

## Bulletin Insert – Children: The Unexpected Gift



There are few true surprises left in our instant-gratification world. We have unlimited information at our fingertips, constant communication, high speed internet, and same-day shipping. But there is still one thing that remains a mystery: welcoming a new child into our hearts and into our homes.

Every time a child enters the world, it is cause to celebrate the delivery of an unexpected gift. Sometimes children come before we are ready. Sometimes they arrive when we thought our family was complete. Sometimes a child comes exactly when we had planned, but they appear with unexpected needs, surprising qualities, or special abilities that demand our attention and care. Some children may come to us through adoption, fostering, or as godchildren. Sometimes they leave us too soon. And for some, no children appear at all, even though we may want them very much.

No matter how or when they arrive, children are always a true gift from God. From the first moment of their existence, each is a unique and unrepeatabeable person with an eternal destiny, chosen and called to become a son or daughter of God through Baptism. Welcoming and loving a child, helping that child to grow in wisdom and faith, is the greatest act of hope in the world. Arriving home for the first time with our new little one in tow, we come face-to-face with a whole new life, a new way of living for another.

Not all are called to become parents. But for the vast majority of us who are, parenting is the primary way we work out our salvation on earth. Each child entrusted to us is also counting on us to help him or her get to Heaven! When we embrace this call, our extraordinary act of hope has the power to transform us through selfless love, tender care, profound joy, and refashioned dreams to become ever more like the Father who created us. No wonder Jesus tells us, “Whoever shall receive a child such as this in my name, receives me.” Amen! Thank you, God!

**“Children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable. We love our children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or look or think as we do, or embody our dreams. We love them because they are children.” – Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, 170.**

### Venerable Pierre Toussaint: A Heart for Children in Need



**Venerable Pierre Toussaint** (1766-1853) was born a slave in Haiti and died as a freeman in New York City. In his early 20s, Pierre was brought to New York City enslaved by the Berard family, who apprenticed him to a local hairdresser. Pierre learned the trade quickly and eventually worked very successfully in the homes of rich women in New York City. Toussaint attended daily Mass for 66 years at St. Peter's in New York.

When Mr. Berard died, Pierre became the breadwinner for himself, Mrs. Berard, and the others enslaved in the household. He was freed shortly before Mrs. Berard's death in 1807. Four years later, he married Marie Rose Juliette, whose freedom he had purchased. They later adopted Euphémie, his orphaned niece. Together, the Toussaints began a career of charity and philanthropy among people experiencing poverty, such as starting the city's first school for Black children. They raised money for Old St. Patrick's Cathedral, and sheltered orphans and fostered numerous boys in succession, supporting them in learning a trade. He is considered to be the father of Catholic Charities in New York.

#### Reflection questions for couples:

- How do we share the blessings we have received with others in need, especially children?
- How might we be called to open our hearts to pray for and serve children in foster care?
- What more can we do to form our own children's hearts for service?

#### Reflection questions for parents and children:

- How do you think it felt for Venerable Pierre to grow up as a slave? And then to be freed?
- Venerable Pierre and Marie Rose did not have any children of their own. Why do you think they cared and sacrificed so much for other people's children?

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