

This information is provided by the Human Trafficking Task Force of the Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry of the Archdiocese of Hartford in honor of the feast of St. Bakhita. Since 2018, the HTTF has worked to end the injustice of human trafficking through education, awareness and partnership with other activist groups.

# St. Josephine Bakhita

Human Trafficking Task Force  
Office for Catholic Social Justice Ministry

## Her Story

- **Feast Day: February 8**
- Born in 1869
- Died in 1947
- Canonized in 2000
- *Bakhita* means "fortunate" in Arabic
- Spent her remaining days as Canossian Sister with the name Josephine Margaret Fortunata
- Known for her gentle voice and smile
- Patron saint of Sudan and human trafficking

### A Prayer to St. Josephine Bakhita

St Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child

And endured untold hardship and suffering.

Once liberated from your physical enslavement,

You found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.

O St. Bakhita assist all those who are trapped in a state of slavery.

Intercede with God on their behalf so that they will be released from their chains of captivity.

Amen.

(School Sisters of Notre Dame, 2013, USCCB)

St. Josephine was born in Darfur, Sudan in 1869. Her father, a semi-nomadic herdsman, was a well-respected member of the Daju tribe. Widowed when Josephine was only two years old, he provided her with a happy and relatively prosperous childhood. During the family's migration within Sudan, Josephine, then about nine years old, was captured by Arab slave traders, and subsequently, her life of bondage began.

In captivity she was forced to walk barefoot for 600 miles and was sold several times in the course of 12 years. Some owners treated her well. Several did not, one owner beating her severely and scarring her for life. Her path to freedom and safety began the day a Turkish general sold her to an Italian Consul serving in Sudan.

When the Consul planned to return to Italy, Josephine dared to ask him to take her along. Consenting, he did so, and in time gave her as a gift to be a nanny for the daughter of an Italian friend. As a nanny, she accompanied the daughter to a school conducted by the Canossian Daughters of Charity. During her mis-

tress's absence on a trip, she was placed in the custody of the Sisters. Upon her mistress's return, Josephine refused to return to the family and remained with the Sisters. Providentially

she was granted freedom by an Italian court of law.

As a child, Josephine had reveled in the beauty of the natural surroundings of her home. She had often wondered who created such magnificence. In Italy in the company of the Sisters, she found her answer: God. "Bakhita", the name ironically given to her by her captors, in Arabic

means "the fortunate one". Having experienced God's mercy to her, she could thank her captives, for had she not been kidnapped, she might not ever have come to know Jesus Christ nor have entered the Church. After years of enslavement, she was unable to remember her original name. In 1890 she was baptized Josephine Margaret Fortunata.

Josephine entered the Canossian Sisters in 1893, serving as cook and doorkeeper for 42 years. Known for her gentle voice and smile, when asked how she was, now as a "slave" of Christ, she would answer, "As the Master desires." At the close of her life, she re-lived the sufferings of her enslavement and was heard to cry out repeatedly, "Please loosen the chains . . . they are heavy". Josephine died on Feb. 8, 1947, was canonized in 2000 by Pope John Paul II, and proclaimed patron saint of Sudan and trafficking.

Paul II, and proclaimed patron saint of Sudan and trafficking.

*"Be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know Him. What a grace it is to know God!"* – St. Josephine Bakhita

(Written by Human Trafficking Task Force)





## Message of Pope Francis

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Today, February 8, is the Liturgical memory of Saint Josephina Bakhita, the Sudanese Sister who, as a girl, had the tragic experience of being a victim of trafficking. The Unions of Superiors and Superiors-Generals of religious Institutes promoted the Day of prayer and reflection against human trafficking. I encourage those who are committed to helping enslaved, exploited, abused men, women as instruments of work or pleasure and often tortured and mutilated. I hope that all those with government responsibilities will commit themselves with determination to remove the causes of this shameful wound. An unworthy wound of civil society. Each of us feels committed to being the voice of these brothers and sisters humiliated in their dignity. Let us all pray together ...

-Pope Francis, Angelus, February 8, 2015

*“If I were to meet the slave traders who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands, for if that did not happen, I would not be a Christian and religious today. The Lord has loved me so much. We must love everyone.”*

-St. Josephine Bakhita

## Prayer

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Let us consider for a moment what we might do to stop the demand for human trafficking, and let us pray:

For the women, men, and children currently held in slavery-like conditions, may freedom be restored to those who have been bought, sold, or kidnapped for the monetary benefit of others.

**Bring them hope and freedom.**

For those in bonded labor, in agricultural fields, mines and factories, who have been reduced to tools of production and commodities rather than human beings,

**Bring them hope and freedom.**

For children exploited and objectified in the commercial sex industry.

that they may be free to play, learn and grow up in freedom and safety.

**Bring them hope and freedom.**

For consumers, that we may be aware of how we are complicit in human trafficking

when we demand products made by people who are enslaved;

and that we may speak and work for justice for all those who are trafficked.

**Bring them hope and freedom.**

God of hope and freedom, inspire us to act for justice

and bring an end to human trafficking. Help us to build a world

where all are free to live with dignity.

**Amen**

(Prayer Service to End Human Trafficking, Intercommunity Peace and Justice Center)