



A brief profile of the life of St. Josephine Bakhita, Witness of Hope

In 1869, Josephine Bakhita was born in Darfur, in the Sudan. In 1878, at the tender age of nine, she was kidnapped by slave traders and was so traumatised at being kidnapped from her family that she could not even recall her name, so the slave traders named her “Bakhita”, meaning the “fortunate one”.

Over the next seven years at the slave markets in Sudan, young Bakhita was sold and re-sold into slavery, enduring severe beatings and hardship until she was bought by an Italian merchant for the Italian Consul in Sudan in 1885. Two years later, Bakhita travelled with the Consul to Italy where she was formally introduced to the faith by the Canossian Religious Sisters, where she experienced healing from the deep traumas of abduction,



slavery and war. With the sisters, Bakhita came to understand a totally different meaning to the word “master”. She learned that another kind of master or Lord existed, a master who is kind, understanding and loves unconditionally. This master is the Lord of all lords and is the living witness to God’s infinite love for each of us. For Bakhita, the most powerful message of all was the fact that she was known and loved and just like her, this master had himself been flogged and now He awaited her “at the Father’s right hand”. With such love and hope, Bakhita knew she was no longer a slave, she was a free child of God, stating *“I am definitely loved and whatever happens to me-I am awaited by this love. And so my life is good”*.

In 1896, Bakhita was professed and congregational records show that she was gentle in spirit and most loving towards her fellow sisters and students, whom she served faithfully for the remainder of her life until she died in 1947.

Despite being a slave who worked for different masters, her spirit was always free and through her growing faith, she found the grace to accept God as the ultimate Master. Her constant mantra was *“Be good, love the Lord and pray for those who do not know Him”*. Her humility, simplicity and constant smile won the hearts of all citizens as she travelled around Italy in order to share the liberation she had received through her encounter with the God of Jesus Christ. She made God known and loved through sharing about her life experiences, the challenges encountered, her dreams, hopes and fears. Through her example and witness of hope, Bakhita became a source of uplift and is a shining light for all who are oppressed and victimised by human slavery.

We can try and follow her example, to have a powerful faith, to serve God and to do His will in order that those who are suffering, may find solace and hope for the future.

Bakhita was beatified in 1992 and canonised in 2000. Her feast day is the 8th of February, which is now designated by the Church as the International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking.

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