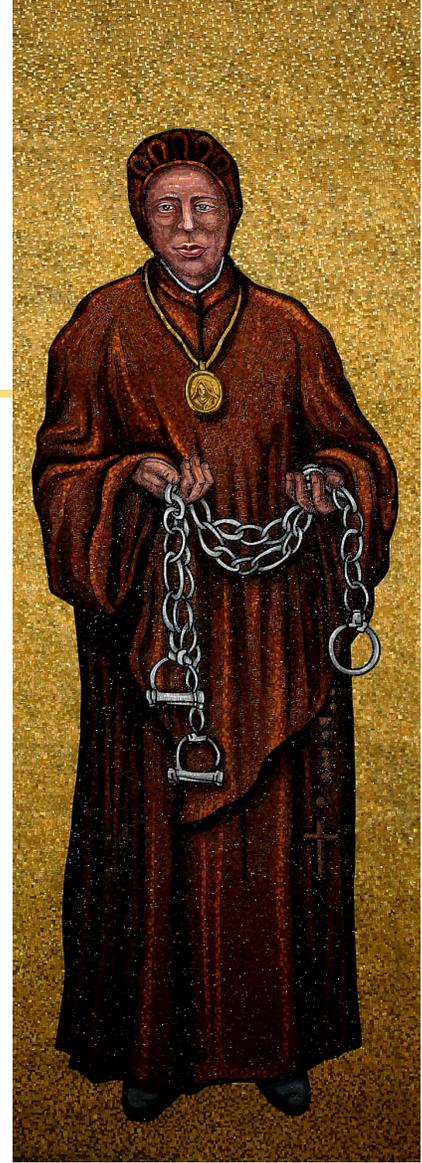




Living the Faith

PRESERVING DIGNITY IN THE HUMAN PERSON: THE STORY OF ST. JOSEPHINE BAKHITA



St. Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan in 1869 and enslaved as a child. Eventually she was sold to an Italian diplomat and taken to Italy, where she was later brought to freedom through the help of the Canossian Daughters of Charity. Through their guidance, she learned about God and served him faithfully until her death in 1947. In October 2000, Josephine Bakhita was canonized by St. John Paul II, at which point he noted that “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” (St. Bakhita’s Canonization Mass, October 1, 2000).



In the movie *St. Bakhita*, St. Josephine Bakhita is bought by an Italian white merchant named Federico Marin after years of being beaten and abused as an enslaved child. The cinematic depiction of the saint’s life shows that once in the Marin household, the daughter of the master, Aurora, takes a strong liking to Bakhita and chooses her as her nanny. Bakhita is treated like an outsider and accused of being wicked by other servants because of her black skin. Despite this, Bakhita proves to be generous to everyone she encounters even if they have wronged her.

Today, the feast day for St. Josephine Bakhita—February 8—is recognized as the annual day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking. Through prayer, we not only reflect on the experiences of

those that have suffered through this affront to human dignity but also comfort, strengthen, and help empower survivors. As Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, former Chairman of the Committee on Migration, has stated: “On that day, we will lift our voices loudly in prayer, hope, and love for trafficking victims and survivors. If just one person realizes

from this day that they or someone they know is being trafficked, we will have made a difference.”

Discussion Questions:

1. It is not always easy to help others who seem different than us. What can the Bible teach us about overcoming these prejudices based on fear?
2. How can we be more like Bakhita and work to forgive those who have victimized others and help them see a life of dignity and respect for others?
3. Sometimes we have to make sacrifices and do things we don’t like in order to help others. What are some realistic sacrifices we can make in our daily lives to help the fight against human trafficking?