

Saint Josephine Bakhita,

You remained strong and brave through years of cruelty and abuse. You did not become bitter, but used your knowledge and experience in helping to prepare Sisters who were going to work in Africa. Your gentle manner brought peace and strength to all.

Help us to have courage when times are hard; help us to be strong and supportive to anyone in need; help us always to remain close, as you were, to Jesus, and show his love to all.

Amen.

A thought to take away

St Josephine saw and experienced how suffering, violence and lack of respect destroyed people, physically, mentally and emotionally. She had known slavery and oppression. However, neither revenge nor anger was in her heart, and she was known for her gentleness and her smile.

This may not seem remarkable, but it had a powerful effect on those around her.

An action to complete

- Is there a 'situation' with a person, or an unhappy memory which you cling to, and which influences the way you behave?
- Can you make the huge step of 'letting it go', and so become a joyful, life-giving presence to everyone you meet?

Saint Josephine Bakhita
Pray for us



St Josephine Bakhita

Feast Day
8 February

Birthplace
Darfur, Sudan

Born
1869 (approximately)

Died
8 February 1947

Canonised
1 October 2000 by Pope John Paul II

Patron saint of
Sudan and South Sudan



With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing...



This passage from the letter to the Hebrews speaks to us of St Josephine's path through life, her attitude to others, and her trust in God.

"Keep in mind those who are in prison... and those who are being badly treated, since you are all one body... be content with what you have. With the Lord to help me, I fear nothing..."

These words are a challenge to our faith. We are reminded of our duty of care and concern for all, especially those who are suffering.

- Do I remember people whose lives are affected by injustice, oppression and greed?
- Do I support those around me who are lonely and facing difficulties?

The life of St Josephine Bakhita

St Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan, into a well respected, comfortable and loving family. She describes her early childhood as “a happy and carefree life, without knowing suffering”.

However, at about eight years old, Josephine was kidnapped by some Arab slave traders, who had previously kidnapped her elder sister. Over the next eight to ten years, she was forced to walk barefoot for miles, and was bought and sold on several occasions. These years of slavery were brutal, terrifying and violent.

This time was so traumatic that Josephine forgot her own name, so she took one given to her by one of the slave traders, Bakhita, which is Arabic for “lucky”.

As a sign that she was ‘his’, Josephine’s fourth owner subjected her, and other slaves, to the torture of scarification and tattooing. Deep sets of patterned lines were cut all over her body and she was left permanently scarred.

Josephine’s final owner was an Italian diplomat, and so began her journey from slavery to freedom. Whilst her owner did business in the Middle East, she stayed in Italy with the Canossian Sisters, working as a nanny.

During this time, Josephine came to know Jesus; she recognised that true freedom and hope come from him, and that he offers fullness of life to all people.

Italy did not recognise slavery and so finally Josephine was free. After being baptised in 1890, she joined the Canossian Sisters in 1893. As an African woman with a deep sense of compassion, who knew, loved and understood her country and its people, and who had endured brutality, slavery and oppression, Josephine was uniquely equipped to help and advise the Sisters who were going to serve in Africa. For CAFOD and our partners, she is a role model and symbol of hope for all those who live with suffering on that continent.

As one writer said: “Her mind was always on God, her heart in Africa.”

CAFOD’s work in South Sudan

CAFOD has worked in Sudan, including in Darfur, where St Josephine Bakhita was born. We now work in the new country of South Sudan. CAFOD has launched a major humanitarian programme in Maban County supplying seeds, tools and training to about 10,000 people who are living in refugee camps and in the local community. This will mean that the people living in the camps don’t just survive on handouts; we’re helping them be self-sufficient and to live with dignity.



Houmada with his father.

Like St Josephine Bakhita, Houmada, 14, has travelled a long distance to arrive at the camp.

“I was living in Blue Nile state until June last year. The problems started with the soldiers bombing our village during the war. After our village was burned, we decided to go to another place. We spent two months travelling around. We didn’t have anything to eat. We survived on leaves and bark from trees. People died because there was no water. Things are okay in the camp because there is no bombing here, but I am not happy to stay here because I have left my country. There is still a lot of bombing in my country, so I can’t go back.

“Every day, we have one meal at around six.

“CAFOD have given us tools and seeds to grow vegetables. They have supported us by giving us seeds to plant, like okra and beans”

“We use them to eat, not to sell. I like the taste of vegetables. We grow vegetables for ourselves and plant them around the home. We fetch water in a jerrycan to water them. I go to school in the camp. My dream for the future is to be well educated. I would like to go home.”



Houmada watering his garden.

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