

Monday February 8th, Monday in the Fifth Week in Ordinary Time, Year 1

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

And a lovely morning it looks – we've certainly escaped all the snowstorms in the East, mainly due to the Pennines the weather forecaster said this morning. God bless 'em! And this morning our St. Bernadette's covid flow testing team (including me) were out in force in the hall as you can see. And all was well!

This week we begin reading from the Book of Genesis, the first book in the Bible. The first part of Genesis consists of various traditions that were passed down from one generation to the next and were eventually written down. They were stories with a spiritual significance - each had a special message about God. Today we have the first half of the wonderful story of Creation, genesis 1:1-19, with God creating everything out of nothing. *'God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light! And it was good.'*

Jesus continues his healing mission both spiritual and physical, with people being healed even by just touching his cloak. *'All those who touched him were cured.'* Let us pray for healing in these covid times:

O Holy One

we come before you today in need of your healing hand.

In you all things are possible.

Hold our hearts within yours, and renew our minds, bodies, and souls.

We are lost, but I come to you find healing grace and peace.

You gave us life, and you also give us the gift of infinite joy.

Give us the strength to move forward on the path you've laid out for us.

Guide us towards better health, and give us the wisdom to identify those you've placed around us, and the gifts of science and medicine to help use get better.

'Lay Your Hands Gently Upon Us' would be a most fitting hymn for today, methinks.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7SdeWyVBQCg>

And today we celebrate the amazing woman and the amazing life of Saint Josephine Margaret Bakhita. She was born around 1869 in the village of Olgossa in the Darfur region of Sudan. She was a member of the Daju people, and her uncle was a tribal chief, but sometime in February 1877,

Josephine was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. Although she was just a child, for the next 12 years she would be bought, sold and given away over a dozen times. She spent so much time in captivity that she forgot her original name. As a slave, her experiences varied from fair treatment to cruel, with daily beatings, leaving her with 112 scars on her body. In 1883 she was sold to the Italian Vice Consul, Callisto Legani, a much kinder master and he did not beat her. When it was time for him to return to Italy, she begged to be taken with him, and he agreed. After arriving in Italy, she was given away to another family as a gift and she served them as a nanny.

Her new family also had dealings in Sudan had when her mistress decided to travel to Sudan without Josephine, she placed her in the custody of the Canossian Sisters in Venice. While she was in the custody of the sisters, she came to learn about God. She was deeply moved by her time with the sisters and discerned a call to follow Christ. When her mistress returned from Sudan, Josephine refused to leave. The case went to court, and the court found that slavery had been outlawed in Sudan before Josephine was born, so she could not be lawfully made slave. For the first time in her life, Josephine was free and could choose what to do with her life. She chose to remain with the Canossian Sisters. She was received in to the Church on January 9, 1890 and took the name Josephine Margaret and Fortunata. (Fortunata is the Latin translation for her Arabic name, Bakhita). The Archbishop who gave her the sacraments was none other than Giuseppe Sarto, the Cardinal Patriarch of Venice, who would later become Pope Pius X.

Josephine became a novice with the Canossian Daughters of Charity religious order in 1896. She was eventually assigned to a convent in Schio, Vicenza. For the next 42 years of her life, she worked as a cook and a doorkeeper at the convent, as well as travelling to other convents telling her story to other sisters and preparing them for work in Africa. She was known for her gentle voice and smile. When speaking of her enslavement, she often professed she would thank her kidnappers, for had she not been kidnapped, she might never have come to know Jesus Christ and entered His Church. In her later years, she began to suffer physical pain and was forced to use a wheelchair, but she always remained cheerful. If anyone asked her how she was, she would reply, 'As the master desires.' On the evening of February 8, 1947, Josephine spoke her last words, 'Our Lady, Our Lady!' and died.

In 1958, the process of canonization began for Josephine under Pope John XXIII. On December 1st, 1978, Pope John Paul II declared her venerable. Sadly, the news of her beatification in 1992 was censored in Sudan, but just nine months later, Pope John Paul II visited Sudan and honoured her publicly. He canonized her on October 1, 2000. In 2019, Pope Francis drew attention to the scourge of human trafficking on Saint Bakhita's feast day and called upon government leaders worldwide to intervene and stop the trafficking of persons. The Pope prayed to Saint Bakhita and asked that she

intercede and assist trafficking victims. On this her Feast Day we are asked to pray for victims of Human Trafficking and those who work to combat it.

*Josephine Bakhita, you were sold into slavery as a child
and endured untold hardship and suffering.
Once liberated from your physical enslavement,
you found true redemption in your encounter with Christ and his Church.
Oh St. Bakhita, assist all those who are trapped in a state of slavery;
Intercede with God on their behalf
so that they will be released from their chains of captivity.
Those whom man enslaves, let God set free.
Provide comfort to survivors of slavery
and let them look to you as an example of hope and faith.
Help all survivors find healing from their wounds.
We ask for your prayers and intercessions for those enslaved among us.
Amen.*

As I said, an amazing woman, and an amazing life.

Be blessed to have the freedom to make the most of a beautiful day.

Ooh, by the way, if you want some clear information regarding Covid and so on, check out www.fullfact.org. Lots of interesting reading.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.