

"In St. Josephine Bakhita we find a shining advocate of genuine emancipation. The history of her life inspires, not passive acceptance, but the firm resolve to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights."

Pope John Paul II, homily at her canonization



Produced by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary
for our Sacred Heart Companions.

Our Congregation is part of TRAC, an inter-congregational initiative
working to end Sex Trafficking - see the TRAC website at
<http://www.traconline.org.uk>

Working to end sex trafficking
trac

END SLAVERY

END EXPLOITATION

END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Pope Francis has designated the Feast of
St Josephine Bakhita as a Day of Prayer for Victims of Trafficking
and those who work to combat it.



The Feast of St Josephine Bakhita
8th February 2015

'Please, loosen the chains... they are heavy!'

Josephine Bakhita, was born in 1869 in a small village in the Darfur region of Sudan. She was nine years old and working in the fields with her family when she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders and sold into slavery. Over the next eight years she was re-sold five times. She was so traumatised by the brutality of her captors, she could not remember her birth name. Her kidnappers gave her the name "Bakhita" - which means 'Fortunate'. Retrospectively, Bakhita was very fortunate, but the first years of her life do not necessarily attest to it. She was tortured by her various owners who branded her, beat and cut her. In her biography she notes one particularly terrifying moment when one of her masters cut her 114 times and poured salt in her wounds to ensure that the scars remained. "I felt I was going to die any moment, especially when they rubbed me in with the salt," Bakhita wrote.

She also had a certain awe for the world and its creator. "Seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, I said to myself: 'Who could be the Master of these beautiful things?' And I felt a great desire to see Him, to know Him and to pay Him homage."

After being sold a total of five times, Bakhita was purchased by Callisto Legnani, the Italian consul in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Two years later, he took Bakhita to Italy to work as a nanny for his colleague, Augusto Michieli. He, in turn, sent Bakhita to accompany his daughter to a school in Venice run by the Canossian Sisters.

Bakhita felt called to learn more about the Church, and was baptized with the name "Josephine Margaret." In the meantime, Michieli wanted to take Josephine and his daughter back to Sudan, but Josephine refused to return. The disagreement escalated and was taken to the Italian courts where it was ruled that Josephine could stay in Italy because she was a free woman. Slavery was not recognized in Italy and it had also been illegal in Sudan since before Josephine had been born.

Josephine remained in Italy and decided to enter Canossians in 1893. She made her profession in 1896 and was sent to Northern Italy.

The next fifty years of her life were spent witnessing to God's love through cooking, sewing, embroidery and attending to the door. When she was on door duty, she would gently lay her hands on the heads of the children who attended the nearby school and caress them. Her voice was pleasing to the little ones, comforting to the poor and suffering. She was a source of encouragement. She was known for her smile, gentleness and holiness.

As she grew older she experienced long, painful years of sickness, but she continued to persevere in hope, constantly choosing the good. When visited and asked how she was, she'd respond: 'As the Master desires'. During her last days she relived the painful days of her slavery and more than once begged: 'Please, loosen the chains... they are heavy!'. Surrounded by the sisters, she died on 8 February 1947.



From slave to Saint

12 years after her death, the local diocese started its investigations into whether Bakhita could be found honourable. The investigations turned out positive, and she was declared Venerabilis (Honourable) on 1 December 1978. Thus the process of declaring her a Saint could start, and on 17 May 1992, she was beatified. The 8th February was declared her official day of worship.

On the occasion of her beatification, Pope John Paul II praised her for "leaving us a message of reconciliation and evangelic forgiveness in a world so much divided and hurt by hatred and violence. She, that was the victim of the worst injuries of all times, namely slavery, herself declared: 'If I was to meet those slave raiders that abducted me and those who tortured me, I'd kneel down to them to kiss their hands, because, if it had not been for them, I would not have become a Christian and religious woman'."

On 1 October 2000, she was canonized.

What can this African Saint teach people today? the Spanish missionary journal *Mundo Negro* asked.

The editor José Luis Lisalde answers by saying that "Bakhita taught us the path of liberation. The path she followed and that lead her from slavery to freedom still has to be walked by so many people that are subject to a variety of forms of slavery."

Bakhita is truly the most African Saint, and her life story is a story of the Continent. Her spirituality and endurance makes her Our Universal Sister!

Adapted from Mundo Negro

Other sources of information: The Vatican, The Catholic News Agency

Final Prayer:

O God, who led
Saint Josephine Bakhita
from abject slavery
to the dignity of being your daughter
and a bride of Christ,
grant, we pray,
that by her example
we may show constant love
for the Lord Jesus crucified,
remaining steadfast in charity
and prompt to show compassion.
Through Christ our Lord.

Amen



Opening Prayer

Creator God, we believe that the human person is the clearest reflection of your presence in our world. All of our work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person, as an expression of your creative work and the meaning of Christ's redemptive ministry. Be with us as we reflect on the plight of all those women, men and children whose dignity is violated through human trafficking and slavery.

(Adapted from The Challenge of Peace, No 15
US Bishops, 1983)

Psalm: 145

R/ *Blessed is she whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord her God.*

Blessed is she whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord her God,
The maker of Heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them -
the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the alien,
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but frustrates the ways of the wicked.
The Lord reigns forever,
Your God, O Zion, for all generations.

R/ *Blessed is she whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord her God.*



Reading: Eccl 4:1

I considered also how much oppression there is under the sun: the tears of the oppressed and no one to console them, the violence of the oppressors and no one to hold them back.

Quiet Reflection....

We pray for the church, for the strength, fortitude and vision of all its leaders and members in addressing the issue of human trafficking.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

We pray for world leaders that they will confront human trafficking in all its forms, by dedicating their time, energy and resources to eradicating it.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

We pray for the rescue and restoration of the countless number of people who have been exploited by the terrible trade in human beings.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

We pray for the development of impoverished nations so that the peoples in such countries may know a decent standard of living, have meaningful education and employment opportunities and thus escape the desperate circumstances that make people vulnerable to human trafficking.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

We pray that the demand for trafficked people will be reduced. May men and women grow in appreciation of the dignity of every human person so that we can live in a world where no one is enslaved.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

We pray for all those who have died as a result of their exploitation and slavery.

R/ Please loosen the chains, O God, they are heavy.

Let us pray together:

Go and open the door

Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a piece of wood
a garden
or a magic city

Go and open the door

Maybe there's a dog rummaging
Maybe you'll see a face
or an eye
or the picture
of a picture

Go and open the door

If there's a fog
It will clear.

Go and open the door

Even if there's only
the darkness ticking
even if there's only
the hollow wind

Go and open the door

Maybe a child is sobbing
a woman crying
maybe you'll notice
the scars and wounds
of human suffering, human slavery

Go and open the door

even if
nothing
is there

Go and open the door

As least
there'll be
a draught

