

V. Henriette DeLille

Biography

Henriette DeLille was born on March 11, 1813, in New Orleans. She was the daughter of a French father and a Creole mother who was of African descent. As a free person of color, Henriette grew up in the French Quarter, an area that was deeply divided by race and social class.

As a young woman, Henriette was deeply affected by the suffering of slaves and the poverty that surrounded her. She was also drawn to the Catholic Church and its teachings of love, mercy, and justice. She was inspired by the example of St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary who had traveled to India and Japan to spread the Gospel. Henriette decided that she, too, would become a missionary, but she faced many obstacles along the way.

One of the biggest challenges was the racial discrimination that was widespread in the Church at that time. Many white Catholics believed that black people were inferior and not fit to receive the Sacraments. DeLille refused to accept this injustice and began to work with a group of like-minded women to establish a religious community.

In 1835, Henriette and her friends founded the Sisters of the Presentation, a community who dedicated themselves to the education of children from marginalized populations, the care of the elderly and the sick, and the spiritual needs of their community. Henriette served as the leader of the community and took on the name Sister Mary Therese, although everyone continued to call her Mother Henriette. She worked tirelessly to raise funds, recruit new members, and expand the reach of their mission. In 1842 the Congregation changed its name to the Sisters of the Holy Family.

Over the years, the Sisters of the Holy Family became a powerful force for change in New Orleans. They opened schools and orphanages, established nursing homes and hospices, and provided spiritual guidance to those in need. Henriette's leadership and vision were instrumental in the growth and success of the community, and she became widely respected and admired for her work.

In 1862, during the American Civil War, Henriette died. The congregation attributed her passing to her difficult life of service. In 1988, Henriette DeLille was declared a Servant of God by the Catholic Church, which recognized her lifelong commitment to the service of others and her exemplary life of holiness. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI recognized her heroic virtues and declared her to be Venerable.

Prayer

O good and gracious God, You called Henriette DeLille to give herself in service and in love to the slaves and the sick, to the orphan and the aged, to the forgotten and the despised.

Grant that inspired by her life, we might be renewed in heart and in mind. If it be Your will may she one day be raised to the honor of sainthood. By her prayers, may we live in harmony and peace, through Jesus Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

(Prayer Source: <https://www.henrietedelille.com/beatification-prayer>)

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