

February 8 - St Josephine Bakhita

Remembering Those Who Have Been Trafficked



Opening Song: **"Come to set us free" – Bernadette Farrell**

*Come to set us free, come to make us your own.
Come to show the way to your people, your chosen.
Open our lives to the light of your promise.
Come to our hearts with healing, come to our minds with power,
come to us and bring us your life.*

You are light which shines in darkness, Morning Star which never sets.
Open our eyes which only dimly see the truth which sets us free.

You are hope which brings us courage, you are strength which never fails.
Open our minds to ways we do not know, but where your Spirit grows.

You are promise of salvation, you are God in human form.
Bring to our world of emptiness and fear the Word we long to hear.

Leader: Let us begin by observing a moment of silence in solidarity with the millions of women, men and children throughout the world who suffer each day in modern-day slavery.

Moment of Silence

We hold in our hearts all those whose lives are impacted by human trafficking as we pray Psalm 126 together.

Side 1: When God brought the exiles back to Zion,
we thought we were dreaming.
Our mouths were filled with laughter then,
our tongues with shouts of joy.

Side 2: And from the nations we heard,
"Their God has done great things for them."
Yes, our God has done great things for us,
and we are filled with joy.

Side 1: Bring back our exiles, O God,
like fresh streams in the desert.
May those who sow in tears
reap with songs and shouts of joy.

Side 2: Those that go forth weeping,
bearing the seeds for sowing,
shall come back with shouts of joy,
as they carry their harvest home.

All: Glory to you, God of life and freedom,
praise and thanksgiving now and forever. Amen.

Leader: Each person forced into slavery has a unique story — a story of struggles, hopes and dreams. Let us listen together to the story of one survivor of human trafficking.



Reader 1: St. Josephine Bakhita was born in southern Sudan in 1869. As a young girl, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Sold and resold in the markets of El Obeid and Karthoum, she was treated brutally by her captors. She did not remember the name she was given by her parents. “Bakhita,” which means “fortunate one,” was the name given to her by her kidnappers.

Reader 2: In 1883, she was bought by an Italian diplomat who sent her to Italy to work as a maid for the daughter of a family friend studying with the Canossian Daughters of Charity. It was there that Bakhita came to know about God whom “she had experienced in her heart without knowing” who God was. In 1890, she was baptized and received the name Josephine.

Reader 3: Later, the Italian family came to take their “property” back to Africa. Josephine expressed her desire to stay. When the family insisted she go, she remained firm, later writing: “I am sure the Lord gave me strength at that moment.” With the support of the superior of the Canossian sisters and the Cardinal of Venice, she won her freedom and later entered the novitiate. For the next 50 years she lived a life of prayer and service as a Canossian sister before her death in 1947.

Reader 4: St. Josephine was canonized in 2000, and there is currently a grassroots movement to designate her as the patron saint for human trafficking victims. At her canonisation in 2000, Pope St John Paul II said:

“In Saint 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 to them their dignity in the full exercise of their rights.”

Moment of silent reflection

Intercessions:

In the weeks before her death, St. Josephine Bakhita relived the terrible days of her captivity. It is said that she often cried out: “Please, loosen the chains ... they are heavy.” We ask her to intercede for us as we pray:

- For the estimated 27 million people being held in slavery-like conditions...

Response: *Loosen the chains ... they are heavy.*

- For young girls and women exploited and objectified in the commercial sex industry... *(Loosen...)*
- For those forced to become soldiers, especially children who are de-humanized and are taught to be violent... *(Loosen...)*
- For those in bonded labour in agricultural fields, mines and factories... *(Loosen...)*
- For conversion of heart for the perpetrators of human trafficking... *(Loosen...)*
- For governments, corporations and consumers, that we will address the systems that make human trafficking possible... *(Loosen...)*
- For the success of all efforts to stop the demand for human trafficking... *(Loosen...)*

...Add your own intentions... *(Loosen...)*

Closing Prayer:

God of hope and freedom, inspire us in our work to loosen the chains of human trafficking in our world. Strengthen us, so that like St. Josephine Bakhita, we may stand firm in our resolve to create a slave-free world. Amen.

Concluding Song: “Voices that Challenge” – David Haas

(Adapted from Prayer service developed by the Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center, Seattle, Washington 2012)

