



2026 History Essay Contest

School 5th Grade Winner

Good Father Gus

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Have you ever been judged or treated wrongly on how you look? Father Augustus Tolton was, yet he persevered through it in order to serve God and others. Father Augustus Tolton experienced this throughout his life, yet he remained faithful to God and dedicated himself to serving others. Born into slavery in Missouri, he was the first African American priest ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. He was an example of racial discrimination being brought to justice. This essay will be about Father Augustus struggles, accomplishments, and relationship with God.

St. Augustus Tolton was born on April 1, 1854. His mother was Martha Jane Chisley and his father was Peter Paul Tolton who were both slaves at the time. He had two siblings named Charles and Anne. His father joined the union army after escaping slavery and died of a disease during the war. After this Augustus's mother bravely escaped with her children by crossing the Mississippi river to Quincy, Illinois. There, the family worked in a cigar factory to survive. Even during these hard times Martha still found ways to teach her children about God and the Catholic faith. He also learned about the faith with the experiences he had as being an enslaved person.

When Father Augustus Tolton was a teenager he helped start a Catholic school for the African

American community. He was invited to join the St. Augustine society to serve African American Catholics. Eventually, he became the first known African American priest in the Roman Catholic Church. Although this was a great achievement, he still faced racial discrimination. Despite these challenges, he remained kind and continued to treat all people with respect. He became known for his powerful sermons and his dedication to his parishioners. He dedicated his life as much as he could to serving black Catholics and addressing their needs.

St. Augustus Tolton later founded St. Monica's church in Chicago, which became a significant spiritual refuge for African American Catholics. Father Augustus Tolton is known for improving religious freedom and human rights. This is one of the reasons he is remembered today, as well as for pioneering as the first Catholic African American priest. There are shrines, churches and housing communities named after him. Tolton's ministry provided spiritual leadership and dignity to African American Catholics during a time of widespread discrimination. His legacy continues to inspire communities across the United States. Father Augustus Tolton truly impacted the United States and showed kindness and courage in his life.

Father Augustus Tolton is truly an amazing saint! He died at the age of 43 on July 9, 1897, of heatstroke. He truly brought great things to the country demonstrating that you can be different and continue to follow God and not letting others discourage you. Today, he is remembered for his courage, faith, and determination. His legacy continues to inspire people to treat others with kindness and to remain strong in their faith, even in difficult times. Father Augustus Tolton truly made a lasting impact on the United States and continues to be an inspiration to many.

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