



Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A.

A Prayer

"Olde Folks Child", from your elders you learned values, survival skills and how to face pain, life and death.

You turned life's experiences into teaching moments, refusing to be overwhelmed by problems you encountered.

Thea, you prayed, sang, danced and preached your way into places where few people of color dared to go.

You saw beauty in the magnificent mosaic of the various cultures and had the gift of bringing others to a profound sense of their own dignity.

Thea, "olde folks child", pray for us before almighty God for the graces we need to hand on your legacy, knowing that the only way we can build the kingdom of God is by working together to build faith and strengthen community.

*Author: Sr. Celeste Donohue, D.C.
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Bishop of Charleston*

Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A.

Sister Thea, the granddaughter of slaves, was born in Yazoo City, Mississippi December 29, 1937. Her parents named her Bertha. Soon after she was born the family moved to Canton.

When very young this child, impressed by the "olde folks", began a spiritual quest that, at age 9, led her to become a Catholic. The next year her parents enrolled her at Holy Child Jesus School staffed by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The life and work of the sisters so impressed her that, at 15, she joined them by entering St. Rose Convent, LaCrosse, Wisconsin. There she was given the name Thea.

After progressing successfully through the formative years of Religious Life and the academic world, Thea received a doctorate in English literature and linguistics from Catholic University of America. During these years she developed a deep appreciation for her identity as both an African American and as a Catholic. As her mission unfolded, she celebrated the gifts of all people and encouraged black Americans to proudly celebrate their own identity.

Blessed with extraordinary talent, she became a poet, a preacher, a master teacher, a vocalist, an evangelist, and an African American catalyst. Thea eventually returned to Canton and served as director of Intercultural Awareness for the Diocese of Jackson. She was particularly successful with children and continued working and teaching in the Diocese even after being seriously impaired by cancer. After regaining a modicum of strength, she was able to travel to distant cities, reviving congregations, both large and small, with her "God-gilded voice sent dancing, swaying, sashaying into our lives. She was song. She was the joyous Franciscan always." One who knew her well referred to Thea as the "springtime in everyone's life."

Hers was the wisdom of the "olde folks": "You walk TOGETHER and you won't get weary. You might get tired, but you won't get weary." Exhausted by illness and the service of others Sister Thea died in Canton March 30, 1990.

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