

“America has been called the most enlightened nation in the world. We shall see whether it deserves that honor. If the United States has never before seen a Black priest, it must see one now.”

– Cardinal Simeoni in 1886 announcing where Father Augustus would be sent for his first mission. He overruled the previous decision (and Augustus' desire) to minister in Africa.



FATHER AUGUSTUS TOLTON

"It was the priests of the Church who taught me to pray and to forgive my persecutors... it was through the direction of a Sister of Notre Dame that I beheld for the first time the glimmering light of truth and the majesty of the Church. In this Church, we do not have to fight for our rights because we are Black. The Church is broad and liberal. She is the Church for our people."



April 1, 1854 – July 9th, 1897



Born enslaved in Missouri, Fr. Augustus was taught about the Catholic faith from a young age. When he was nine, he escaped to freedom in Illinois with his mother and siblings. Even in a "free state," Augustus faced many obstacles to his education, being denied from local Catholic schools and colleges. He later wrote about Father Peter McGuire, who ensured that Augustus got an education, finding a school that would accept Augustus and tutoring him.

When Augustus was discerning the priesthood, he was rejected from seminaries in the United States because of his race. He was accepted to a seminary in Rome, Italy, and was ordained a priest in 1886. He had asked to serve on the African Continent but was instead sent to serve in Quincy, Illinois. He was reassigned to Chicago in 1889 and worked tirelessly for his parish until his death during a heat wave at the age of 43. The Archdiocese of Chicago opened his cause for canonization in 2010.

Sources:

<http://theblackcatholic.com/black-catholic-saints-holy-ones/tolton-bc/>

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/tolton-augustus-augustine-1854-1897/>

<https://toltoncatholic.org/biography-of-father-tolton/>