

in a

WordTM

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BLACK CATHOLIC HISTORY MONTH

Black Catholics Affirmed

by Cathy Green Miner

An often forgotten event during Black Catholic history month was the 1987 meeting of Pope John Paul II with Black Catholics in New Orleans, Louisiana. This article written by Cathy Green Miner in 1987 (who was a student at the University of New Orleans at the time) describes her excitement in being present on September 12, 1987.

The phone rang at 4:43 a.m. "Time to get up," said the other voice. The day had finally arrived for Pope John Paul II's visit to New Orleans. When asked if I wanted to attend the Papal meeting with Black Catholics, my immediate response was yes. As time drew near, I felt anxious and sometimes unconcerned that the Pope would meet with my people. It never really hit me that history was in the making until I looked behind me as I stood in line and watched hundreds of Black Catholic women and men draw near to the entrance of the Superdome.

We were asked to arrive at the Superdome before 7 a.m. The seats were not reserved so I arrived at 5:45 a.m. There were people from all over the United States waiting and hoping for a chance to shake the Pope's hand. The rising sun welcomed the string of people that wound around the Superdome patiently awaiting the opening of the doors.

Standing in line, a young girl from Jackson, Mississippi, agreed with the priest who accompanied her that she had never seen so many Black Catholics, and Black nuns and priests all at one time. Upon hearing this, I realized that the youth involvement in meetings like this is very low in the Church community. The Black youth of today need more encouragement from Church role models to participate in programs designed to help bring out the precious gifts they have to offer.

The doors were finally opened. The race began as people poured into the Dome heading for their seats. Somehow I managed to get a seat close enough to the stage. A choir from Xavier University sang as people socialized. A

man using sign language followed each song for those who could not hear the beautiful music. The Black bishops were introduced, each saying a brief prayer and giving a warm welcome to the Church. The atmosphere was filled with excitement as the Pope's entourage arrived.

In a matter of moments, Pope John Paul II would arrive. As I anticipated his arrival I stared at the majestic, white chair on which he would sit. A beautiful 'Amen' that flowed over the room seemed to calm me as I looked on.

It was 9:35 a.m. when the people rose as His Holiness, Pope John Paul, II entered with outstretched arms, extending the love of Jesus to everyone present. Bishop Howze of Biloxi, Mississippi then greeted the Pope.

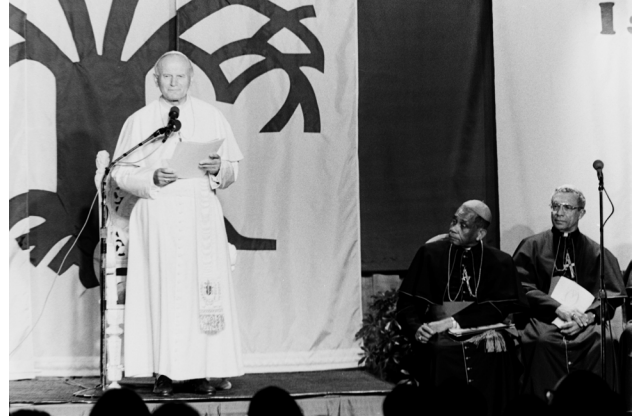


The Bishop recalled that "Black Catholics love the Church and want to become a more significant part of its mission to evangelize and sanctify the world. We wish to share our gifts with others who do not know Jesus and the Church as we do."



I express my deep love and esteem for the black Catholic community in the United States. Its vitality is a sign of hope for society. Composed as you are of many lifelong Catholics, and many who have more recently embraced the faith, together with a growing immigrant community, you reflect the Church's ability to bring together a diversity of people united in faith, hope and love, sharing a communion with Christ in the Holy Spirit. I urge you to keep alive and active your rich cultural gifts. Always profess proudly before the whole Church and the whole world your love for God's word; it is a special blessing which you must for ever treasure as a part of your heritage.

-Pope John Paul II from his address to Black Catholics on September 12, 1987



Pope John Paul II then began by encouraging us "to live the Gospel and to proclaim it by word and example - to give priority to the great task of evangelization." The Pope also urged youth to respond to the Lord's invitation to a religious vocation.

The message of the family was brought to us by the Pope as he explained, "Your faithful Christian families are a source of comfort in the face of the extraordinary pressures affecting society. Today, you must rediscover the spirit of family life which refuses to be destroyed in the face of even the most oppressive forces." The family must become stronger, for it is through the family that the evangelization process begins and is shared through lifetimes.

The Pope continued by reminding us of the importance of forgiveness towards those who oppress us, and to always offer our Christian love to the oppressed. We were urged to keep our Catholic schools strong and active and to evangelize through the use of mass media.



His holiness concluded his message by stating, "Your Black cultural heritage enriched the Church and makes her witness of universality more complete. In a real way the Church needs you, just as you need the Church, for you are part of the Church and the Church is part of you."

The Pope's message will always be an inspiration for our people. Pope John Paul II seemed very concerned about supporting the efforts of Black Catholics. While we do have the support of the Church in Rome, I always wonder how the Church in America will support the Black Catholic ministry.

I believe the National Black Catholic Pastoral Plan is a summary of the needs of Black Catholics and is an example of the support we will need from the Catholic Church in America.

Bishop Howze said in his address to the Pope "*We hear the expression today: 'Being Black and Catholic.'* This expression is not to denote separatism, but rather to identify those gifts and talents which integrate the faith and culture of Black Americans into the common heritage of the Church which is shared by all."

I am proud to be a Black Catholic woman. Attending the Papal meeting and the 1987 Black Catholic Congress has opened my mind and heart to the concerns of the Black community. I hope the Black Catholic community can come together and realize that the Church needs our cultural gifts to enhance the Catholic faith.

in a word or two



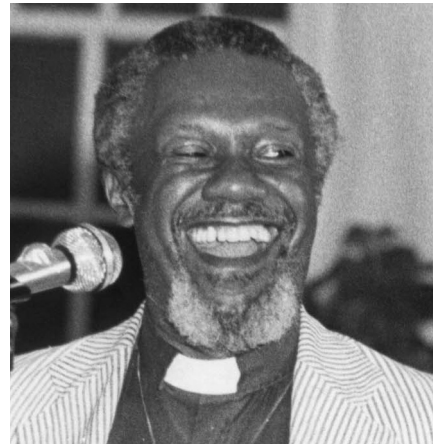
St. Paul the Apostle Church in New Orleans, Louisiana began its observance of their rich history of 75 years serving the people of New Orleans East. With Bishop Fernand Cheri, OFM as presider and homilist, dance, first communions, and stirring gospel music the joyful celebration on October 17, 2021 was a fitting tribute to the history of this African American Catholic church.

Jubilee Prayer of 75th Anniversary
God of our Ancestors,

We thank You for this Diamond Jubilee year of our Church St. Paul the Apostle. You have chosen, called, and given us the courage to witness and proclaim Your love and word to our brothers and sisters.

Through our history, You helped us to grow and strengthen our faith. You entrusted us the mission of being a family with all our diversity, worshipping together and carrying the Good News to all. Jesus our Savior, Your presence in our midst is manifested, felt, and tasted in our Church Community. As we celebrate our 75th anniversary, we ask You to send us the paraclete to help us to renew ourselves, to get more courage, to proclaim Your word and to be consecrated totally to You.

We ask this through Christ our Lord...St. Paul the Apostle, our Patron saint, intercede for us that we may be made worthy of the love of God. Amen!



Father Clarence Rivers
July 19, 1984 photo at NOBC conference Lafayette, LA

The new podcast, *Meet Father Rivers*, celebrates its official release to coincide with Black Catholic history month in November. The podcast intimately explores the life and impact of Black priest, liturgist, composer and scholar Fr. Clarence Rivers (1931-2004), both on the individuals who knew him and on Catholic worship culture in North America. The podcast seeks to introduce Fr. Rivers to Catholics of any color who have never heard of Rivers or the profound impact he made on the way Catholic worship looks and sounds today.

Created and co-hosted by Emily Strand (of the podcasts *Beyond the Words* and *Pottersversity*), *Meet Father Rivers* seeks out individuals who knew Rivers at all stages of his career—from the youthful optimism of his early years to the disillusionment and isolation he seemed to experience toward the end of his life. Strand and guests dialogically uncover hidden truths of Rivers' (and their own) personal history, revealing both the gift of Blackness and the impact of racism and oppression—historical and ongoing—in the American Catholic Church.

Listen: Stream or download episodes at meetfatherivers.libsyn.com, on Apple Podcasts, or anywhere podcasts are found. New episodes appear at the end of every month.

Connect:

E-mail: MeetFatherRivers@gmail.com Twitter: @RiversPodcast

Facebook: @MeetFatherRivers

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To read The Pope's 1987 Address to Black Catholics go to www.inaword.com/documents.html

Bishop Cheri's Homily titled *Upgrading One's Serve* also found at www.inaword.com/documents.html

All photos in this issue by Fr. James Pawlicki, SVD

Divine Word Missionaries is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Florida and Arkansas.

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