

St Josephine Bakhita 1869-1947: Feast Day 8th February



When she was 7, near her village home in Darfur, Sudan she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders and forced to walk barefoot about 600 miles.

She was so traumatised she couldn't remember her name & was given the name Bakhita "Lucky" by her captors. She was sold and resold five times.

She was treated very badly by some of her "owners": whipped, cut, salt poured in wounds.

Whilst a slave, she became a modern, proud and independent woman, always looking out for the underdog.

Her last "owner" was an Italian consul called Legnani. He treated her well so she insisted he take her back to Italy. On arrival she was given to a friend Michieli and she was lodged temporarily in a convent. Aged 20, when Michieli's wife came to reclaim Bakhita she repeatedly refused to leave and a court ruled that her slave status was illegal - free at last.

She remained with the nuns and was baptised - later becoming a nun herself.

She once said, "If I were to meet those who kidnapped me, and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands. For, if these things had not happened, I would not have been a Christian and a religious today".

She is venerated as a modern African saint, and as a statement against the brutality of slavery. Pope John Paul II said when canonising her on 1 October 2000:- *"Rejoice, all of Africa! Bakhita has come back to you. The daughter of Sudan sold into slavery as a living piece of merchandise and yet still free. Free with the freedom of the saints."*

Some people have promoted Bakhita as a possible patron saint for the victims of human trafficking, the modern-day form of slavery that includes forced labour and many adults and children of both sexes being forced into prostitution. St Josephine Bakhita, pray for us!¹

If you want to read more there is a small CTS leaflet on her life and a book "Bakhita" by Veronique Olmi published by Other Press. The book's fly leaf speaks of Bakhita's unfathomable resilience, her stubborn desire to live, and her ability to turn toward the pain of others in spite of the terrible sufferings that she too must endure.

¹ Extracts from the website of The RC Diocese of East Anglia. Remaining text prepared by Thetford parishioner Simon John of RC Diocese of East Anglia: john_simong@hotmail.com