholic church. So, her mother suggested that she visit other faith churches to help her make a decision. She did this, and even remembers attending a Baptist church with her father's aunts. The service carried so long that she decided that this experience was not for her. Turning back to Catholic worship, Jasmine realized that there had been certain "benefits" to her Catholic experience: she was a liturgical dancer and got the chance to dance at Holy Name Cathedral and yearly sunrise services, she was able to fellowship with other Black Catholics with different opinions, and she enjoyed how the scriptures were broken down and explained by her catechist teachers during weekly Sunday school. Other advantages that made her gravitate toward the Catholic church was the ceremonial practices of the priest and others serving on the altar during services and she appreciated how these same group of people had helped with her journey in her earlier years. Jasmine admitted that another reason she stays in the Catholic church and is probably her biggest motivator, is her desire to stick with the practice of her parents worshipping as Catholics which is a "tradition" that she does not want to break.

When asked about her thoughts on how to attract young adults to the Catholic church, she pointed out that people her age are primarily looking for a church experience that is more relatable to their current living experiences along with more upbeat music. She feels the way to achieve this would only take certain adjustments and compromise between people of her age and the older groups leading in the church today. Her ideas include updating the laws and teachings of the church to make them more appealing to people from different backgrounds, strive for age diversity on the altar during Masses-commentators, lectors and eucharistic ministers, deliver homilies that have young people in mind, and even develop a weekly service that is for young adult people by young adult people. Jasmine stresses that this is not to overlook any other age groups, it is just to give young people a voice and let them know that they are being heard. Also, she feels that a bible study specifically designed for young adults would be a great addition because it would be another way to make them feel comfortable in expressing their ideas about their beliefs.

At the newly formed St. Moses the Black Parish, Jasmine participates in several activities alongside her mother, (Girl Scouts and assisting in the Women's Guild). Since she does not consider this ministry work, she currently is in discernment about what makes a ministry and how she would like to serve. However, what may be a possibility is the church dance ministry since Jasmine has been a liturgical dancer from the age of five. She is thinking about taking a leadership role in this ministry because she has always felt that dancing was her connection with God, being the way she always talked to him, and having her one-on-one time with him.

Her final words...

"I love being a Black and young African American Catholic. And I get it, change is not going to happen overnight but if we start in the right direction and have a positive mind about it, anything is possible over time."

Contributing Reporter Stephanie Garrison

Habari gani What's the News?



St. MOSES the BLACK
PARISH

St. Moses the Black Parish

331 E. 71st Street
Chicago, IL 60619
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stmosesparish.org

ST. MOSES THE BLACK
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Wednesday, March 9, 2022

11:00 am with Fr. Tracy O'Sullivan, O.Carm.
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Followed by a Light Fellowship



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<https://benedicttheafrican.org/>



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Our Hush Harbor series features spirituals and speeches from the past that speak loudly today.

In Antebellum America, a hush harbor was a place where the enslaved Africans would gather in secret to practice religious traditions.

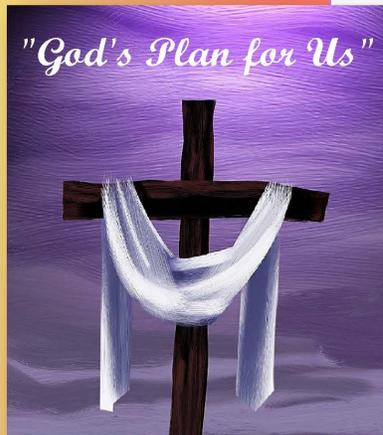
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Invites you to join us for a

Lenten Evening of Reflection
Sunday, March 6, 2022 • 4:00 PM

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Using Sacred Scriptures
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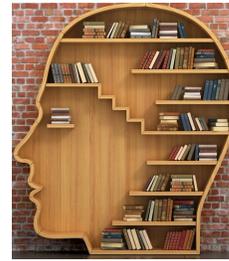
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Presenter:
Deacon James Norman

Literary Corner



Thea Bowman, Faithful and Free by Fr. Maurice J.

MAURICE J. NUTT

THEA BOWMAN

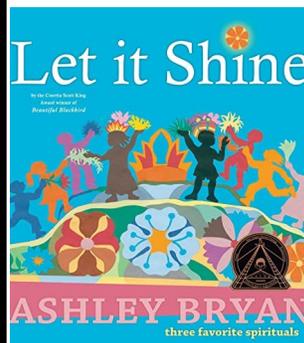


Faithful
and Free

Nutt published in 2019 is a biography of Sister Thea Bowman that introduces her and sheds new light on who she was. The granddaughter of slaves, she converted to Catholicism at age 9 and later became a Franciscan Sister, a teacher, a singer, a dancer and enjoyed a wide ranging ministry of joy, music and justice. She brought her whole self, fully functioning to her ministries. She was an unapologetically African American woman who embraced the blessings of her ancestry.

This book is a must read for anyone seeking to understand Sister Thea Bowman and why she is a Servant of God on the road to Sainthood.

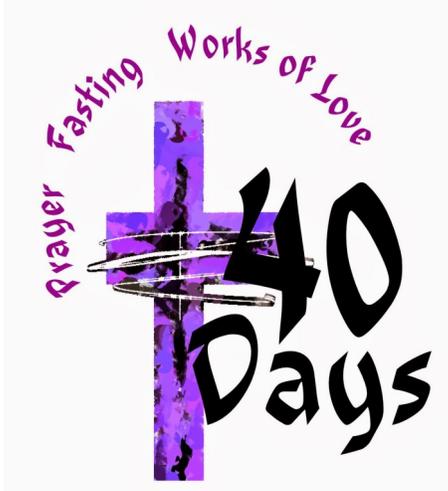
Let It Shine: Three Favorite Spirituals by Ashley Bryan.



This Little Light of Mine, When the Saints Go Marching In and He's Got the Whole World in His Hands are featured in this award winning picture book by the late Ashley Bryan. Full song lyrics and music are included. The colorful images introduce our youngest children

to the sweet joys of spirituals and how they move us all to sing and glorify the Lord! For ages 2-5

Prayer for Lent Month



Father God,

As one, we come to you this lenten season with open arms, open minds, and open hearts; to humbly ask for your guidance as we partake on a spiritual voyage towards clarity, peace and rejuvenation. Father, let our senses be in tune with you.

Let us hear you,

Let us see you,

Let us feel you,

and be comforted by your faithful promises that proclaim you'll never abandon us, and will forever remain by our side. Father, let us find strength in every sacrifice and be reminded that each new day will lead us closer to you.

Let us abandon our fears, and rejoice because our Lenten season is here.

Father, Let us have faith, find peace, find comfort, and find our way back home.

In Jesus names we pray, Amen.

-Shannon Ambroise

Who are we?

The Pulse is a monthly newsletter to provide information about the concerns and happenings in Black Catholic Chicago. It will be made up of articles, profiles and information about events and programs happening throughout the archdiocese of Chicago. If you are interested in contributing or have any questions or concerns please email us at chicagoblackcatholics@gmail.com

This month's contributors are:

- **Dr. Kimberly Lymore** DMin, is the director of the Augustus Tolton Pastoral Ministry Program at Catholic Theological Union and Associate Minister of the Faith Community of Saint Sabina.
- **Dr. C. Vanessa White** is Associate Professor of Spirituality and Ministry as well as the Director of the Certificates in Pastoral Studies and Black Theology and Ministry at Catholic Theological Union.
- **Shannon Ambroise** MAPS, is a Tolton Alum, facilitator of St. Mary Evanston Black Catholics and member of St. Mary Parish, Evanston, IL.
- **Tanya Bolen** is a Tolton Scholar and part-time student at Catholic Theological Union pursuing a Masters of Arts in Pastoral Studies. She serves and worships at St. Moses the Black Parish as a Eucharistic Minister, Hospitality, and the Women's Guild.
- **Tina L Carter**, M.Div.; MLIS, is a public librarian, graduate of Catholic Theological Union and Tolton Alum. She is a parishioner, catechist and serves on the technology ministry at Our Lady of Africa Parish in Bronzeville.
- **Cheryl Cattledge** is the Director of Campus Ministry at Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School and Tolton Alum. She is a parishioner at the Faith Community of Saint Sabina.
- **Stephanie Garrison** is a retired teacher, Tolton Scholar currently seeking a Masters in Pastoral Studies at CTU Seminary, attends St. Moses the Black Parish, serve in the ministries of Lector, Catechism and RCIA.
- **Gardis Watts** is a Tolton Scholar and part time seminary student at Catholic Theological Union pursuing a Master in Divinity. Current member of Holy Name of Mary Parish.