

# Prayer Service for an End to Human Trafficking

## Remembering St. Josephine Bakhita and all Victims of Trafficking

*Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free victims and stop this crime that's become even more aggressive, that threatens not just individuals, but the foundational values of society, international security and laws, the economy, families and communities.*

—Pope Francis

**Opening Song:** Select an appropriate song

**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:** Each person forced into slavery has a personal story...a story of struggles, hopes and dreams. Let us listen to the story of Bakhita, a survivor of human trafficking.

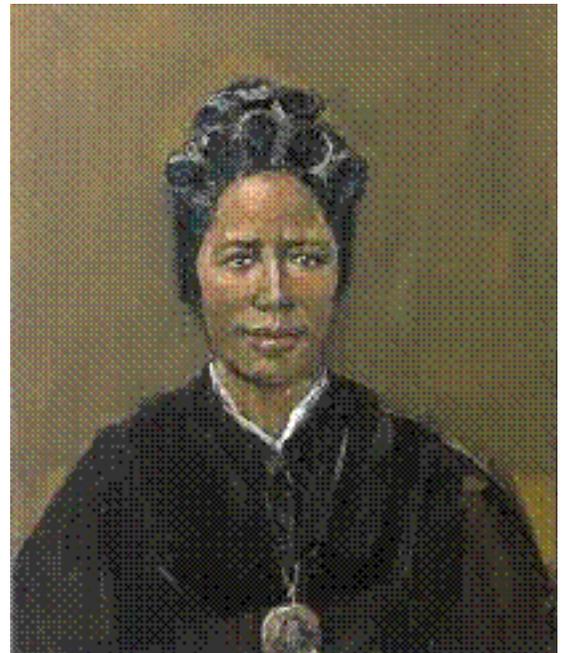
**Reader 1:** St. Josephine Bakhita was born in southern Sudan in 1869. As a young girl, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. Sold and resold in the markets of El Obeid and Karthoum, she was treated brutally by her captors. She did not remember the name she was given by her parents. Bakhita, which 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. There is a grassroots movement to designate her as the patron saint of kidnapped and trafficked persons.

**Leader:** We hold all 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.  
Than our mouths were filled with laughter  
And our tongues with 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 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*

Those that go forth weeping  
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:** As we listen to the stories of survivors of human trafficking, we pray for the strength of those enslaved as we work to create a world where no one causes terror again.

**Reader 1:** “The long working hours made us weak and exhausted... I always felt very tired and much disturbed because the supervisors were scolding me for carelessness in my work. I also suffered from headache and leg pain. I didn’t like working at the mill at all.”

—A 20-year-old Dalit Girl working 12-hour plus days at a textile factory in Tamil Nadu, India

**Reader 2:** “My wife and I were forced to do agricultural and construction work to pay off our debt. Our small children were abused and forced to do household chores. We were all forced to live in the garage and were threatened with deportation. Food was locked up and we were not allowed to eat without permission.”

—A man who moved with his family from Latin America to Washington State, USA

**Reader 1:** “We had no choice. There was nowhere to flee; we were surrounded by the sea. After we arrived back to the shore, we were locked inside the room guarded by their men. The workers had to take one trip after another. There were many workers living under the same conditions.”

—A young man enslaved on a fishing boat in Thailand

**Reader 2:** “They let me know what would become of me if I told anyone. They told me they knew where I lived, they knew my teachers, they knew my school, they knew everything about me. There was nothing I could do to protect myself. At 14-years-old. I didn’t know where to begin.”

—An American girl sold by a friend’s father and trafficked for sex in Florida, USA

**Leader:** Take a moment to reflect upon these stories.

(Moment of silence)

*Prayer Response: Restore their freedom*

**Leader:** May human dignity be restored to those who have been bought, sold or kidnapped for the monetary benefit of others. R

**Leader:** For those in bonded labor, in agricultural fields, mines and factories who have been reduced to tools of production, commodities than human beings. R

**Leader:** For those who cannot return home due to stigma of prostitution, disease or shame, that they receive the solace, healing and support they need R

**Leader:** For women who are estimated to make up 80% of human trafficking victims, and for changes in societal attitudes that deny the equality and dignity of women. R

**Leader:** For victims of trafficking in our own local communities. May we have eyes to see and act to make our communities slave free, R

**All:** Awaken our hearts and deepen our commitment to work for a world where every person is free and able to live with dignity and freedom. We ask for conversion of heart for traffickers and for strong laws that protect victims. Give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity, so that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all people. Amen

**Closing Song:** We are Called (or another choice)

### **ACTIONS:**

**LEARN** about human trafficking – globally and locally

**PRAY** for victims of trafficking and for an end to this slavery

**DEMAND** slave-free products. Buy fair trade when possible.

**ADVOCATE** for state and federal legislation that protects victims

*From the U.S. Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking (USCSAHT)*

*Prayer adapted from INTERCOMMUNITY PEACE & JUSTICE CENTER – Seattle, WA*