

Stories From the Faithful

St. Josephine Bakhita (c.1870-1947)

Born to herders in the Darfur district of Sudan around 1870, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave raiders when she was barely seven years old and given the name Bakhita, which means fortunate. She was sold in the market of El Obeid, first to an Arab chieftain and later to a Turkish military officer who had her branded with 114 razor-cut scars. She was later resold to the Italian vice counsel, Luigi Legnani, who lived in Khartoum. The Legnani family returned to Italy in 1885 where Bakhita was given to Augusto Michaeli, a merchant with ties to Sudan.

Bakhita became babysitter to Augusto's daughter, Mimmina Michieli, whom she accompanied to Venice's Institute of the Catechumens, run by the Canossian Sisters. While Mimmina was being instructed, Josephine felt drawn to the Catholic Church. When the Michielis returned from Africa and wanted to take Mimmina and Josephine back with them, the future saint refused to go. During the ensuing court case, the Canossian sisters and the patriarch of Venice intervened on Josephine's behalf. The judge concluded that since slavery was illegal in Italy, she had actually been free since 1885.

Even as a child, Bakhita evidently had an innate religious sense, nourished by her wonder at the beauty of the natural world: "Who could be the Master of these beautiful things? I felt a great desire to see Him, to know Him and to pay Him homage." That innate sense of awe and her experiences in a Catholic school led her to the faith. Bakhita was baptized and confirmed in Venice, taking the name Josephine Margaret in 1890. She then entered the novitiate of the Canossian Daughters of Charity. She was admitted to first vows after a searching interview with the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, Joseph Sarto, who would later become Pius X.

In 1902 Josephine was assigned to a Canossian convent near Padua, where the superior asked the young sister to write about her life in Africa, which she did in a 30-page memoir in Italian. Sister Josephine Bakhita spent her vowed life assisting her religious community through cooking, sewing, embroidery and welcoming visitors at the door. She soon became well loved by the children attending the sisters' school and the local citizens. In 1935 she made a tour of Canossian convents telling her life story, despite her own reluctance and shyness. She was delighted to serve three years (1935-1938) in Milan where young sisters prepared for the African missions.

Evidence put forth in the beatification process makes it clear that all who knew her held Sister Josephine in high esteem. The first steps toward her beatification began in 1959. She was beatified in 1992 and canonized eight years later on October 1, 2000 by Pope John Paul II .

One cannot ponder the life of this transparently good woman without remembering that children are still kidnapped and sold into slavery. When we honor Josephine Bakhita, we ought to do so not with any spirit of sentimentality but with a vigorous sense of outrage at those who rob children and adults of their dignity, their freedom and their physical and spiritual integrity. We honor Josephine Bakhita not as a humble nun (which she surely was) but as an emblematic figure who stands for all who are enslaved.

Taken from "Saint of the Day" by American Catholic.org, and St. Anthony Messenger article: "Josephine

St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207 - 1231)

St. Elizabeth was born 1207 to King Andrew II and Gertrude of Hungary. At a young age, she was betrothed to Louis IV of Thuringia, who became king in 1221. As she grew in age, and in spite of her position at court, she began to lead an austere simple life, practiced penance, and devoted herself to works of charity. After her marriage, she continued her charitable practices, which included spinning wool for the clothing of the poor. In 1223, Franciscan friars arrived, and the teenage Elizabeth not only learned about the ideals of Francis of Assisi, but started to live them. She was known to bring bread to the poor, and to bring the sick into the castle to care for them. King Louis IV was not upset by his wife's charitable efforts, but highly esteemed her virtue and encouraged her in her exemplary life. Elizabeth assumed control of affairs at home and distributed alms in all parts of their territory, even giving away state robes and ornaments to the poor. Below the castle, she built a hospital with twenty-eight beds and visited the inmates daily to attend to them. After her death, Elizabeth was commonly associated with the Third Order of St. Francis, the primarily lay branch of the Franciscan Order, though it is not sure if she actually formally joined them.
(Taken from Catholic Online - www.catholic.org)