

Prayer Service for an End to Human Trafficking

Remembering St. Josephine Bakhita Feast Day February 8.

Opening Song: Select a song, such as *We are Called*

Leader: Let us begin by observing a moment of silence in solidarity with the more than 27 million women, men and children who suffer each day from modern day slavery.

[Moment of Silence]

Leader: We hold all those impacted by human trafficking in our hearts as we pray Psalm 126 together.

Psalm Prayer (Read Antiphonally)

Side One

When God brought the exiles back to Zion
we were like those who dream.
Then our mouths were filled with laughter,
and our tongues with shouts of joy.

Side One

Bring back our exiles, O God,
like fresh streams in the desert.
May those who sow in tears
reap with songs and shouts of joy.

Side Two

Among the nations it was said,
“God has done great things for them.”
God has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.

Side Two

Those that go forth weeping,
bearing the seeds for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.

All: Glory to you, God of life and freedom, praise and thanksgiving now and forever. Amen

Leader: Each person forced into slavery has a unique story—a story of struggles, hopes and dreams. Let us listen now to the story of one survivor of human trafficking.



Reader 1: St. Josephine Bakhita was born in southern Sudan in 1869. As a young girl, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Sold and resold in the markets of El Obeid and Karthoum, she was treated brutally by her captors. She did not remember the name she was given by her parents. Bakhita, which means “fortunate one,” was the name given to her by her kidnappers.

Reader 2: In 1883, she was bought by an Italian diplomat who sent her to Italy to work as a maid for the daughter of a family friend studying with the Canossian Daughters of Charity. It

was there that Bakhita came to know about God whom “she had experienced in her heart without knowing” who God was. In 1890, she was baptized and received the name Josephine.

Reader 1: Later, the Italian family came to take their “property” back to Africa. Josephine expressed her desire to stay. When the family insisted she go, she remained firm, later writing: “I am sure the Lord gave me strength at that moment.” With the support of the superior of the Canossian Sisters and the Cardinal of Venice, she won her freedom and later entered the novitiate. For the next 50 years she lived a life of prayer and service as a Canossian Sister before her death in 1947.

Reader 2: St. Josephine was canonized in 2000, and there is currently a grassroots movement to designate her as the patron saint for human trafficking victims.

Quiet Reflection/Sharing

“In St. Josephine Bakhita we find a shining advocate of genuine emancipation. The history of **her life inspires not passive acceptance but firm resolve** to work effectively to free girls and women from oppression and violence, and to return them to their dignity in the full exercise of their rights.”

Response Prayer: In the weeks before her death, St. Josephine Bakhita re-lived the terrible days of her captivity. More than once, she cried out: “Please, loosen the chains ... they are heavy!” We ask for the intercession of St. Josephine as we pray ...

For the estimated 27 million women, men and children currently held in slavery-like conditions.

R. Loosen the chains ... they are heavy!

For young girls and women exploited and objectified in the commercial sex industry. **R.**

For those forced to become soldiers, especially children forced to commit violence. **R.**

For those in bonded labor in agricultural fields, mines and factories. **R.**

For conversion of heart for the perpetrators and organizers of human trafficking. **R.**

For governments, corporations, and consumers, that we will address the systems that make human trafficking possible. **R.**

For the success of efforts to stop the demand for human trafficking. **R.**

Closing Prayer: God of hope and freedom, inspire us in our work to loosen the chains of human trafficking in our world. Strengthen us so that like St. Josephine Bakhita, we may stand firm in our resolve to create a slave-free world. Amen