

Saint Josephine Bakhita

1869 – 1947

INTRODUCTION

For older students:

“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...” – St. Josephine Bakhita

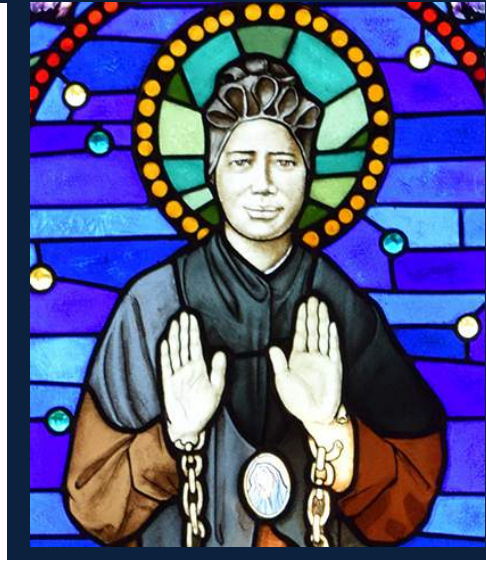
A testament to the inner strength and grace of St. Josephine Bakhita is that in spite of a life that was marked by overwhelmingly brutality and pain, she was able to recognize the glory of God all around her.

St. Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan in 1869. Her family was affluent, but this did not protect them from the atrocities of slave raiders in the area. Like her sister before her, Bakhita was kidnapped and sold into slavery as a young girl. In an act of irony, her kidnappers named her “Bakhita,” meaning “fortunate” in Arabic.

In the years that followed, Bakhita was sold five different times to cruel masters. She was branded, beaten, and cut. In one horrific incident, a master rubbed salt into the 114 cuts he had made on her body.

Her last sale was to the Italian consul in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. Although he was kind to Bakhita, he still kept her in a state of slavery, which by this time was illegal in both Sudan and Italy. He presented her as a gift to an Italian merchant, Augusto Michieli, who brought her to Italy to be his daughter’s nanny. While at the Michieli estate, Bakhita was given a silver crucifix, her first encounter with Christ. The image of his suffering body must have resonated with her tremendously. Bakhita accompanied Michieli’s daughter to a school run by the Canossian sisters in Venice. It was here that she fell in love with the Catholic faith.

When Michieli was recalled to Africa, Bakhita refused to leave Italy and was able



to take her case to court. With the backing of the Canossian sisters and the patriarch of Venice, Bakhita was declared a free woman since her enslavement had been illegal since its inception.

Bakhita became a Canossian Daughter of Charity in 1896 and faithfully served in the Canossian community in Schio for the next 50 years. She attended to cooking, sewing, and embroidery. She would often stand at the door of the community and welcome children by praying over them.

In 1910, her fellow sisters asked her if she would share her story so that it could be transcribed and preserved as a testament to her strength and grace. St. Josephine Bakhita was canonized in 2000 and her feast day is celebrated on February 8th. In 2015, her feast day became the first international day for prayer and reflection on human trafficking, a cause in which Pope Francis has taken a particular interest. St. Josephine is the patroness of Sudan and the victims of human trafficking.

At her canonization in 2000, Pope John Paul II stated, “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.”

For younger students:

As a young girl in Sudan, St. Josephine Bakhita was sold into slavery. The cruel men who kidnapped her, named her “Bakhita,” which means “fortunate” or “lucky.” But, St. Josephine’s early life was far from lucky. She was sold five different times to cruel men who horribly mistreated her. Because she was held as a slave, she was not free to do as she pleased and was never paid for the work she did.



St. Josephine Bakhita

Her last master was an Italian merchant, or businessman, who forced her to come to Italy to be a nanny for his daughter. When she got to Italy, Bakhita was given a small silver crucifix, her first encounter with Christ. Bakhita went with the master’s daughter to a Catholic school run by Canossian sisters. While she was at this school, she fell in love with the Catholic faith, and decided to become a religious sister.

When the Italian merchant came to pick up Bakhita and his daughter from school one day, he informed them that he was moving the family back to Africa. Bakhita refused to leave. Her cause was taken to court, and a judge declared that Bakhita should be a free woman. She became a Canossian Daughter of Charity, and served in their community at Schio for the last fifty years of her life.

Today we celebrate St. Josephine Bakhita for her strength and grace, especially after enduring evil enslavement and abuse. Her feast day is February 8th and

she is the patron saint of nation of Sudan and all victims of slavery and human trafficking.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
Thank you for the example of St. Josephine Bakhita. Like St. Josephine Bakhita, help me to see and be thankful for the beautiful things in my life, even when I am in pain or I feel I am being mistreated. Through her intercession, please aid all victims of human trafficking and slavery in our world. Help us create a world without atrocities, in which everyone is valued as children of God with free will. St. Josephine Bakhita, pray for us. Amen.

Or...

Dear Lord,
Thank you for the blessings in my life. Help me to see you in everything and everyone around me like St. Josephine. Please help all people that are victims of slavery and who suffer painful lives. Help us make a more peaceful, free, and beautiful world. St. Josephine Bakhita, pray for us. Amen.

Alternate Prayer Sources

- USCCB prayer in both English and Spanish: <http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week/upload/M7-266-Josephine-Bakhita-Prayer-Card.pdf>
- Prayer in honor of St. Josephine Bakhita by Rev. Macram Max Gassis, Bishop of El-Obeid Diocese, Sudan: <http://www.canossiansisters.org/images/StBakhita.pdf>

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Religion

- Celebrate St. Josephine Bakhita’s feast day on February 8 by observing the international day of prayer and reflection for victims of human trafficking.
 - Say a rosary for trafficking victims
 - Organize a school-wide awareness campaign about the issue.

- Place a picture of St. Josephine in a prayer corner or on a prayer wall.
- Say a prayer for the people of Sudan and South Sudan and pray for a peaceful resolution of their conflicts.

Writing

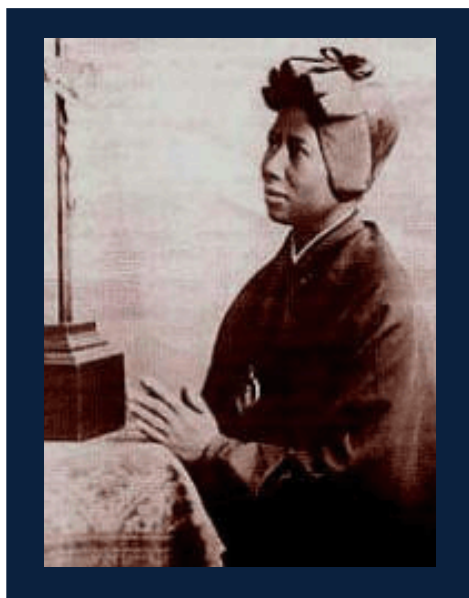
- Read *Bakhita: From Slave to Saint* (2013) by Roberto Italo Zanini as a class, and have students keep a prayer journal while reading it.
- Have students write informational posters about human trafficking that can be hung around the school in order to observe the international day of prayer and reflection for victims of human trafficking.
- Write letters to St. Josephine Bakhita asking for strength and bravery in the face of pain and adversity.

Social Studies

- Have students make presentations about the state of human trafficking in the world
- Create timelines and maps showing the history of slavery in the United States and across the globe
- Share a lesson about the Sudanese conflict that led to the creation of South Sudan, the youngest country in the world, in 2011

Art

- Using the quote "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..." have students cut out sun, moon, and star shapes and write what they are thankful for on these cut-outs.
- Watch the film: *Two Suitcases: The Story of St. Josephine Bakhita* (2000) or *Bakhita* (2009).
- Create a map showing St. Josephine's journey from Sudan to Italy in which students draw images of different times in her life.
- Using the quote "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..."



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Language

- Say this prayer to St. Josephine in both English and Spanish (<http://www.usccb.org/about/migration-and-refugee-services/national-migration-week/upload/M7-266-Josephine-Bakhita-Prayer-Card.pdf>).
- Have students research the dozens of indigenous languages spoken in Sudan and South Sudan.
- Learn to say "*a salaam alaikum*" in Arabic, which means "peace be with you."

Home and Family Connections

- Donate to an organization that helps victims of human trafficking.
- Donate to an organization that provides aid to people in Sudan and/or South Sudan.
- Go to a talk or event concerning human trafficking as a family.
- As a family, pray for the victims of human trafficking.



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Book Recommendations

- *Bakhita: From Slave to Saint* by Roberto Italo Zanini (2013).
- *In Our Backyard: Human Trafficking in America and What We Can Do to Stop It* by Nita Belles (2015).

Service Projects

- Have a fundraiser at school in order to donate to an organization fighting human trafficking or helping people in Sudan/South Sudan

Relevant Songs

- "Break Every Chain"
- Show clips from the following two videos of masses in South Sudan, so that students can experience worship music and dance:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohuMerkF9PQ>
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7zRp5eqOLk>

SOURCES

Brockhaus, Hannah. Catholic News Agency. (2017, February 8). St Josephine Bakhita, former slave, is patron of trafficking victims. Retrieved from <http://>



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