

Heaven's Heroes: growing in the faith, with a little help from the Saints.



This month, we are inspired by:

Saint Josephine Bakhita

Feast day:

February 8

Patron saint of:

victims of modern slavery and human trafficking.

Catholics are encouraged to pray for all those affected by the crimes of modern slavery and human trafficking, an illegal industry which today afflicts over 30 million people worldwide. We are also called to pray, and help, all the people who volunteer and work to eradicate this crime.

Goal of this activity:

To inspire in children a love for the saints and helping them understand that we are all called to a life of holiness, inspired by those who came before us, and in whom we can trust to intercede on our behalf when we are struggling.

Materials Needed:

This lesson plan, the accompanying story and prayer card, which we encourage is shared through the parish and/or school's social media accounts if available. Depending on each month's and the age of the students, other materials, such as coloring pencils, might be necessary.

It might be useful to remember, and remind the students...

that a saint is a person who lives like Jesus and teaches others about Jesus with their example. And that even though not only those who have been proclaimed by the Church as saints following their deaths are in Heaven, but the official recognition of sainthood also allows us to venerate them.

With this month's activity we hope...

you will be able to introduce to your students Saint Josephine Bakhita (say Buh-KEE-tah), sharing with them as much- or as little- of her story as you deem appropriate for the children at your grade level.

With this activity, which will help children develop their listening skills, as you are invited to share Saint Bakhita's story with them, we hope that they will learn that Josephine was holy because she lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus, and that we are all called by God to share the Gospel with others.

In the classroom:

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



St. Josephine Bakhita

Born in 1869 in a small rural village in what is now South Sudan, Josephine was a member of the Daju people and her uncle was a tribal chief. Due to her family lineage, she grew up happy and relatively prosperous. One day, when was out for a walk with a friend, she was kidnapped and sold into slavery. She was nine years old.

Such was the trauma she experienced during the following 12 years, during which she was bought, sold and given away a dozen times, that she forgot her birth name. Her kidnappers called her Bakhita, which means 'fortunate'. Her name was a contradiction seeing that flogging and maltreatment were part of her daily life, and for decades she experienced the moral and physical humiliations associated with slavery.

One of six children, she never saw her family again, not even her twin sister.

Josephine 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 criminalized in Sudan long before her birth, making it impossible for her masters to justify owning her. Bakhita was baptized, taking the name Josephine. 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.

She was assigned to a convent in the town of Schio, in Italy's Vicenza region. For the next 42 years of her life, she served as a cook and a doorkeeper. She also traveled and visited other convents telling her story to other sisters and preparing them for work in Africa. 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.

She was known for her gentle voice, smile and charismatic spirit.

During World War II, the people of the village of Schio regarded her as their protector: Although bombs fell on their village, not one citizen died.

In her later years, she suffered 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." She was sometimes delirious, and when in this state she could be heard saying "Please loosen the chains ... they are so heavy!", arguably in reference to her time as a slave.

When she died on February 8, 1947, thousands of people 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.

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.

All students:

1. 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.
2. If you want to know more about what the Church does, and how individual Catholics can help combat the illegal industries of human trafficking and modern-day slavery, here's a document from the Holy See's Integral Human Development dicastery. You can also find it on-line by searching "Vatican's Pastoral Orientations on Human Trafficking."