

FEBRUARY 2023 - Featured Saint of the Month

Saint Josephine Margaret Bakhita

Reflection shared by Krystal Montgomery - Director of Religious Education

Saint Josephine Margaret Bakhita was born around 1869 in the village of Olgossa in the Darfur region of Sudan. She was a member of the Daju people and her uncle was a tribal chief. Due to her family lineage, she grew up happy and relatively prosperous, saying that as a child, she did not know suffering.

Historians believe that sometime in February 1877, Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. Although she was just a child, she was forced to walk barefoot over 600 miles to a slave market. She was bought and sold at least twice during the grueling journey.

For the next 12 years she would be bought, sold and given away over a dozen times. She spent so much time in captivity that she forgot her original name. As a slave, her experiences varied from fair treatment to cruel.

The last time she was sold, her master was kind and did not hurt her. When he decided to go to Italy, she begged for him to take her with. After a long and dangerous journey across Sudan, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean, they arrived in Italy. She was given away to another family as a gift, and she served them as a nanny.

When her new family had dealings in Sudan, her mistress decided to travel without Josephine and placed her in the custody of the Canossian Sisters in Venice.

While she was in the custody of the sisters, she came to learn about God. According to Josephine, she had always known about God, who created all things, but she did not know who He was. The sisters answered her questions. She was deeply moved by her time with the sisters and discerned a call to follow Christ.

When her mistress returned from Sudan, Josephine refused to leave. Her mistress spent three days trying to persuade her to leave the sisters, but Josephine remained steadfast. This caused the sisters to complain to Italian authorities on Josephine's behalf.

The case went to court, and the court found that slavery had been outlawed in Sudan before Josephine was born, so she could not lawfully be made a slave. She was declared free! Josephine could finally choose what to do with her life. She chose to remain with the Canossian Sisters. *Continued...*



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Josephine became Catholic and after a time, took her final vows on December 8, 1896 to become a sister. For the next 42 years of her life, she worked as a cook and a doorkeeper at the convent. She also traveled and visited other convents telling her story to other sisters and preparing them for work in Africa.

She was known for her gentle voice and smile. When speaking of her enslavement, she often professed she would thank her kidnappers. For had she not been kidnapped, she might never have come to know Jesus Christ and entered His Church.

Saint Josephine Bakhita is the patron saint of Sudan and her feast day is celebrated on February 8.

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