

First Reading: This is a small excerpt about the Life of St. Josephine Bakhita

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.

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.

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. She was trafficked and an immigrant in Italy. St. Josephine was canonized in 2000.

Second Reading: Story of Magnolia (not real name): I had been teaching pre-school in my small town in Mexico for several years. I loved the children and was glad I had income. I could help my parents with the bills. One of my good friends had gone to the United States a year earlier, and kept in contact with me. She told me what a good life she had, that the wages were a lot better, and that she would have someone accompany me and she would meet me across the border. So I saved up my money to pay the “coyote”, and several months later, with tears, fears and some hope, I kissed my parents goodbye, and started my new adventure. As promised, as we reached the US, my friend met us and continued the journey with us.

After an all day trip, we came around midnight to a small grocery store that was closed for the night. My friend told me to get my things and wait here, while she and the driver went to find the man who bought me. “The man who bought me”... Those words rang with disbelief in my entire being, as I crouched down next to the

building and began to cry. What had I gotten my self into? How could my friend betray me like this? I was alone, without any resources, and all my money had been used to bring me here. At the first light, I knew I needed to get out of there before my friend came back, but not knowing English and not having a clue where to go, I felt hopeless and helpless. After a while I caught sight of a man walking with his toddler and figured it would be safe to approach him. I asked him where there was a church in the few English words I knew and surprisingly he answered me in Spanish. He told me there was a church a few blocks away so I walked there. Luckily there was a couple there who were bilingual and were willing to listen to my story. They asked me what I wanted to do. I told them that I wanted to go home to Mexico. They called the bus station to see how much a ticket would be. Then we visited several churches in a larger city asking for money and received enough donations to buy the bus ticket. The bus traveled to Mexico and so the driver and the passengers spoke Spanish. I know through all the pain and betrayal, I was blessed to have found the church and the people who helped me or who know where I would have ended up.

Let us pray the prayer for Immigration

Third Reading: Story of Eliana (not real name): a Bolivian woman who accepted a job in California and was told they would help her get a six month work visa. She worked for six months but there was one problem: she had a tourist visa, which did not legally permit her to work. Eliana had unknowingly become a victim of labor trafficking. Unsure of where to go, the only solution she saw was reporting her employer to US Customs and Border Patrol, thinking they would understand and help. They didn't!

Instead Eliana was placed in handcuffs and taken to multiple detention centers over the course of two years. She was forced to work, ironically, since working without a visa had been her only crime, and was routinely mistreated by the guards. There were times when she was ready to give up hope and sign any papers whether she understood a word or not. However, thanks to God, an organization called the Florence project and visitors who came to see her and other migrants, she kept hope and eventually won her case. She is living in Arizona and leads an initiative in support of migrants.

Let us pray the prayer to end trafficking