



Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



Saint Josephine Bakhita February 8

Goal: To provide a lesson for children about a saint or saints who exemplify a deep relationship with God and the ability to share it with others

Materials Needed: This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow-up activities

Objectives:

- To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
- To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a saint?
One who:
 - lives like Jesus
 - teaches others about Jesus by their example
 - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
- To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Josephine Bakhita, (say Buh-**KEE**-tah) telling as much of the story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
- To learn that Josephine was a saint because she lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
- To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
- To help the children develop listening skills

Procedure:

- Prepare the children to listen to Josephine Bakhita's story. (Have a map posted or globe available)
- Read, or have read, the attached story of Saint Josephine. Elaborate/abbreviate as necessary for time constraints or age level of listeners.
- Use the follow-up questions (below).
- Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

Saint Josephine Bakhita

Born in a small rural village in what is now South Sudan in 1869, Josephine Bakhita never recalled her real name. At the age of nine, while she was out walking with a friend, she was kidnapped by slave traders. One of six children (one of them her twin sister), she never saw her family again. This so traumatized the young girl, she forgot her own name. Her captors ironically gave her the name *Bakhita*, which means fortunate one. Her life was anything but fortunate.

Bakhita was sold or traded from one cruel master to another over the next few years. She was beaten and tortured, even branded multiple times by one owner who wanted to be sure that if she ever escaped, he could identify her by the marks he left on her body. Throughout this mistreatment, Bakhita retained a sense of awe and wonder at the beauty of the natural world. She said later in life that she thought to herself, "Who could be the Master of these beautiful things? I felt a great desire to see Him, to know Him and to pay Him homage."

Bakhita was finally sold to an Italian master. The family moved to Venice, Italy from Africa where Bakhita served as a nanny to the family's daughter. When the master and his wife took a trip back to Sudan, they decided to leave Bakhita and their daughter in the care of the Canossian Sisters who taught them about the Catholic faith and God's great love for everyone. When the couple returned to Italy and declared that they would all return to Sudan with Josephine as their slave, she courageously refused. The Canossian Sisters intervened with the government and Bakhita was declared free. Slavery was not only illegal in Italy, it had been made so in Sudan well before Bakhita's birth, making it impossible for her to live as a slave any longer. Bakhita was baptized, taking the name Josephine. She joined the convent and worked first as a seamstress, cook, and porter (the person in charge of answering the door). She later became a speaker for the Sisters' missionary work, traveling

and telling her life story.

In her final days, Bakhita suffered ill health and was sometimes delirious. She must have thought back to her childhood in bondage as she called out, "Please loosen the chains ... they are so heavy!"

When she died on February 8, 1947, thousands, whom she had met in the markets or helped at the door of the convent, waited to pass by her body to honor this humble woman known for her piety and charity.

Pray: St. Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child and endured untold hardship and suffering. Once freed, you found true salvation with Jesus Christ. We pray today for those still trapped by the real bonds of human slavery in our world. Provide comfort to survivors of slavery and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith. Help us to remember that there are many in our world who are denied basic freedoms. We pray for those enslaved in any way. Amen.

Follow-up Questions: (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Saint Josephine was known to be kind and loving to others, even when she was mistreated. Think of a time when you felt life was unfair. Were you able to keep your thoughts charitable? How? If not, why not?
2. Josephine did not know that she was technically not a slave in Italy. Why?
3. Josephine loved the wonder of creation. How do you appreciate the gift of God's earth to us?

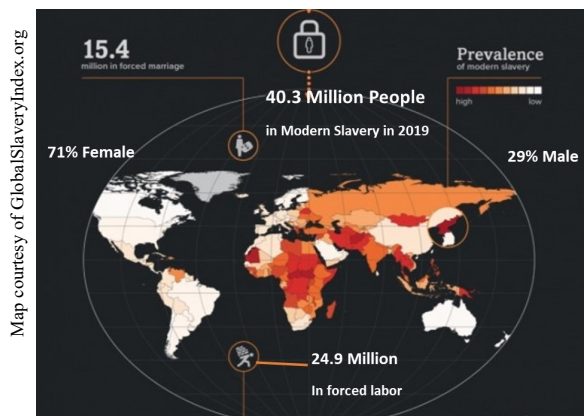
Follow-up Activities:

Younger students:

1. Write a letter to Saint Josephine. Ask her for help breaking free from a bad habit that keeps you bound just as her chains kept her bound.
2. Draw a picture of Josephine on the day of her baptism—remember she was an adult!

Older students:

1. Even in the worst times of her life, Saint Josephine loved the beauty of God's creation and the earth. This month, organize a bottle redemption drive in at your school or parish. Donate the proceeds to the missions through the Missionary Childhood Association.
2. As we honor the spirit of Saint Josephine Bakhita, we must keep in mind that thousands of people are still forced into slavery or some kind of bondage all around the world. Children in India and Pakistan are forced to weave expensive rugs because their small hands can make tinier, more desirable knots. Young ones in many countries are sold by destitute families to act as house slaves for wealthier families. Young girls are sold into marriage in their early teens or younger. Write a letter to your member of Congress asking him or her what the United States is doing to stand up for the rights of enslaved people.



In 2019, approximately 40.3 million people were victims of modern slavery.

This number is about FOUR TIMES the entire population of South Sudan, Saint Josephine Bakhita's native country.

All students:

1. The Archdiocese of Boston has a vibrant African American Catholic Community. To learn more about it, go to this link: <http://bit.ly/1z8mpZC>
2. Pray a living World Mission Rosary for enslaved people everywhere. Dress in the colors of the different continents to make a statement that you stand against modern slavery around the world.

Missionary Childhood Association

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