





TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY & ARCHDIOCESE OF LOS ANGELES

PRESENTS

RESPECT LIFE WEEK CURRICULUM:
RACISM AS A LIFE ISSUE

Black Catholic Saints

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Lesson Overview

Lesson Description: This lesson invites students to reflect on the lives of two of the Black Catholic saints-in-waiting, Fr. Augustus Tolton and Sr. Thea Bowman. Using a short text written by Catherine Cavadini, Ph.D. (Department of Theology, University of Notre Dame), students learn about these Fr. Tolton and Sr. Bowman, their lives, their experiences of racism, their experiences being both Black and Catholic, and their growth in holiness.

This lesson is designed for middle/high school students in U.S. Catholic schools, and is suitable for integration in Social Studies, Language Arts, or Theology/religion classes. Depending on the class and/or the level at which this lesson is taught, the teacher may need to make appropriate adjustments.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- ◆ appreciate the extraordinary lives of Fr. Augustus Tolton and Sr. Thea Bowman.
- ◆ develop the ability to read a text that is written to communicate deep and rich understandings of different types.
- ◆ discuss racism and its effects.

Lesson #1

1. *Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.**
(Luke 2:4-7)
2. Augustus Tolton was born on April 1, 1854 on the Elliot Plantation in Brush Creek, Missouri in slave quarters. Both of his parents, his mother Martha Jane and his father Peter Paul Tolton, were enslaved. The following month, Augustus was baptized at St. Peter's Catholic Church. His baptismal certificate reads, "slave boy... property of Stephen Elliot."
3. Eighty three years later, Thea Bowman was born, on December 29, 1937. She was born to her father, Theon Bowman, who was a medical doctor, and her mother Mary Esther, who was a school teacher. Though their family home was in Canton, Mississippi, baby Thea was born in neighboring Yazoo City because there was no hospital in Canton that would care for Black patients.
4. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and his life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*
(John 1:1-4)
5. Augustus grew up on the Elliot Plantation, working alongside his mother, Martha Jane, and listening to her sing. Her songs, often retelling bible stories about God's saving power, such as the one about Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, brought the Gospel to life. Martha Jane herself, would soon lead Augustus to freedom. His father, Peter Paul, had already escaped the Elliot Plantation to fight (and die) for their freedom in the Civil War, when Martha Jane decided to flee for the free state of Illinois, 20 miles to the East across the wide Mississippi River.
6. Led by his mother, Augustus, and his two siblings, Charley and Anne, fled into the night. No one knows for certain exactly how Martha Jane and the children made it all those miles to the Mississippi River, while managing to carry Anne (who was only 2!) and hiding during daylight hours from bounty hunters. But we do know they escaped across the Mississippi River to Illinois in a dilapidated rowboat and under fire from Confederate soldiers! Augustus later recalled that the promised price for finding their family, whether they be dead or alive, was \$200. This would be the equivalent of \$7,000 in today's money.

*All biblical passages are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

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7. Martha Jane and her children settled in Quincy, IL, which was a stop along the Underground Railroad. There, she and Charley and Augustus worked at a factory that made cigars. During the winter, when the factory was less busy, Augustus was able to attend the school at St. Boniface Catholic Parish. But his schooling there was not successful. Though he tried to be a good student, his attendance was not frequent enough for him to learn well. But worse was that Augustus was mistreated and bullied by the other students and their families because he was Black. The community of people attending the school would make no room for Augustus to learn! Eventually, they made him feel so unwelcome that his mother sought help to support his education somewhere else.
8. Martha Jane moved Augustus to St. Lawrence Catholic School. There, they met Fr. Peter McGirr who was an Irish immigrant and a good pastor. Fr. McGirr made sure Augustus received an education, and recognizing Augustus's great love of Christ, encouraged him to become a priest. When every seminary in the United States of America refused to admit Augustus because he was a Black man, Fr. McGirr helped him look outside the United States for a place to study. He encouraged Augustus to apply to a seminary in Rome, Italy. At this time in Rome, there was not the same racist discrimination against Blacks as there was in the United States. Augustus was admitted to the seminary in Rome and would become the first Black priest in America!
9. Thea's birth certificate reads "Bertha Bowman." Although she was named after her Aunt Bertha, she was later given the name "Thea" when she became a religious sister. Thea liked her new name for two reasons. It was like her father's name which was "Theon" and meant, in Greek, "gift of God." She was baptized as an Episcopalian at St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Canton, Mississippi in February of 1938. During Thea's lifetime, slavery such as Augustus had endured was not legal in the United States, but racism was common. This meant that people of certain races were not treated the same as those from other races, nor given the same opportunities. In Thea's home state of Mississippi and others where slavery had been practiced, white leaders and a majority of white people still held racist beliefs about people whose skin was not white. Based on these beliefs white communities enacted different types of laws and customs that discriminated against and oppressed those who had black or brown skin.
10. In 1946, a group of Catholic religious sisters, the Missionaries of the Holy Trinity, arrived in Canton. They started the Holy Child Jesus Mission to serve the Blacks who were poor and oppressed due to racism. The sisters lived simply and worked together. They served those most in need as a way of living their faith and following the example and teachings of Jesus. The next year, in 1947, Thea was so inspired by the Missionaries she met and their work with the poor that she converted to Catholicism, and lived the Gospel also. As a Catholic, Thea lived her Christian faith as her family and her community had taught her: with her whole Black self, and with the whole of her life (Nutt, *Thea Bowman: In My Own Words*, 43).
11. Because of segregationist laws in Mississippi, the public schools that were open to Black students lacked support and funding. Thea's education suffered while she attended them. When she was old enough for middle school, she could only read at a third grade level. Fortunately, in 1948, another group of Catholic religious sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, welcomed Thea into a school they were starting. She was part of their very first class for sixth grade at Holy Child Jesus Mission School. This experience changed Thea's life because she was part of a caring community that made God's love known and real! Reflecting on her experiences as a grown-up, she explained it saying, "We loved our teachers because they first loved us...the school was graced and grace-filled" (Nutt, *Free and Faithful*, 24)

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12. By experiencing the love of her teachers and seeing their joy as they shared God's love with others in service, Thea learned what might be possible for her own life. Her relationship with these holy women and the experiences in their community taught Thea how she could also be truly happy and fulfilled. When she was fifteen years old, Thea decided she would join them as a Franciscan Sister of Perpetual Adoration and become who she was meant to become: Sister Thea, FSPA. Thea would be their first and only Black sister. As Thea would often sing, "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine!"

13. *"Come, follow me," Jesus said ... [Y]our light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."*

14. While attending seminary at the College for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, Augustus joined other men attending studying to become priests from all over the world: the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. There, he experienced, for the first time, true Catholicity. He understood from this that the Catholic religion was for all people, of all races, no matter where they lived around the globe and that the "Church" truly is a community of people who have a relationship with Jesus through prayer and who share the love it creates in their lives. Augustus learned, for the first time and fully, that he belonged, just as much as his neighbor, in love and in true friendship with God through Christ. In Christ, God had been born in a manger and died upon the cross for each and everyone, equally and completely. Of his fellow students, Augustus said, "All were my friends; they loved me" (Duriga, 30).
15. Augustus was ordained a priest on April 24, 1886 in St. John Lateran Church in Rome. It was Holy Saturday. The next day, on Easter Sunday, he offered his first Mass at St. Peter's Basilica. Forty days later, on Ascension Thursday, he was sent back home to minister in Quincy, IL.
16. Arriving in Quincy, Augustus was welcomed by Martha Jane and Anne, and also with festivities organized by Fr. McGirr, including a brass band and a horse-drawn, flower-draped carriage! On July 25, a ceremony was held celebrating the beginning of Fr. Augustus' work as the pastor of St. Joseph's Church, Quincy's parish serving Black people. The church was crowded every Sunday for Mass and attended by both Blacks and whites. Reports tell us that the faithful flocked to St. Joseph's because of Fr. Augustus' "whole souledness," his fine preaching and his "rich and full" singing voice (Hemesath, 178). Blacks and whites alike waited in line together to see him for Confession because of his genuine love for all people. In Fr. Augustus, all people in Quincy experienced God's friendship, which had "bent low" to all in a stable in Bethlehem.
17. However, Fr. Augustus was not happy in Quincy. Even with his church full every Sunday, he had great difficulty in caring for the people of his parish, who were the Black Catholics of Quincy. Many of them suffered greatly from poverty and the effects of racism. He felt powerless to help them. On top of this, his success in drawing so many to worship at St. Joseph's, made other priests angry and jealous. They persecuted Fr. Tolton. They refused to share money that might have been offered in support of the parish and its people. They also told white people not to attend St. Joseph's for Mass, even if they preferred the liturgy and Fr. Augustus there.
18. This persecution was hard to endure for many reasons. It was difficult for him to see that people leading the Church, though given a sacred task to complete and many privileges, were still sinful and could be petty and hurtful. Augustus remembered his time in Rome and it gave him hope for the future. He believed that in

time, the Church in the United States could become more of what God had made it to be and reflect the true Catholicity of the global Church. He understood that, while the Church as he experienced it in Quincy was imperfect, the love of God active within it and working through its faithful people, could bring its perfection. Despite the often-times racist treatment by other priests, he never wavered in his belief that the Catholic faith was the religion that could offer true freedom for all people, including Black people. In one of his reflections on his experiences in Rome, he expressed this, saying, “There were students from Africa, China, Japan, and other parts of the world. The Church, which knows and makes no distinction in race and color, had called them all. When the Church does all of this, is she not a true liberator of the race? In this Church we do not have to fight for our rights because we are Black. She had colored saints--Saint Augustine, Saint Benedict the Moor, Saint Monica, the mother of Saint Augustine. The Church is broad and liberal. She is the Church for our people” (Duriga, 58).

19. This Church now has the witness of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton who is on his way to being canonized a saint. His example of God’s love, made visible in his words, actions, and manner of living shows us how “broad and liberal” God’s love is, sanctifying and constituting the Church. God’s Love, whose first home was but a stable in Bethlehem, is our home.
20. Thea let her light shine in many ways, mostly through her teaching and preaching in many places. This included her home in Canton, MS at Holy Child Jesus Mission School. But her very first teaching assignment was at a wealthy school for white children in LaCrosse, Wisconsin. When she first arrived there, many people resented her and discriminated against her because of her race. Even in states where slavery had never been practiced, many white people were unkind and afraid of others who were different. They accepted the unequal treatment Black people routinely experienced as they sought education, work, and housing. But Sr. Thea did not let this discourage her. She kept being joyous and loving. Quickly, she became everyone’s favorite teacher. She once shared how the children “will remember being part of a community of faith and love” (Nutt, *Free and Faithful*, 79). Thea let Christ’s light shine through her love for all as she went on to teach in many different places, including Xavier University in New Orleans.
21. As Sr. Thea shined God’s love, she often echoed Fr. Augustus’ invitation for all people to follow a call to holiness through the Catholic faith. “Children of the universe,” she declared, “we come together in Jesus’ name, and the only answer that we can offer to one another is the love that is found in The Word of God, the love that is shared and celebrated in Jesus’ name. Love, enunciated in a thousand languages, a thousand symbols, a thousand rituals, a thousand ways so that the giftedness and the heritage of the multiplicity of God’s people becomes available to all of us and to the church that we call our home...” (Nutt, *In My Own Words*, 71).
22. By living a life of love for God and others, Thea had experienced true freedom. She wanted others to experience the freedom of God’s love too. The Church, said Thea, calls us “to be ourselves” (Nutt, *Free and Faithful*, 78) And to be yourself, she knew, you must be free; you must know God loves you.

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23. *“Pray then like this:
Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our debts,
As we also have forgiven our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.”*

24. Archbishop Patrick Feehan asked Fr. Tolton to move to Chicago, which he did in December of 1889, just before Christmas. There Augustus started a new parish, St. Monica’s Catholic Church. This was the first Catholic Church in Chicago for Blacks. At first they met in the basement of a white parish, St. Mary’s Church. But Fr. Augustus soon began to raise money for their own church building at the corner of Dearborn and 36th Sts. Fr. Tolton wanted to build a home for the Black Catholics of Chicago, especially those who were neglected, the poor, and those without opportunities or power.
25. Fr. Augustus often traveled, asking people to donate money so he could care for his parish and build a church building where they could celebrate the holy Mass. One person who helped him was Katherine Drexel, a wealthy white woman who had chosen to become a religious sister and use her fortune to serve the poor and needy across the United States. Katherine, who later became a saint herself, sent him \$36,000 (which is like sending a million dollars today!). Fr. Augustus was encouraged by Katherine’s generosity and thanked her saying, “We are glad we can look forward in hope” (Hemesath, 206).
26. When Fr. Augustus first arrived, St. Monica’s had just 30 parishioners. The parish would grow to 600, with both Blacks and whites in the community. People attending his parish of all races were at home together because of Fr. Augustus’ witness. One episode from his ministry is especially telling. We hear of it in one of his letters to St. Katherine:
27. “Just last Sunday night I was called to the deathbed of a Colored woman who had been away from her duties [i.e. away from the Mass] for nine years because she was hurled out of a white church and even cursed by an Irish member. Very bad indeed! She sent for me and thanked God that she had a priest to send for” (Hemesath, 206).
28. For Catholics like this woman, people who had been mistreated by members of their own religion, Augustus radiated God’s light in a special way and gave them hope. His witness allowed them to see their own dignity and created a sense of belonging to Christ and his Church. They had a loving priest in Fr. Augustus, and knew that through his witness Christ came into their homes to become “their daily bread.”

29. When Augustus moved to Chicago, Martha Jane and Anne came with him. They helped him in his ministry of tending to the sick and caring for the poor. Living together in a one-room apartment, they often invited others to share a meal. A rosary with big black beads hung by the dining table. It was a promise of spiritual refreshment after the meal.
30. This one-room apartment from which flowed the works of mercy, offers an image of Fr. Augustus's life. His humble heart, where love for the Lord and His Church, resembled the home God had made for Himself so as to dwell amongst us. And so Fr. Augustus' heart continued to be such a home, as he gave all his heart, mind, soul and strength to pastor St. Monica's Church.
31. "One of the things Black folk give to the church is freedom. My people," said Thea, "have this thing—praise the Lord with your whole heart, mind and spirit. Freeing your mind and imagination is to see the good things the Lord has done for us" (Nutt, *Faithful & Free*, 78). Like Fr. Augustus, Sr. Thea was "whole-souled."
32. Thea recognized that, because of their experiences, Blacks understood freedom in a unique way and this understanding was an important contribution to offer the Church. For Thea, lessons about freedom and what it meant to be Black and Catholic were a central part of the education she offered the whole Church. She taught courses on Black History and Black Spirituality. She traveled the country speaking and interviewing on television. Thea also published a hymnal of Black spiritual songs, titled *Lead Me, Guide Me*. Everyone, both those inside the Church and outside it, understood Thea's gifts as a teacher and preacher. In 1989, very sick with cancer, Sr. Thea was even invited to teach the U.S. Bishops. Despite her illness, Thea spoke to these important men with poised eloquence from her wheelchair as their sister saying,
33. "The Church teaches us that the Church is a family. It is a family of families, and the families got to stay together. We know that if we do stay together, if we walk and talk and work and play and stand together in Jesus' name, we'll be who we say we are, truly Catholic; and we shall overcome—overcome the poverty, overcome the loneliness, overcome the alienation and build together a holy city, a new Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know we are his because we love one another" (Nutt, *In My Own Words*, 33).
34. By the end of Sr. Thea's words to them, the bishops were in tears. Sr. Thea had shown them something larger than even her whole soul and her whole heart. She had shown them that their own hearts must be truly free, without being bound to anything (including prejudices that still exist from the long history of racism in the United States), to follow the Lord's greatest commandment. She had shown them the heart of the Gospel. Hearts filled with the Gospel are hearts that can "build together a holy city, a new Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know we are his because we love one another" (33).
35. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you..."*
36. Fr. Augustus died when he was only 43 years old. It was July 9, 1897 and Chicago was experiencing an intense heat wave with temperatures as high as 105 degrees. Fr. Augustus collapsed on the sidewalk with heat stroke, and died shortly after being taken to a nearby hospital. Those who knew him, however, had seen that his health had been declining for some time. They had noticed how he had to sit to deliver sermons, and that he was

sweating and shaky much of the time. It was clear to them that, out of love for his Church, Fr. Augustus had worked himself to utter exhaustion. They saw, and now we see, that Fr. Augustus had loved them as Christ, to the very end.

37. Sr. Thea died of breast cancer on March 30, 1990. She was barely 52 years old. At her request, her tombstone shares her service to the end, reading, “I tried.” She had been known as saying in life, “I want people to remember that I tried to love the Lord and that I tried to love them” (107). Sr. Thea’s life-long effort to shine the light of Christ’s love was a living prayer. She asked Our Father that “Thy kingdom come,” even into our own homes and our own hearts so that we might all see who we are: God’s children, free to love because loved by God.”

38. Echoing Christ, Sr. Thea and Fr. Augustus challenge us today:

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Love one another.

Thy Kingdom come!

In fact, this challenge to love one another is presented to us every time we celebrate the Eucharist at Mass. The Eucharist is the Sacrament of Love, and when we receive the Eucharist God comes to us to help us love one another. Because the saints join us in offering the Mass to God, Fr. Tolton and Sr. Thea are there with us, celebrating too. Perhaps we can remember their Christ-like witness when, before receiving the Eucharist, we say: “Lord I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

Works Cited

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Glossary

Admit: to allow someone to attend school or enter into a place or group.

Alienation: the state of being separated or estranged.

Birth Certificate: a legal document that communicates important “official” details about a person’s status at birth, such as their date of birth, parents’ names, and official name, etc.

Bounty Hunters: people who were paid to find, capture (and sometimes kill) enslaved people who were seeking freedom or fugitives on the run.

Dilapidated: falling apart or in a state of disrepair.

Jim Crow: racial segregation and discrimination enforced by laws, customs, and practices, particularly as institutionalized throughout the South from the end of Reconstruction in 1877 until the mid-20th century.

Discrimination: the unfair treatment of one group of people based on their race, gender, or another characteristic. It might be privately practiced by a particular person or by an entire group. It might also be built-into the laws and rules of a particular organization such as a city.

Exhaustion: a state where a person’s body systems are strained and without energy.

Flee: to run away from danger; to escape enslavement and seek freedom by moving to a state where slavery was illegal (i.e., a free state).

Flocked: the movement of a large group of people together, towards or away from something.

Heat stroke: a condition when a person's body is so hot it is unable to regulate body temperature; can cause injury or even.

Hymnal: a collection of religious songs, suitable for singing as worship.

Legal: something allowed by law in a town, city, county, state, or country.

Ordination: the process of becoming Catholic priest through the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Ordained: to undergo or receive ordination.

Plantation: an estate or large piece of land on which crops are grown; in the slave-holding South these estates would grow valuable crops, such as cotton, tobacco, and sugar. Enslaved men, women, and children were forced to work the fields under brutal conditions.

Property: something that a person owns and has control over.

Racism: a belief, whether conscious or unconscious, that race fundamentally determines a person’s traits and capacities and that such differences in race create a superior race; the discrimination against a person or a group of people because of their race. The term can be used to describe a personal interaction (one person mistreating another person) or a much larger, systematic, long-term mistreatment of a group of people. Racism is a sin because it tears apart the unity of the human family and violates justice.

Glossary cont.

Seminary: a school where men study to become priests.

Slave Quarters: the very primitive dwellings provided for people being held as slaves; typically made with logs and had wood or dirt floors; if there were windows these were generally without glass.

Underground Railroad: a loosely organized system of hidden locations “stations” where enslaved people seeking freedom could hide, rest, and replenish supplies on their way to a free state; “Station masters” were people who provided these safe havens and helped the enslaved people move from one to another, without being detected; not a real railroad but called this as a metaphor.

The background features a white page with decorative elements. On the left side, there are three overlapping, pointed shapes filled with a teal marbled paper pattern. At the top and bottom center, there are small, downward-pointing triangular shapes in a muted red color.

Student Guide

Read 1: Comprehension of the Text

Student Worksheet with Guiding Questions

Please do your best to respond to the questions as you read. They will be discussed with the class and will prepare you to participate in the discussion.

1. The quote in Section 1 is from the Scripture presented in the Bible. Perhaps it is familiar. Who is the child that is born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes?
2. How long ago did Augustus and Thea live, and how long a time period was there between their births? How long did each live? What were some of the events, inventions, and social changes going on in the world around them at the time?
3. How did Augustus and his family escape across the Mississippi? Where did they go? What was it like for them there? What kind of a student was he? What did he decide he wanted to do with this life as he was becoming an adult?
4. What was Thea's family like? What do you learn about her from what is shared about her name?

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10. What did Thea do in 1989? To whom did she speak? Why is this significant?

11. How did Augustus die? How old was he? Is the age of his death surprising?

12. How did Thea die? How old was she?

13. What questions do I have about the text? Do I need clarifications that will help me understand it better?

Read 2: Racism and its Effects

Student Worksheet with Guiding Questions

Please do your best to respond to the questions as you read. They will be discussed with the class and will prepare you to participate in the discussion.

1. Thea and Augustus lived during different time periods. What are some of the examples of racism during each time period?
2. What does it mean that Augustus grew up enslaved and on a plantation? What would his experiences have been like? How might this have influenced how he might have felt, how he might have thought about himself and his place in the world, and his future opportunities?
3. After Augustus and his family escaped from being enslaved, they began a new life in Quincy, Illinois, which was in the North. What was this like for them? How did it compare with their previous life?
4. Why was Augustus unable to attend a Seminary in the United States? How did his time in Rome shape him?

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11. The text ends with the following: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Love one another. Thy Kingdom come!” Based on what you have read in the text, how would you say that either Thea or Augustus made this true with their lives? What does this mean about being a saint?

12. Looking back at the childhood experiences of Thea and Augustus, how do you think they were able to grow to be such holy persons when they faced such struggles in their younger years? How does their perseverance through these hardships reflect Christ in his own childhood?

13. When saints like Augustus and Thea are referred to as “another Christ” or “alter Christus” what do you think that means? How can we understand this better from the lives of Thea and Augustus?

14. Christ tells us both to turn the other cheek and to correct injustices that we meet in this world. How did Thea and Augustus both confront racial injustices in their lives and at the same time live out that commandment of love for enemies without revenge or anger toward them?



Teacher Guide



Framing the Lesson and Introducing Read One

In this lesson, students will read a rich and layered text. To gain greater comprehension of it and all the things that can be learned from it, students will read it four different times. The teacher will want to facilitate the four readings in a way that best meets student needs. By the end of the exploration, students will have gained deeper insights into the lives of Venerable Augustus Tolton and Servant of God Thea Bowman, the history of racial injustice in the United States, and the Black Catholic experience. Students will also develop some advanced reading competencies.

In the first reading of the text, students will focus on comprehension. Ideally, students will understand more about the events in the lives of Augustus Tolton and Thea Bowman and how they responded to these events. As students read, they will notice that they will sometimes need to “read between the lines,” to understand what is going on more fully. Not everything in the text is explained; this gives students room to participate in the interpretation of the text. Students should be encouraged to focus on what happens as well as when and how it happens. It may help to imagine what it would be like to be the people in the text.

As students read, they will want to pay attention to the visual appearance of the fonts that are used. They should notice three different styles. These differences in formatting are intended to assist your reading. See if they can figure out how.

What is communicated in the text and how it is communicated are both important. Students will need to puzzle a bit as they contemplate the series of episodes in the lives of Fr. Augustus Tolton and Sr. Thea Bowman and their pairing with Scripture.

A glossary is provided to help students understand any words they may not have familiarity with. Refer to it if it is helpful.

With each reading, students will find it helpful to use the worksheets with guiding questions that are provided. The questions will help draw their attention to different details, and they should take notes as they read. The teacher should explain how the four readings and discussions will proceed.

Read 1: Comprehension of the Text

Guiding Questions with Teacher Notes

1. The quote in Section 1 is from the Scripture presented in the Bible. Perhaps it is familiar. Who is the child that is born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes?

Possible Student Response: The child is Jesus.

Teacher Follow-up: In our fourth and final read, we will dig more deeply into the significance of the connections between Jesus and Augustus, but as we do the other reads, please begin to think about this.

2. How long ago did Augustus and Thea live, and how long a time period was there between their births? How long did each live? What were some of the events, inventions, and social changes going on in the world around them at the time?

Possible Student Response: Augustus was born in 1854 (168 years ago, 1854-1897), and Thea was born in 1937 (85 years ago). Augustus lived 43 years, Thea 52. In the time Augustus was living, slavery was abolished, train travel became common, and science was gaining ground (e.g., germs were discovered). During Thea's lifetime, the United States established itself as an industrialized society, World War II occurred, and the Civil Rights Movement happened. These things greatly changed society.

Teacher Follow-up: The teacher will want to emphasize that Thea and Gus did not live at the same time (if Augustus was alive when Thea was born he would have been in his 80s.) and that they experienced very different conditions of daily life. For example, Gus would not have enjoyed basic things like electricity, and he would have traveled by foot, by horse, or by train. Thea would have seen a world of automobiles, radios, televisions and electrified technology. The world in her lifetime was characterized by a massive boom in technologies and population, followed by major social unrest revolving around how people live (civil rights, sexual revolution, etc.).

3. How did Augustus and his family escape across the Mississippi? Where did they go? What was it like for them there? What kind of a student was he? What did he decide he wanted to do with this life as he was becoming an adult?

Possible Student Response: The Tolton family crossed the Mississippi in a rowboat while being pursued by bounty hunters and shot at. They got over the border into the free state of Illinois and settled in a town called Quincy, where slavery was illegal. Augustus struggled in school initially because of his poor attendance due to a need to hold a job to support his family. Eventually, after getting a better education and meeting a wonderful Irish priest, Augustus decided he wanted to become a priest.

Teacher Follow-up: Tomorrow we will talk about this episode again but it is important to appreciate the ordeal Augustus' family went through to escape from the conditions they were living in while they lived in Missouri (where slavery was legal). They experienced danger as they left their home, but they clung to one another and the hope that they might be free in the North. Once they got to Quincy things were still not easy for them, but they had opportunities that never would have been possible in the South. We recognize here that education was important to his mother and it eventually brought him into contact with good people and his vocation. His education provided new opportunities.

TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

4. What was Thea's family like? What do you learn about her from what is shared about her name?

Possible Student Response: Thea was originally given the name "Bertha" by her parents. She received her name "Thea" after she became a religious sister. She liked the name because of its connection to her father and also to God the father. She was born into a well-educated family. Her father was a doctor. Originally Thea was not Catholic but an Episcopalian (another Christian denomination).

Teacher Follow-up: Something we will talk about more with the next read (focusing on racism) is how the hospital in her town would not admit her mother for her birth because she was Black.

5. Why was Augustus unable to go attend a seminary in the United States for his education as a priest? What was different about his experiences in Rome?

Possible Student Response: Seminaries in the U.S. would not accept Black students during Augustus' lifetime. This was not the case in Europe where there was not the same history of legalized slavery.

Teacher Follow-up: The United States, because of its history of slavery was unusual in the world with regard to racism. Rome, because of its ancient roots and geographic location, had long been a place where various groups of people lived and interacted with each other. We will continue to consider Augustus' experience in Rome, which was deeply important for him.

6. What group of religious sisters did Thea join? Where was her first teaching position?

Possible Student Response: Thea joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration as the first and only Black woman. She was assigned to LaCrosse, Wisconsin and taught in one of their schools.

Teacher Follow-up: It was not surprising that Thea would have joined this order given that she had first-hand experience with it and knew they were wonderful women. It is interesting that religious orders serving Blacks in the South during Thea's time were often full of women who were from northern states. Why do you think this is?

7. Who was the rich woman who sent Augustus the money he needed to build his Church? How much did she send him?

Possible Student Response: The rich woman was Katherine Drexel, who later was canonized as a saint. Katherine Drexel was a wealthy young woman who inherited a fortune and instead of spending her money on extravagant living started a religious order devoted to providing education for American Indians and Blacks. She sent Augustus \$36,000, which now would be around 1 million dollars.

Teacher Follow-up: Katherine Drexel ministered to the poor and dispossessed. She is well known for starting schools for Native Americans and others who were discriminated against.

8. Thea continued to be a teacher throughout her life but worked at different educational levels. Where and what did she teach later in her career?

Possible Student Response: Thea taught about Black Catholicism and spirituality at Xavier University, a Catholic university in New Orleans.

Teacher Follow-up: It is interesting to think that in her relatively short life (52 years) so much progress was made. When she was born, hospitals were still segregated. By the time she died, that was not the case.

TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

9. What did Thea do in 1989? To whom did she speak? Why is this significant?

Possible Student Response: In 1989, Thea gave an address to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. This is a gathering of all the Bishops across the country. When the bishops heard Thea speak about her experiences as a Black Catholic, they were moved to tears.

Teacher Follow-up: Think about the significance of a Black woman speaking to an audience of Bishops (almost exclusively white men). Such a thing would have been unimaginable in the 1930's and earlier, but by the 80's a Black woman speaking as an authority could and did happen. What factors influenced this change?

Her address can be viewed [here](#) (full-text is available on the USCCB website).

10. How did Augustus die? How old was he? Is the age of his death surprising?

Possible Student Response: Augustus was 43 years old. He died of heat stroke and exhaustion.

Teacher Follow-up: For a 43 year old to die of heat stroke is uncommon today and would not have been particularly common at the time when Augustus lived. The reader is intended to appreciate that Augustus was overworking himself to care for and love his people. He literally worked himself to death for the sake of those he served and the Church.

11. How did Thea die? How old was she?

Possible Student Response: Thea died of cancer at 52 years old.

Teacher Follow-up: Can you imagine the amazing things that both Thea and Augustus might have accomplished if they lived longer? And yet it seems like their lives were lived completely and well, doesn't it?

Other Questions for Discussion and Engagement

What similarities did you notice between the events in the lives of these two saints? What are some of the differences?

What questions do you still have about these individuals?

What questions do you still have about what you read in the text? What was unclear or confusing?



Introducing Read Two

Jesus was Jewish and lived in the Middle East during the time of the Roman Empire. Augustus Tolton was of African descent and born enslaved during the mid-1800s in the United States. Thea Bowman was a Black woman living in the 20th century, also in the United States. Although each of these individuals is a unique person, all three shared some aspects of their experiences. All three were born into loving families, but also into a world that did not welcome them. All three were immersed in a society where people like them (i.e., Jews or enslaved people, African Americans) were believed to be inferior by those in power (i.e., Romans, those of European descent). This resulted in their mistreatment—both by individuals and also through the systems of society (e.g., laws, customs, and practices). All three lived lives dedicated to others. All three experienced oppression, but they also experienced interior freedom through God’s grace. All three are holy people.

As students read the text this second time, they should use the student worksheet provided for read two to write down what they notice about the experiences Augustus and Thea have in relation to their race and racism. Some of these experiences will be more obvious and others will be less so. It might help you to pay attention to unjust treatment they experience from individuals and also their experiences of how the systems in place oppressed them in ways that did not give them the same rights, freedoms, and opportunities as others.

Read 2: Racism and its Effects

Guiding Questions with Teacher Notes

1. Thea and Augustus lived during different time periods. What are some of the examples of racism during each time period?

Possible Student Response: Augustus was born in 1854 (168 years ago, 1854-1897), and Thea was born in 1937 (85 years ago). They lived roughly 40 years apart from one another. At the time of Augustus' birth, slavery was legal. The Civil War was fought between 1860-1865 and the 13th Amendment to the Constitution outlawed slavery in December 1865. Augustus would have been 11 when this happened. He lived through "Reconstruction," the period which was supposed to dismantle and create new systems to establish greater equality and opportunity for Black Americans. It took a long time to change the unfair laws, systems, and practices that had caused oppression. It also took a long time to change the views, values, and behaviors of individual people.

Thea was born 40 years after Augustus passed away and was born in Mississippi, in the South, where slavery had been legal and much more a part of the culture than the North. During Thea's lifetime (some 72 years after slavery was abolished) there were many social changes. Many of these were related to the increased opportunity Blacks managed to gain and their frustration about the freedoms and opportunities that they still did not have so many years after slavery was abolished. As Blacks gained access to education, economic opportunity, and power and as many whites became more aware of the injustices they had suffered (and continued to suffer) the Civil Rights Movement was born. This social movement involved activists and protests that challenged American citizens (in both the North and South) to change formal laws and systems (e.g., Jim Crow laws), as well as informal conventions that were unfair. It also sought to change the views and values of people who considered non-whites inferior. During Thea's lifetime there continued to be people who justified discriminating against Blacks with the wrong belief that they were inferior to whites.

Teacher Follow-up: It might be helpful to discuss the difference between formal systems and informal systems of oppression/ racism and also why it took such a long time to dismantle them. For example, during Reconstruction slavery was legally outlawed, but many of the new laws and policies reinscribed the oppression Black Americans experienced under slavery. It would also be valuable to discuss the ways that racism manifested itself in the behaviors of people living during Augustus' and Thea's lifetimes. Some discussion of how racism exists and appears today would also be important to include.

TEACHING HUMAN DIGNITY

2. What does it mean that Augustus grew up enslaved and on a plantation? What would his experiences have been like? How might this have influenced how he might have felt, how he might have thought about himself and his place in the world, and his future opportunities?

Possible Student Response: Augustus' growing up on a plantation meant that his family was considered the property of the plantation owner and were not free. They could not own property. They did not have the right to stay together as a family if their enslaver wanted to separate them by selling them. They did not have the ability to attend school or vote. They did not have the protection of law which meant that their enslaver could mistreat them (e.g., starve them, beat them, choose not to give them medical care, even kill them, etc.). Growing up as property and being treated poorly would have made it difficult for him to develop self-confidence and a sense of his equality with other non-slaves.

Teacher follow-up: Slave owners did not treat the people they enslaved in the same way. Some enslaved people were better taken care of by those who held them than others. However, no slaves were free to live with the same rights and privileges as the whites who did or did not own slaves. Augustus' father had escaped slavery, but had died in the Civil War. He was likely motivated to risk his life for the freedom of others like himself.

Note: Recently there has been a recognition of the importance of terminology as it relates to our discussions of slavery. The new preference is for the term "enslaved people" as opposed to "slaves." and "enslavers" instead of "masters," "slave owners," and "slave holders." More information about this can be found [here](#).

3. After Augustus and his family escaped from being enslaved, they began a new life in Quincy, Illinois, which was in the North. What was this like for them? How did it compare with their previous life?

Possible Student Response: The Tolton family's experience in Quincy was not an easy one. Augustus was not treated well by other students and had difficulty succeeding in school because he worked to support his family.

Teacher Follow-up: Racism was also present in the North, although slavery was not legal and a Black person was considered "free." Even in the North, Blacks were not as free as whites because there were unfair systems in place that meant Blacks had to work harder to meet their basic needs (e.g., earn a living, own a home) and to fully participate in society (e.g., vote). An example of this from Augustus' life is that while he could find employment that allowed him to earn a wage (working in a cigar factory) he was probably not paid the same wage as a white employee. Further, his job prospects would have been limited to jobs that were less desirable (harder, dirtier, more dangerous, not well-paid, and with less opportunity for promotion).

4. Why was Augustus unable to attend a Seminary in the United States? How did his time in Rome shape him?

Possible Student Response: Seminaries in the U.S. when Augustus was living would not accept Black students regardless of whether they were in the North or the South. In Rome, Augustus very likely experienced freedom in ways that he had never before. He was less likely to be mistreated and more likely to feel equal to others. For the first time, he might have recognized how unjust the systems in the United States were and how they might be otherwise.

Teacher Follow-up: In Europe, where there was no modern history of legalized slavery, there was a very different attitude toward race. The time Augustus spent in Rome showed him a Church that accepted all regardless of background and color. This showed him the true face of the Church. He could understand how the Church in the United States was infected with the sin of racism.

It might be helpful for the students to imagine how Augustus must have felt in seminary in Rome where he was welcomed and could see the Church responding to him in a different way. What might this have meant to him? How might he have initially reacted? What are some other experiences that he might have had in Rome (e.g., walking in a public park, shopping, taking public transportation) that would have been different than those in the U.S.?

5. What were some of the examples of racism in Thea's early life?

Possible Student Response: Thea's mother could not deliver her daughter in her hometown because the hospital would not admit black patients (even though her father was a doctor!). Thea's education suffered because the public school she attended had fewer resources and teachers.

Teacher follow-up: Although Thea lived a long time after the Civil War and the end of slavery, racism was still experienced across the U.S. in both the North and South (though usually not as acutely in the North and West). It might be worth discussing Thea's experience with religious sisters, which totally changed her life in good ways. Some energy could be invested in talking about the difference in the views about Blacks held by the religious sisters and why this was the case.

Students might find it helpful to consider what it might have been like for Thea to grow up in these circumstances. It could be helpful to discuss her treatment in LaCrosse, her reactions, and how she might have responded differently than she did.

6. When he returned from Rome, Augustus was assigned to minister to a Black parish as its pastor. How was racism evident in his experiences there?

Possible Student Response: The fact that there was a separate parish for Blacks was an indication of racism. Also, the other priests discouraged people from attending his parish and were not generous with their financial and resources to Black Catholics who were struggling.

Teacher follow-up: The separation of Blacks into their own Catholic parish in Quincy and also in Chicago is reflective of racism. It is particularly evident in the first parish in Chicago that shared a Church building with a parish for white but functioned separately. Although this separation of races was not unusual (churches, swimming pools, schools, and other community spaces were still routinely segregated in many areas in the North) it is striking and would have been a contrast from Catholic experiences in Rome and other areas outside the United States.

7. In Rome, Augustus' experience of being fully included in the Catholic Church and his recognition of how others were also included regardless of the race, helped him understand how belief in God and Jesus Christ might affect a conversion in how people thought about and treated one another. Upon what premise should a Christian reject racism if they were living with fidelity to their faith?

Possible Student Response: A Christian believer would reject racism because God created all people out of love and Jesus Christ saved them. Each has dignity regardless of their race and because God loves them.

Teacher follow-up: In our next read, we will talk specifically about the Black Catholic experience and revisit the issues of racism in the Church more deeply and fully.

8. When Thea became a religious sister and was sent to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, how did people respond to her? What does this indicate?

Possible Student Response: In the text, we are told that Thea was not treated well. I imagine people were not friendly to her and spoke about her behind her back but the text is vague here. We are led to believe that there was also racism in the North and among Christians.

Teacher Follow-up: Racism, though often less blatant and extreme, was also deeply ingrained in the northern parts of the United States. When Thea moved to LaCrosse as the first Black sister of her religious order, she was possibly one of the very few Blacks her students had ever met. Although disturbing, it is not surprising that she met prejudice and mistreatment even in this Christian community.

Unfortunately, Catholic parishes were still largely segregated in Thea's lifetime (and they still are in our own time). In some cases, this occurred due to leadership decisions at the diocesan level. In others, it occurred through "happenstance" because of the tendency toward "territorial parishes." What this means is that Catholics were expected to attend a particular parish church based on where they lived. Because of racism (e.g., socioeconomic, a practice called "red lining" that prohibited Blacks from living in certain neighborhoods, etc.), it was common for Blacks and whites to live in different neighborhoods and therefore attend different Catholic parishes.

9. Jesus, as a Jew living in the Roman Empire, Augustus as a former slave living in 19th Century America, and Thea as a Black woman in the early 20th century, are all affected by oppression. What does this common experience look like for each of them? Where is it similar? Different? How would they have been effective on a daily basis?

Possible Student Response: Jesus was born not on a throne or in a palace, but in a humble shelter for animals because there was "no room at the inn." The town of Bethlehem was occupied (as all of this area was) by Romans who had required a census for all inhabitants. As an enslaved person, Augustus was born in a very primitive, dirt-floored hut. Thea was unable to be born at the local hospital, and had to be born further away because Black people were not allowed in the local hospital. Each individual from the very beginning of their lives, experienced the effects of oppression. As their lives continued, this continued in varying ways.

Teacher Follow-up: Our Catholic faith suggests that oppression exists in Creation due to our sin, which tears apart the unity of the human family. Catholics believe we must cooperate with God's grace to create just and loving communities.

11. Racism can be both systemic (built into society in ways that promote inequality) and personal (decisions and actions taken by individuals). Can you use these terms to describe episodes and experiences in the lives of Augustus and Thea?

Possible Student Response: Jesus was born not on a throne or in a palace, but in a humble shelter for animals because there was "no room at the inn." The town of Bethlehem was occupied (as all of this area was) by Romans who had required a census for all inhabitants. As an enslaved person, Augustus was born in a very primitive, dirt-floored hut. Thea was unable to be born at the local hospital, and had to be born further away because Black people were not allowed in the local hospital. Each individual from the very beginning of their lives, experienced the effects of oppression. As their lives continued, this continued in varying ways.

Teacher Follow-up: Our Catholic faith suggests that oppression exists in Creation due to our sin, which tears apart the unity of the human family. Catholics believe we must cooperate with God's grace to create just and loving communities.

10. How was racism different at the time when Augustus was living than when Thea was living? What had changed in those years between them? What hadn't?

Possible Student Response: Racism during Augustus' was more extreme than it was during Thea's lifetime. There were few to no legal protections for Black Americans (depending on one's geographic location across the U.S.) or for other marginalized groups. This made it easier and more common for people who were racist to mistreat others and they did so in many, varied, and terrible ways.

At the time of Augustus' birth (1854) it was legal to enslave Black people, to control all aspects of their lives, to sell them as property, to abuse them in different and horribly damaging ways, to separate families, and even to kill them. Racism was at the heart of slavery, but even though it was abolished during Augustus' lifetime it was such a long-established and all-pervasive system that it continues to have effects long after its legal abolition.

Over Thea's lifetime, the face of racism changed. There were more laws and legal protections put in place for Blacks and people from other marginalized races. However, racist beliefs were still very much in the hearts, minds, behaviors and practices of many people and communities. Racism was still institutionalized, meaning that there were not equal opportunities for all people. The Civil Rights Movement, a nonviolent social movement and campaign from 1954 to 1968 in the United States is the most noteworthy catalyst for wide-spread social change addressing racism. This had the effect of overturning segregation laws and enabling people from marginalized communities opportunities to access equal education, etc. Thea's opportunities as a Black woman to receive an excellent education and become a national leader are fruits of these social changes.

Teacher Follow-up: Even after the formal end of slavery, racism continued to impact laws, beliefs, and customs. Racist beliefs and attitudes were built into systems, laws, community norms, and more. For example, even though Black Americans were no longer legally enslaved, their life and freedoms did not have the same protections as those who were not Black. It was possible to kill a free Black person without reason, take their land from them without warrant, and accuse them falsely and ruin their reputation with no legal consequences. Racism also motivated laws that prevented people from voting and accessing education. By the time of his death in 1897, some positive changes had been made to curtail the effects of racism. Slavery was abolished with the 13th amendment in 1865 and, Black men gained the right to vote in 1870. But forward progress was often frustrated. After the Civil Rights Act of 1875 made it a crime for an individual to deny "the full and equal enjoyment of any of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, public conveyances on land or water, theaters and other places of public amusement; subject only to the conditions and limitations established by law, and applicable alike to citizens of every race and color," the Supreme Court enshrined segregation in federal law with the Plessy v. Ferguson decision. This established the legality of "equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races." This happened in 1896, one year before the death of Augustus, and it was still the "law of the land" when Thea was born in 1937. It would take another 20 years before this ruling was overturned by the Brown V. Board of Education of Topeka supreme court decision. This is why Thea was forced to be born in a neighboring town's hospital, and also why the quality Catholic education she received was so valued.

Over time in different geographic areas (e.g., Southeast, Midwest, etc.) and locales (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) legal protections, community norms, and more changed with regard to racism. At the same time, many beliefs, attitudes, and customs continue to persist. Racism continues to manifest itself in different ways today. We must continue to combat racism and work to purge it from our systems and in our hearts.

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Possible Student Response: One of the biggest differences between racism in Augustus' time and Thea's time is legalized slavery. Augustus was born before the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved persons; Thea was born after the end of slavery, but before the Civil Rights Movement.

Teacher Follow-up: How do we see racism playing itself out today? One example I can think of being brought to our attention is the unequal punishments given through the justice system when Blacks commit crimes. Two people, of different races, often commit the same offense (e.g., selling drugs, stealing a car) and receive very different punishments (e.g., a longer prison sentence for a person who is Black). Another effect I can think of is that over many generations, Black people have had less financial opportunity. For example, historically Black people were not able to access government-sponsored loans for education or housing. This means that across generations they have less accumulated wealth to share with one another and their upward mobility has not matched that of non-Blacks. What are some other long-term remnants of racism that limit opportunities and rights for Black people?

13. Racism can be both systemic (built into society in ways that promote inequality) and personal (decisions and actions taken by individuals). Can you use these terms to describe episodes and experiences in the lives of Augustus and Thea?

Possible Student Response: In Augustus' life, systemic racism is evident in legalized slavery and the discrimination he encountered at his first school. Systemic racism was evident in the fact that he could not attend a U.S. seminary. Personal racism was evident when other priests in his diocese persecuted him. In Thea's life, systemic racism is evident in the separate and unequal educational experiences that were available to her and other Black children. Systemic racism was also evident in the segregated hospitals at the time of her birth. She experienced personal racism in the community's treatment of her when she arrived in LaCrosse, WI. Systemic racism was evident in the segregated hospitals at the time of her birth.

Teacher Follow-up: There are lots of ways to think about oppression and racism but these categories are helpful as we try to wrap our minds around such a pervasive and perduring legacy.

12. If you “read into” how Augustus and Thea responded to different experiences in their lives, what can you infer about their personalities, motivations/goals, and their virtue in the face of the racism they experienced?

Possible Student Response: Both Augustus and Thea seemed to be able not to get discouraged by the racism they experienced and continued to be kind, generous, charitable, positive, and faithful people.

Teacher Follow-up: What I find interesting about Thea and Augustus is the way the challenges they experienced formed their personalities in unexpected ways. Both probably grew up in faith-filled families and shared the desire to serve their community. In the face of the sin of racism, Augustus and Thea persevered in faith, hope, and charity. Can you explain other things that helped them persevere in holiness in spite of all the forces working against them?

14. How is the experience of Augustus and Thea different from your own as a person growing up today? As a person living today who is growing up Black?

Possible Student Response: The most obvious difference is that legalized slavery and segregation no longer exist. The experiences of Blacks in education, health care, and the Church are better on the whole than they were 100 years ago. For example, a Black man growing up today would be able to attend seminary in the United State. Yet there is still so much more progress to make in terms of personal racism and systemic racism. A person growing up Black today may still experience racism in a lot of different ways, including “racial profiling,” more limited educational opportunities, healthcare and income inequality, discrimination in the workplace, and more.

Teacher Follow-up: The scholarly consensus suggests that Black Americans continue to encounter systemic and personal instances of racism. But there is hope. In 2019, Pew Research found that 93% of adults surveyed recognized that Black Americans are at some disadvantage due to racial discrimination. There are many things that impact how people view the significance of race in the contemporary world: political differences, age cohort differences, “racial” identity differences, and economic class. Working toward more racially just communities will require genuine dialogue across difference and disagreement.

15. What successes did Augustus and Thea experience in their combat against racism in their own times?

Possible Student Response: Augustus worked to alleviate the effects of racism for his community members— working to provide them the things they needed to survive (food, shelter, community, education, etc.) At this time, there were fewer societal supports, so those through the Church were really important. Thea did a great deal to challenge the Church to become more inclusive of Blacks and even more to appreciate the gifts that Black Catholics offer the Church.

Teacher Follow-up: Augustus was a part of a long tradition in the Church that prioritized charity to the poor. His ministry was important and there were many Catholic ministries that made an impact in combating racism. Thea’s scholarship, preaching, and example, did a lot to help the Church. The presentation to the Bishops did a lot to make this point, though much more progress is needed in the Church as it relates to

16. What questions do you still have about what you read in the text? What was unclear or confusing about their experiences as they relate to racism?



Introducing Read Three

The experience of people who are both Black and Catholic is important to understand. Examining it through the lives of Augustus and Thea can teach the Church a lot about faith. It can help them learn about the common hurts and difficulties Black Catholics experience. It can also reveal some of the ways the Church might seek to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ more fully and deeply. Further, it can show us the particular struggles of Black Catholics and gifts they offer the Church.

In this read, the focus is on what can be learned about the experience of Black Catholics based on the lives of Augustus and Thea. They are just two people, but their experiences offer some insights that can be generalized more broadly across the experiences of all Black Catholics.

Read 3: The Black Catholic Experience

Guiding Questions with Teacher Notes

1. When he was a child, Augustus' mother often sang "spirituals," a genre of songs that were important to enslaved people and are still important to the Black community today. These songs are characterized by many scriptural references to the experiences of the Jewish people (who were also enslaved), a longing for freedom and an unwavering trust in God. Why do you think these songs were important to the Black community? Do you think it is possible that hearing these songs from a young age influenced Augustus? How?

Possible Student Response: The songs sung by the enslaved people helped them keep their hope alive and survive the oppression of slavery. They demonstrated their faith in a God who loved them in spite of the evils of this world and reminded them that they would someday be free from troubles and woes and spend eternity with God. The songs reminded them that, although they were not free in many ways, they were free to love God and model the love of Jesus Christ in their own lives. This love of God and these songs were passed along to their children and became an important part of the culture, keeping the freed descendants of former slaves connected to their past and reminded of the triumph of their freedom. Augustus could not have helped but be influenced by these songs from the time he was a boy. He lived the hope they inspired his entire life.

Teacher Follow-up: The spirituals that were so important to this community offer a tremendous gift to the Church. Thea Bowman dedicated much of her life to communicating how being Catholic didn't mean losing oneself but rather bringing oneself fully into participation in the Church.

2. When Augustus first attended school in Quincy at St. Boniface Parish School, it was unsuccessful because people there were not acting in a Christ-like way to him. Do you think that the people at St. Boniface who bullied Augustus saw the contradiction between their behaviors and how Jesus would have wanted them to behave? What would you have said to enlighten them?

Possible Student Response: It is pretty clear that the people at St. Boniface, for a lot of different reasons probably, could not see the problems with their own behaviors. Sometimes, when something becomes normal, it is invisible. One way to enlighten these people would have been to point out that God loves all people and Christ died for their salvation. It is not right to treat some people with love and others with scorn because we are called to be like Christ who loves all.

Teacher Follow-up: It must have been particularly difficult for Augustus each time people in the Church, people who knew better, were racist toward him. Yet he continued to strive to be like Christ instead of letting the treatment he endured make him bitter or fall away from his faith.

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3. Augustus' experience was different at St. Lawrence Catholic School, in large part due to an Irish priest named Fr. McGirr. How did Fr. McGirr help him?

Possible Student Response: Fr. McGirr loved Augustus as Jesus Christ. He saw Augustus as capable and worthy of love. Fr. McGirr helped Augustus get a good education, affirmed his goodness and talent, and helped him find a way to be a priest. It was a really smart thing to suggest going to Rome. Being from another country probably meant that Fr. McGirr was more aware of how things were different outside the U.S.

Teacher Follow-up: We can see the Holy Spirit was working through Augustus' experiences. We see here how God can bring good from evil. Augustus' mistreatment at St. Boniface eventually led him to Fr. McGirr. If he hadn't met Fr. McGirr, he may not have become a priest.

4. What challenges did Thea face in being educated as a child? What was the significance of the Catholic religious sisters and the education they made available to her?

Possible Student Response: The public schools for Blacks in Thea's community were separate and not equal to those of whites. Her parents' decision to send her to Catholic school run by religious sisters made it possible for her to receive a good education which probably changed her career trajectory — she converted to Catholicism, and later she became a Catholic sister, whose mission it was to educate others, first teaching in elementary school and as college professor.

Teacher Follow-up: In school, she not only learned math, science, and history; she also learned to think about the purpose of her life as a person of faith. This changed not only what she was able to do but what she was striving for. Her experiences in Catholic schools introduced her to a lifelong community in which to belong and grow in holiness.

5. How do you think Augustus might have felt when he went to Rome and discovered that the racism he experienced in the United States was not present in other countries? What did he discover about the Catholic Church that his experiences of the Church in the United States had not taught him?

Possible Student Response: In Rome, Augustus discovered the Church as universal, and he was accepted in the Catholic Church simply as a fellow Catholic. He likely felt hopeful for the first time for a Church in which Black people were regarded as equal, and not looked down upon by their fellow faithful. It is likely this that helped sustain him in his struggles in the U.S.

Teacher Followup: Look at his experience in Rome and think about Fr. Tolton's future efforts in building the Church in the U.S. See if you can find a common thread in how he pushed for a Church of love, not exclusion. Think also about how this experience must have helped him sustain hope for the Church in America, having seen firsthand what the Church is meant to be.

As students consider the racism in the Church, it is important to emphasize how the Church is at once holy (because it is founded on the perfect love of Christ) and also in a state of journeying and striving to become more fully what it is created to be. The sin in the Church exists because there are sinners in the Church. The Church must strive to become what it is, Christ's body on earth.

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6. Thea was Black, but her experience gave her insights into the experiences of all peoples in the Church. She realized that God loves each member and group in the Church and that all of their experiences (especially those of faith) were important gifts to the Church. How does her own writing reflect this?

Possible Student Response: An example of Thea's writing from the text reads, "Children of the universe, we come together in Jesus' name, and the only answer that we can offer to one another is the love that is found in The Word of God, the love that is shared and celebrated in Jesus' name. Love, enunciated in a thousand languages, a thousand symbols, a thousand rituals, a thousand ways so that the giftedness and the heritage of the multiplicity of God's people becomes available to all of us and to the church that we call our home..."

Teacher Follow-up: What do you think about this beautiful idea? Have you experienced the different gifts of cultures that are a part of the Church? What are some of them? Could the experiences that Thea had feeling excluded help her recognize the importance of finding a home in Jesus and his Church?

7. Why was Father Augustus's building of a Church for Black Catholics in Chicago so significant? What did it mean for his parishioners? Imagine how they might have felt having to meet in the basement of a white church before their own parish was built. What was it like to have their own church? Describe it if you can.

Possible Student Response: Fr. Augustus' building of a Church for Black Catholics in Chicago was significant because it created a space for Black Catholics "worship without fear." Before having their own building, they were forced to meet in the basement of a white church. They would have felt looked down upon by white parishioners, rejected from full communion for no reason other than the color of their skin. When they had their own church, they might have felt as though they really belonged.

Teacher Followup: Remember the experiences Augustus had all the way back in Quincy, and think of how this must have felt after already experiencing discrimination in his hometown. Consider how he might have felt after finally building a parish for Black Catholics in Chicago, which finally gave them a space within which to worship. Would he have felt conflicted about his success? Would he have wanted his people to worship in an integrated church with whites more or have their own church?

8. What did Thea have to say to the Bishops about the experience of Black Catholics? How did she say it in a way that demonstrated her "whole-souledness?" How did the Bishops respond?

Possible Student Response: Thea spoke of the importance of the Church as a family. She shared how the Black Catholic experience in America was one of alienation from the Church for much of its history and the need for a Church of unity, not alienation, and about how unity is still essential to fulfilling the mission of Catholicity. Thea saw the need, ultimately, for the people of Christ's Church to love each other fully. Thea brought all her talents, gifts, and experiences into teaching the Bishops. They were incredibly moved.

Teacher Follow-up: The speech Thea delivered is [available on YouTube](#). It might be enriching to view it.

9. What were some of the beliefs Augustus had that helped him remain connected to the Church in spite of its shortcomings?

Possible Student Response: Augustus believed that the Church could offer something that nothing else in the world could: true freedom for all. No matter what restrictions or chains were imposed by society, a person was free to love as Jesus did.

Teacher Follow-up: Can you name some of the ways that Augustus loved as Jesus did? How did he love others?

10. What contradictions did Augustus and Thea see between what the Church was created to be (by Jesus Christ) and what the Church was doing? Think about the actions of the members of the Church in America. How did they respond to these?

Possible Student Response: Both Thea and Augustus saw that the Church had been made to spread a universal love of Christ. The Church was meant to include all people, and to be a light to the nations. Instead, many members of the Church in America were far too willing to reject their brothers and sisters in Christ on the basis of race. For instance, members of the Church, individual parishioners, and lay persons would actively attack Black Catholics as inferior. Some pastors even would throw out Black parishioners, rejecting them from the community of faith. It was not uncommon for Black Catholics to have to sit in segregated areas of the church or to wait to receive communion until after all whites had received. Thea and Augustus were both deeply distressed by this, but also filled with resolve to make certain that the condition of Black Catholics was improved. Augustus tried to make a space for Black Catholics, who were rejected by the Church in America, so as to give them the spiritual nurturing they needed. Thea meanwhile spoke both patiently and firmly, publishing books and hymnals emphasizing the importance of all races in the Church.

Teacher Follow-up: Note that this question builds up to the next. Think about this and try to use this question to segue along, keeping the same train of thought moving and developing.

11. Why do you suppose Augustus and Thea continued to be Catholic and continued in their vocations in spite of the Church's very real and hurtful failings? How did they respond to unjust rejection based on their race by members of the Church?

Possible Student Response: The failings of the Church experienced by both Augustus and Thea were significant. Augustus observed Black Catholics being rejected by other priests and parishes based on the color of their skin. He himself was alienated, first as a child by fellow students in a Catholic school, then as an adult by fellow pastors because he was Black and because of his success as a priest. Thea saw segregated schooling and churches, and experienced the discrimination perpetrated by members of the Church. Despite this, both remained faithful to the Church. This is because their faith was not merely based upon the actions of particular members of the Church, but upon Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd. Some people, like Father McGirr and the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, helped show them the heart of the Church and what it is called to be, rather than what it was. It is because of their faith and the influence of fellow holy people that Augustus and Thea responded as they did.

12. What did Thea think that Black Catholics bring to the unique communion of the Church? How does this reflect upon the commandment in the Scriptures, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations"?

Possible Student Response: Thea pointed out that Black Catholics brought a unique understanding of freedom to the Church. The uncommon faith of Black Catholics embraced freedom in the Lord with their whole mind, body, and soul. Thus was it commanded, to make disciples of all nations. Each and every people in the world brings some unique gift to the communion of the Church, and the Church is not whole without the gifts of all her members to support each other and reach for God.

13. What do Augustus and Thea teach us about responding to the wounds of the Church and the sins of her members?

Possible Student Response: Augustus and Thea experienced a Church that was not living up to its call. The way they responded was the way we always ought to: Firmly and out of a deep love of the Church. Lovingly, without bitterness, they boldly proclaimed and lived the truth, even if it was uncomfortable. They tried to correct others and minister both to those who had been hurt and those who had done the hurting. Augustus cared for impoverished and abandoned Black Catholics in Chicago with his mother and sister. Thea taught children in LaCrosse with patience despite the prejudice of the community, and their prejudice was unable to sustain itself in the face of her patient kindness. In both cases, their missions were often hard and disheartening, yet they persevered in faith.

Teacher Followup: Imagine how Augustus must have felt, seeing so many of his parishioners impoverished and abused by the community in which they lived, and Thea, when she was rejected by those whom she served with joy. How could they keep going? What sustained them?

14. How were Augustus and Thea able to persist in spite of the negative effects they experienced from racism? What helped them to persevere in their ministry and promote equality in their times?

Possible Student Response: Augustus and Thea did not falter in the face of adversity, ultimately due to the perseverance they learned from their youth and the faith which sustained them. Augustus not only had the inspiration of the Church he had seen in Rome, but also a unique faith which led him to be able to persist in ministry. Thea's faith also sustained her. She saw the grace of the sisters she had met as a child and imitated their love.

15. What did Augustus' light do for Black Catholics in his time period? What does it mean that he became "their daily bread?" How does Augustus' light still shine for us today?

Possible Student Response: Augustus was a beacon of hope in a time of despair. When the Church alienated Black Catholics, he reached out to those who had been abandoned. He and his family gladly served the sick and the injured, the poor and the despairing, sharing their joy with those who were in need at every turn. He became their daily bread inasmuch as he spread the light of Christ to those most in need of it, and he still provides an example of self-giving love for us.

16. What did Thea's light do for Black Catholics in her time period? How did she "let it shine?" How does Thea's light still shine for us today?

Possible Student Response: Thea emphasized the importance of Black Catholics for the Church, reminding both them and the whites who oppressed them of the Church of the contribution that every race, ethnicity, culture, and people has to offer to the body of Christ. She did not allow the disparaging and racist acts of others detrail her ministry, but rather worked harder in the face of injustice to make certain that people could see God's work alive in all peoples. To this day, her message of dignity and equality in the Church provides an example of both patient love and certain determination. Thea reminds us of our call to be truly Catholic and maintain the familial bonds of the Body of Christ.



Introducing Read Four

Students have already learned much about Augustus Tolton and Thea Bowman. They've learned about their personal experiences, the reality of racism, both in the United States and in the Catholic Church, and also some things about the Black Catholic Experience (at least in how it is evident in the lives of these two people).

Students now explore the meaning of sanctity, often called “holiness” and sainthood as it is understood in the Catholic Church. The final “read” ought to increase student appreciation for Augustus and Thea, and also allow students to gain some insights that will help them in their own striving to become a saint and grow in holiness.

Thea and Augustus are currently in the process of being officially recognized for their holiness. This official recognition is called “canonization.” Sometimes we say that this or that person is “canonized” as a saint. What this means is that a very careful process is used to analyze their lives and then, if they meet the requirements, they are added to the canon (i.e., a traditional term for list or roster), of people who we believe are “in God.”

When the Church recognizes that someone is a saint, it means that it recognizes that this particular person has slowly been conformed to Christ's love their whole life, making them a unique alter Christus (another Christ). So deep is their conformation to divine love and are “in God” that they enjoy a “state” of perfect joy. This joy is the result of their being united to God and all other saints in divine, self-giving love. When the Church officially declares that a saint is “in heaven” when they are canonized it acknowledges that they are in a state of being in union with God and others (the communion of saints)

through the sharing of divine love after their physical death and for all eternity. However, it is interesting to consider that saints were probably in a state of heaven even as they lived, before they died physically, meaning that their lives were completely open to God that they experienced this during their lifetime. Canonizing a person makes official what those who knew the saint personally probably already find to be true.

Many students may have an idea of what a saint is. They might describe them as a really good or even a “perfect” person—someone who prays to God a lot, is kind to other people, and has developed virtues like charity, patience, hope, and joy. They may also know that it is possible for any person to become a saint if they desire it and live their lives accordingly. They also probably recognize that there are many different types of people who achieve sainthood. They aren't all alike: they include men and women, adults and children, people from all over the world, and who all lived unique lives. Something else they might know is that there are certain categories of saints, such as virgins (women who chose not to get married or have children so they could devote their lives to loving Jesus Christ) and martyrs (those whose faith was so strong that they were willing to die for it). At any rate, there's a lot we hear about saints and some of it isn't wrong, but our understanding of saints tends to be underdeveloped and generally incomplete.

Why does it matter? If students are supposed to strive to become saints, then it helps to understand what a saint is. If this is the goal, studying the lives of saints can be really helpful.

The class has engaged in the study of sainthood and learned from the lives of these particular two saints, Thea and Augustus (though they are not officially canonized saints yet!), and their stories are a wonderful gift. But their stories also present a challenge. Students probably recognize that their stories are not identical. The way the story is told draws attention to certain details the author wants to point out. If students were to read other stories about Thea and Augustus, they may not hear the same details. Thea and Augustus can help us understand what sainthood looks like.

In the tradition of the Catholic Church, a saint is often referred to as an “Alter Christus” or another Christ. This means that the saint, following Jesus, makes God’s love visible in this world through their own particular personality, relationships, talents, and faith as they respond to the unique time in which they live and the other circumstances of their life. Although saints have a lot in common with one another, the thing to focus on is how they manifest holiness through their own distinctiveness (e.g., personal choice, talents, weaknesses, and virtues) and become the full and whole person God created them to be. Someone once said, “every saint is another page in the book of love.” Now students will have the opportunity to see what they think about this quote as they go through the last reading.

In this last read, students use the “Read 4: Student Worksheet” to help focus on particular details of the text. Again, some of the questions will be challenging, but encourage students to do their best to respond to them. In the second half of the worksheet students will notice that the questions shift from focusing on the details of the text chronologically to “big picture” questions that challenge them to think about what they have read and learned as a whole. Again, students ought to be encouraged to answer these, even just to jot down some initial thoughts. The class will discuss these questions together as a group.

Read 4: Saintliness and Sanctity

Guiding Questions with Teacher Notes

1. In Section 13, what does Jesus mean by telling others “let your light shine”? Why do you think this passage included?

Possible Student Response: In this Scripture passage from John’s Gospel, Jesus is pointing out how darkness cannot overcome light. What he means by this is that (literally) light, even the smallest bit, eliminates darkness.

Teacher Follow-up: In the passage from John, the scriptural image of light refers to divine love. We sometimes use the term love in different ways. For example, we might use it in a casual way saying we love ice cream. Or we might use it to describe a bond of a relationship with someone, for example we might say we love our friends. The truth is that there are different definitions for the word love. When we are talking about love and comparing it to the scriptural image of “light,” we are talking about a specific type of love. Jesus offers us the definition of this kind of love as he makes it evident in his life, passion, death, and resurrection. Divine love as we see in Christ’s example is a love that is selfless, complete, and poured out without the other meriting it or needing to repay it. This is a special type of love, and human beings are made for this love (both giving it and receiving it). This love is a light that can dispel sin and evil in creation.

As we think about the image of light, and we will discuss it again later, it is helpful to consider how light does different things besides dispel darkness. For example, light can be multiplied; it can also radiate energy in the form of heat. Think about it, a candle can light up a room, but it can also give warmth and light up other candles. Can you give an example from the text of how Thea or Augustus’ light gave warmth to others and how they lit other candles?

2. In Section 5, we read that Martha Jane sang religious songs (i.e., (spirituals) as she worked for people who had enslaved her and her children. This communicates that her faith was in God at all times, even when she was not completely free in a human sense (e.g., to live where she wanted, do what she wanted, etc.). What does this say about her? What would Augustus have learned from this example?

Possible Student Response: Even though she was enslaved in physical and social bondage, Martha Jane remained spiritually free. No one, not even the worst slave master, could keep her from loving God and putting her trust in Him. This tells us that Martha Jane was a resilient person and one of strong faith. She was also a great role model for Augustus.

Teacher Follow-up: The spirituals Martha Jane sang were important to people who were enslaved. Many of the songs centered on the stories of the Jewish people from the Old Testament, especially their experience of slavery in Egypt and their journey to freedom.

Martha Jane gave her son Augustus a witness and model of faith in God. As we just discussed in the first question, her faith was like a light that lit Augustus’ candle.

As you learn about the different saints, you will find that they often had models who taught them how to love God, how to pray, and how to persevere in faith. Sometimes they know the person directly and sometimes they learn about them by reading or hearing stories about their lives. If a person wants to become a saint, it helps to know as many saints as you can! Who are the saints you know the most about?

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3. What is significant about the specific feast days that are mentioned in the events related to Augustus' entry into religious life (Section 15)?

Possible Student Response: Augustus was ordained a priest on Holy Saturday and said his first Mass Easter Sunday. He began his mission as a priest on the Ascension. These are among the holiest days for the Church and have great importance.

Teacher Follow-up: These dates were probably chosen by the Church in Rome and may have been chosen to signify how the life August had taken on in his priestly ministry was a gift to the world.

4. When Thea first began teaching in Lacrosse, Wisconsin she was not welcomed. Why? What did she do? Does this suggest she “shone her Christ-light?” Why? (Section 20)

Possible Student Response: There were probably not very many Black people in LaCrosse at the time Thea lived. So it is possible that people were prejudiced against her and fearful because they saw Black people as different. When members of the community were not welcoming to Thea, she persevered in loving and shining the light of Christ. She eventually won them over. She knew her actions were more powerful than anything she could say to change their hearts and make them love her too.

Teacher Follow-up: Instead of letting the darkness of other people's cruelty extinguish her light, Thea committed herself to shining her light more brightly! She could have become discouraged, angry, or bitter in the face of the racist treatment she endured, but instead she shared self-giving love all the more. It was important to her that she share divine love with others and witness her faith in God as being the most important thing in her life. She put herself second to her mission of witnessing Christ's love. She genuinely wanted others to feel this love and live it in their lives too.

Can you think of other saintly people who also loved when people were abusing or mistreating them? Speaking from your own experiences, what makes it so difficult to keep loving when people are unkind or unjust?

5. In Sections 21 and 22, some of Thea's words are shared directly. These quotations communicate how Thea understood freedom in a fuller and more rich way, something we might call “true freedom.” How would you describe “true freedom” based on Thea's words?

Possible Student Response: Thea indicates that true freedom is the ability to live fully as the unique person God created each one of us to be.

Teacher Follow-up: “True freedom” is not simply the ability to make free choices and do what we want. This is often how society defines freedom today. True freedom, as both Thea and Augustus understood it, does have something to do with making choices, but these choices express freedom for “doing the good.” True freedom is part of who we are as creatures. This freedom allows us to sin, but it also allows us to truly love. In making these choices our whole life long, we become ourselves—hopefully a person formed by God's sacrificial love.

St. Pope John Paul II had a lot to say about true freedom and it might interest some of you to read it. As Thea and Augustus understood and demonstrated in their lives, each person lives “true freedom” in a special way, meaning that they bring all they are (e.g., their culture, their talents, what they've learned, their personality) to their vocation of loving God and others.

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6. What prayer is in Section 23? Why do you think it is included in this reading about two holy people?

Possible Student Response: This prayer is the “Our Father.” It is included because it illustrates how the two saints lived out this prayer in their own lives. Augustus and Thea conformed their lives to the love that Jesus made evident in his life and shared in the prayer given to his disciples (i.e., the “Our Father”). They praised God. They relied on God without fail. They entrusted their lives to God’s will. They forgave others. They worked to bring about his kingdom. They consistently and regularly became the nourishment and strength of others (like daily bread).

Teacher Follow-up: We say the “Our Father” prayer quite often, so often that it can become routine. We may not pay full attention to what it communicates or realize it gives the secret for becoming a saint! Next time you pray for it, maybe you’ll think about it differently.

Let’s think about the meaning of this prayer:

- *“Our Father who art in Heaven. Hallowed be thy name”: recalls that we are all “children” of the same Father.*
- *“Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven”: Work now, here on Earth, to bring about His kingdom by doing His will.*
- *“Give us this day our daily bread”: Rely on, put our trust in, have faith in God to give us all that we need to flourish and live our vocation (“our daily bread”).*
- *“And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”: Strive to live a holy life (practice virtue, avoid sin) and forgive others.*
- *“Lead us not into temptation and deliver us from evil”: Stay close to God so as to avoid temptation and stay on the path to salvation.*

*Thea and Augustus made their own lives an “Our Father.” [*The Catechism of the Catholic Church* \(§§ 2759-2854\)](#) offers a beautiful commentary on the “Our Father” that is worth reading before leading the class discussion.*

7. What did Augustus’ light do for Black Catholics? What does it mean that he became “their daily bread?”

How was the heart of Augustus a home for Christ?

Possible Student Response: The light that Augustus provided allowed his parishioners to see the truth of their belovedness. We are made for giving and receiving love. His light warmed and ignited the flame of love for God and others within the hearts of those who knew him. As “daily bread,” Augustus gave his whole self to his parishioners and became a living sign of Christ. He helped Black Catholics in the parishes he served by providing them with the material things (e.g., food, resources, opportunities, etc.) and spiritual (prayer, community, love) things they needed.

He provided a witness of faith and made a gift of his life to God and others. This is what is meant by his becoming “daily bread.” It is also important to point out that he wasn’t “weekend bread.” He consistently gave to others what they needed physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Teacher Follow-up: It is true that Augustus allowed God’s light to shine through him because he lived the “Our Father” (receiving the sacraments, including Holy Orders [i.e., becoming a priest]). He became bread for the Black Catholics he knew directly. But he was and still is light and bread for all Catholics, including those who did not know him directly. The witness

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of Augustus Tolton continues to be meaningful for Black Catholics and the whole Church.

Can you explain what it might mean that there is a model of faith for the Black Catholic community? There aren't very many saints from the United States. What do you think it would mean for the Black Catholic community if he was canonized a saint? For the Church?

8. The term “whole souled” is used in Sections 16 and 34. What does “whole souled” mean?

Possible Student Response: It says in the text that that whole souledness is loving the “Lord with your whole heart, mind and spirit.” Thea and Augustus both demonstrated this in their words, actions, and entire lives.

Teacher Follow-up: What are some of the ways that you see “whole souledness” from Thea and Augustus? What might get in the way of someone bringing their whole selves to loving God?

9. In Sections 33-34 we learn about Thea's presentation to the Bishops of the United States. Why were the Bishops in tears by the end of her time speaking to them? What did she show them that is bigger than her whole soul and her whole heart? What is meant by “the heart of the Gospel?” What can hearts full of the gospel do?

Possible Student Response: In the passage it says that Sr. Thea “had shown them that their own hearts must be truly free, without being bound to anything (including prejudices from the effects of racism), to follow the Lord's greatest commandment. She had shown them the heart of the Gospel. Hearts filled with the Gospel are hearts that can “build together a holy city, a new Jerusalem, a city set apart where they'll know we are his because we love one another.” Thea had shown them the meaning of true freedom.

Teacher Follow-up: Can you explain how the life and witness Thea gave might have challenged the Bishops to be more saintly themselves?

10. What does it mean that Thea's tombstone says, “I tried?”

Possible Student Response: Perhaps the epitaph on her tombstone expresses that Thea brought her whole self to everything she did in her life. She wanted to communicate that if she didn't live her true freedom perfectly all the time, she at least tried to! This must be a characteristic of a saint. They recognize they have freedom to “do the good.”

Teacher Follow-up: Thea was a person who was tireless in her love for God and others. What are some of the things in her life that demonstrate how hard she tried? When you die someday, will you be able to say you tried like Thea? What things might you do to try to be more like Thea?

11. The text ends with the following: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. Love one another. Thy Kingdom come!” Based on what you have read in the text, how would you say that either Thea or Augustus made this true with their lives? What does this mean about being a saint?

Possible Student Response: Thea and Augustus experienced many challenges in their lives, and they always continued in faithfulness because of their love for God and desire to be like Jesus Christ.

Teacher Follow-up: The image of light occurs throughout the text. We see it in how the love of Jesus Christ radiates through the lives of Thea and Augustus. When Jesus instructs people to shine their light, he is telling them to bring divine, self-giving love to the world. It can eliminate the darkness of sin and selfishness.

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Have you ever seen a stained glass window with a saint on it? These are very common in many Catholic churches. Perhaps it is because stained glass is not merely beautiful, it is also an illustration of what it means to be a saint. What we see in each of the saints is how the light of the world (the divine love of Jesus Christ) shines through the saint. So, in a sense, each saint radiates love in a singular and beautiful way.

12. Looking back at the childhood experiences of Thea and Augustus, how do you think they were able to grow to be such holy persons when they faced such struggles in their younger years? How does their perseverance through these hardships reflect Christ in his own childhood?

Possible Student Response: Both Thea and Augustus experienced great hardships during their childhood, yet from these backgrounds came two saints. Their holiness was developed in cooperation with God, not independently from him.

Teacher Follow-up: Both Thea and Augustus learned to depend upon God in times of struggle. Through that trust grew the holiness we see in them. Christ was dependent upon the Father and Mary, his mother, as a child. As a child, Jesus was a refugee for many years during Herod's reign. Even when his family did return to Nazareth, he was still a Jew and a member of a conquered people. Throughout, he trusted in the will of his divine Father and remained obedient to Mary and Joseph.

13. When saints like Augustus and Thea are referred to as “another Christ” or “alter Christus” what do you think that means? How can we understand this better from the lives of Thea and Augustus?

Possible Student Response: Thea and Augustus imitated Jesus by loving others as he did. First, they loved everyone, no matter who they were or how they treated them. Second, they loved with all they had and until the end (Augustus even died of exhaustion from his service to his people).

Teacher Followup: After Jesus died, he promised to not to leave his disciples but to send the Holy Spirit to be their advocate. Grace, God's life within us, can perfect our human nature if we cooperate with it and we see that in the lives of Augustus and Thea. By saying that they were 'another Christ', we mean that he lived in and through them in their response to his grace. When we realize that their lives were centered on Christ's will, and that he lived in them and guided them, then we understand Thea's and Augustus' call to root out prejudice from our hearts as part of living in conformity to Christ.

14. Christ tells us both to turn the other cheek and to correct injustices that we meet in this world. How did Thea and Augustus both confront racial injustices in their lives and at the same time live out that commandment of love for enemies without revenge or anger toward them?

Possible Student Response: Thea worked to change people's minds and to demonstrate Christ's love. When she encountered prejudice and racism in LaCrosse, she “turned the other cheek” in her willingness to stay and continue to give her whole self to her mission. In her teaching, she continually taught and communicated about the important gifts of every race and people to the Church. Later she opened the hearts of the Bishops in the U.S. Church when she addressed them and shared with them the experience of being Black and Catholic. Augustus also loved everyone and witnessed to the love of Christ. He made a shelter of love for his people. Rather than rejecting the Church for its failings, both Theo and Augustus witnessed to what the Church is called to be and renewed it with their love.

Teacher Follow-up: Thea and Augustus faced injustice from the moment of their births. Thea was born in a hospital the next town over because of segregation. Augustus was born into slavery. Throughout their lives they experienced discrimination and mistreatment, and in the eyes of the world, they would have every right to resent and hate those who oppressed them. Instead, they loved their enemy. They both actively confronted the injustices of their time with the motivation of purifying

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the Church. In the case of Augustus, he longs for the Church to fulfill its vision of true unity. Augustus ministered to all who attended his masses without reservation, Black or white. What mattered was that they were children of God.

Thea encountered hate in the very people to whom she was sent to minister. In the school she taught at in LaCrosse, she faced extreme prejudice from her first day. Yet, her love and patience toward those who persecuted her reveals her true character. Thea also confronted injustice in action and word, speaking out against the sin of racism.

Is it also important to note that Augustus and Thea reveal to us what the human person most fundamentally and most truly is. Thea shows us that it actually does matter if you are Black or white (or anything else) because it is part of the richness of the Church — part of its catholicity — the histories and cultures and expressions of the Gospels that come from this catholicity are very important to her.

Christ's response to the evils of his time were and still are radical. His humility in suffering and his mercy to those who themselves were suffering reveal God's love. Just as he ministered to the sick and the poor and cried out against the injustices done to them, so did Augustus and Thea. Augustus cared for those whom no one else would care for, those who were forgotten on the streets or bound to their beds by illness. Thea taught those in need of teaching, and did not hesitate to speak out for that which she knew was right.

Each one of us is called to respond to the evils and injustices of our time. What are we to do in the face of the evils which presently plague our world? What can we learn from Thea and Augustus about imitating Christ in ways that will serve the people of our time?

As you think about other historical figures who have fought against racism, what is different about Augustus and Thea?

15. How can aspiring saints like us follow the example provided by Thea and Augustus? Why is it important to talk about these saints now? What lessons might they provide us and the Church today?

Possible Student Response: Thea and Augustus devoted themselves to their faith and made it the priority of their lives. They remained in constant dialogue with Jesus through daily prayer. We can also do this. They also surrounded themselves with other people (for Thea the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and for Augustus, Fr. McGirr, his mother and sister) who were committed to living their faith and vocation. We can also do this. At this time in Church history there are scandals that might make someone lose faith in the Church. Thea and Augustus are witnesses of fidelity to and love of the Church in spite of its failing. Their very lives show us what the Church most truly is: life with Christ, lives lived with Christ and in Christ, a "heaven" on Earth.

Teacher Follow-up: Every era in history encounters injustice. Today, people still experience suffering, rejection, and despair, even those who are members of the Church. In the face of the racial injustice which continues to plague America, the Church is ever more in need of those willing to follow the example of Thea and Augustus. In every age, the Church knows scandal. Men and women like Thea and Augustus remind the Church of its mission and strengthen the Church on its journey. Society rejects the poor and the sick as much as it did in Augustus' time. Without those who, like him, are willing to 'get their hands dirty', to minister to them, the Church is not living her mission. Education remains as essential now as it was then. Patient teachers who will treat their students with respect to the dignity they possess are ever essential.

How else might we follow their example now, even outside of the spheres in which they worked? What things about these two holy persons are still significant for us today?

16. Why do you think that the author chose to overlap the stories Augustus and Thea with episodes from the life of Christ and Scripture? What does this suggest about how Augustus and Thea conformed to the love of Jesus Christ in their lives? What was their motivation?

Possible Student Response: The use of Scripture is not a coincidence; it was intentionally chosen as a method by the author to help the reader see the similarities in the lives of Jesus, Augustus, and Thea. When one considers the life and teachings of Christ and sees these reflected in the lives of Thea and Augustus it demonstrates something about the way both embraced Christ and followed the path he laid out. They both followed the pattern set forth by Christ, and we can see how their lives, which were very different, were similar to each other in their holiness and conformity to him. Ultimately, we see a perseverance in charity in both of them, even in the face of great difficulty.

There is a clear pattern of actions which shows both the great similarity and difference of their lives. Augustus was someone who had seen and experienced horrid injustices and wished to minister to those who had experienced such things as he had. He knew that those who had been wounded were the most in need of healing, whether that injury be spiritual or physical, and felt a desire to aid others as part of the Body of Christ. When one sees his desire to help each parishioner, and his sadness in the face of their struggles, one sees a true priest.

Thea was also motivated by the injustice she had experienced, but in a different way. Upon seeing the way that the grace and love of the sisters had helped her, she wished to share that same grace and love, not simply healing those already wounded, but teaching the Church about how to flourish. Her patience in the face of hardship reflected a unique trust in God and humility amidst struggle.

In both cases, they followed the example of Christ, providing his love to his flock, not by following the same route, but rather by using their own unique charisms and gifts in the unique situations of their lives. Father Augustus was a good preacher and a priest, who was at home ministering to a parish. Sister Thea was a natural teacher, educating both children and adults, the young and the old alike.

Teacher Followup: Notice the pairing of Scripture to episodes in their lives, particularly thematically. Christ's call to follow him is paired with the stories of Augustus' and Thea's first steps in their vocation; his call to prayer juxtaposed with the ways their lives are expressions of the "Our FAther." Christ's commandment to love is aligned with their deaths. We see this love in the way that Fr. Augustus worked himself to the bone for the sake of those he ministered to. We see it in the way that Thea asked to be remembered as one who tried her best to love the Lord with her whole life. Draw student attention to the specificity of the choices of passages and their significance.

17. What questions do you still have about what you read in the text? What was unclear or confusing?

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