

**SUGGESTED HOMILY NOTES: 5TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME,
SATURDAY 9th and SUNDAY 10th FEBRUARY, 2019**

On Friday 8 February, the Church invites us to celebrate the feast day of one of the most recently canonized saints – St Josephine Bakhita. Each year she is honoured as the patron saint of Sudan, South Sudan and of people who are trafficked or held in slave-like conditions.

Born in Olgossa in the Darfur region of southern Sudan in 1869, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery as a little girl and forced to work.

She later told how her slave owner gave her the name Bakhita, which means fortunate. As a young girl, she was resold several times, until finally in 1883 she was sold to the Italian consul in Sudan.

Two years later, he took his slave, Bakhita, to Italy and gave her to his friend as a babysitter. One of her tasks was to accompany her charges to a school run by the Canossian Sisters in Venice. Over time, Bakhita felt drawn to the Good News of Jesus. She was baptized and confirmed in the Catholic Church in 1890, taking the name Josephine.

When the Italian slave owner and his family wanted to take their slave, Josephine, back to Africa, she refused to go. During the ensuing court case, the Canossian Sisters and the patriarch of Venice intervened on Josephine's behalf and the judge eventually concluded that since slavery was illegal in Italy, Josephine had to be released from the bonds of slavery and given her freedom.

Josephine later joined the Canossian Sisters in 1893 and made her profession three years later. She spent the rest of her life living in her religious community, cooking, sewing and kindly welcoming visitors at the door. Her life as a Sister became one of 'service freely given' and the children and local citizens grew to love her.

Josephine once said, "Be good, love the Lord, pray for those who do not know God, for what a great grace it is to know God!" Josephine Bakhita died in 1947 and was canonized in 2000.

We still hear or read reports of some of the millions of women, children and men in various parts of the world, or even in Australia, who are enslaved today. These people may be physically imprisoned, held captive by debts or threats to their lives or the lives of those they love, or entrapped in forced marriages or work situations, which deprive them of their basic human right to freedom.

Five years ago Pope Francis called for the end to all forms of slavery and human trafficking, especially those which involve children. He said - "They are children, not slaves". Last year he called human trafficking a form of slavery and an atrocious scourge. In recent years our Australian bishops and other

religious leaders have called all of us to take some action towards eliminating slavery and human trafficking wherever we live or work.

So as we prepare to honour St Josephine Bakhita, let's take a few moments to reflect on how we will each take the challenge of the Gospel to heart and be prepared, whatever the cost, to help bring the good news of freedom and justice to all.

This weekend may each of us be willing to set aside some time to learn a little more about human trafficking and slavery in the world today. May we individually, or in our families, also decide on one or two practical actions we will take to play our part in helping to eliminate slavery. Every small action and each purchase we make can make a difference and help bring healing and hope.

May God who is good and who binds up all wounds, transform us through the example of Jesus and the story of St Josephine Bakhita, so that we will be ready to do our part in bringing an end to all forms of slavery in the world today.