

# ***Saint Josephine Bakhita***

## ***The Great Hope***

Sis Herminia Cosico, FDCC

Mother Bakhita was born in Sudan in 1869. The heartbreaking story of Mother Bakhita will, in God's time lead us to the triumph of her Sainthood, but after long calvary.

The family of Bakhita lived at the very heart of Africa in Darfur. She had three brothers and three sisters. She lived a very happy, carefree life then, without knowing what suffering meant. However, that peaceful life did not last long. It was a horrible period of slave trade in Africa. Bakhita remembered well enough when her own eldest sister had been carried away by the raiders. She witnessed her parents bitter anguish and the cries of the whole family. That was her first meeting with sorrow and hopelessness.

Not long after the kidnapping of her sister, Bakhita herself fell into the hands of the kidnappers. Bakhita was not the name she received from her parents at birth. The terrible experiences she went through made her forget even her own name. Bakhita, which means "fortunate", is the

name given her by kidnappers. And by that name, she was to be known ever after.

Although much of Bakhita's memories of happy childhood were gone with shocked

fear, it remained in her heart the pain of harsh treatment, the isolation, hunger, fatigue and the anguish of those long hours, worn out with crying and solitude. The slaves were treated as beasts of burden. Bakhita and other children (slaves) were chained at night to prevent them from running away.

They were sold and resold more than once in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum. She experienced the humiliations and sufferings of slavery, both physical and moral.

After having survived the cruelty of several "masters" (as Bakhita referred to them), Bakhita was bought by an Italian Consul in Sudan, Callisto Legnani. It was to be the fifth and last purchase of the young Sudanese girl. Along sad chapter in her life history was coming to an end, a chapter of sorrow and humiliation. THE BETTER THINGS God had destined her



for were beginning to materialize.

For the first time since the day she was kidnapped, she realized with pleasant surprise, that no one used the lash when giving her orders, instead she was treated in a loving and cordial way. As freed person she recalled the several occasions she was spared of death. She could only think of the good Lord who watched over her and her friend. He had destined her for BETTER THINGS. The LIGHT OF HOPE started to appear.

Meanwhile, the political situations in Khartoum became dangerous which compelled her new master to leave for Italy. Bakhita asked and obtained permission to leave with him and with one of his friend, Mr. Augusto Michieli. On arrival in Genoa, Mr. Legnani sold Bakhita to his friends, Mr. & Mrs. Michieli who were very pleased. She then became the baby sitter of their daughter Mimmina. That time Mimmina remained in Italy with Bakhita under the Canossian Sisters in the Institute of the Catechumens in Venice. It was there that Bakhita came to know about God whom she referred as her "Paron" (meaning Master), whom she experienced in her heart without knowing who he was ever since she was a child. After several months in the Catechumenate, Bakhita received the Sacraments of Christian Initiation and

given the name Josephine. From then on, she was seen often kissing the baptismal font and saying: "Here I became a daughter of God".

Bakhita remained in the Catechumenate where she discerned in her the call to be a Religious. On 8th December 1896, Josephine Bakhita was consecrated forever to God whom she called with the great affection "The Master" ("El Paron, El Segnor"). As a humble Daughter of Charity, Bakhita performed with great love various services in her community: cooking, serving, embroidery and attending to the door. Her humility, her simplicity and her constant smile won the hearts of everyone.

With age came long and painful years of sickness, but Mother Bakhita continued to witness to faith, goodness and CHRISTIAN HOPE. Her last words on her death bed were: "Our Lady! Our Lady!" And her final smile testified to the encounter with the Mother of the Lord.

Mother Josephine Bakhita breathed her last on Feb. 08, 1947, in the Convent of Schio (Italy). She was canonized as Saint Josephine Bakhita on October 1, 2000 by Pope John Paul II who gave her the title "The Universal Sister". Pope Benedict XVI declared her as the Patron of Human Trafficking. 