

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2024 B

Picture a young girl born in southern Sudan some time in the late 1860s. At age 7 she was kidnapped from a peaceful home and sold into slavery. With twisted humor, her captors gave her the nickname Bakhita, which means “lucky.” She was beaten harshly and bore 114 scars throughout her life. She was resold a dozen times before she was 12, just an object, not even knowing her own birthday. Finally she came to the household of the Italian consul in Khartoum. There, she found some kindness. Through her task to babysit a child, she met an order of nuns, the Canossian Sisters, and then first heard about Jesus, her Savior. That kindness of those who finally saw her as a person, not a thing, changed her life. Baptized in 1890, she took the name Josephine. Asked once what she would do if she met those who sold her as a slave, she said: “I would forgive them, and thank them, because through that evil I met Jesus Christ.”

Pope Benedict recounted her story as an example of *the power of redeeming hope*. St. Josephine Bakhita came to know that her human masters also had a Master they would meet and have to answer to some day, and that Jesus, this true Master, *knew her, loved her, and waited for her*. Her scars remained; her painful past was not erased; the years she lost could not be given back. But she now knew that she mattered. She was loved by God, and no human power could ever take that away.

Some 1900 years earlier, two other women – one older, one also young – met God in person. Mark tells us that the older woman, who approached Jesus in faith and was healed by Him, trembled in fear. It is not that she is afraid Jesus will somehow hurt her or scold her. It is instead the awesome realization that because God was in the world – in HER world – everything was different. A power greater than herself – greater than any of the human experts she has consulted – greater than anything merely human AT ALL – has intervened on her behalf. And while her physical ailment was cured, something far MORE important happened to her ... she knew that God loved her, and so her suffering was redeemed – her years of pain,

her humiliation, her fears for her future, were swallowed up in awe and gratitude. ***Her past, too, was not erased or changed, but she now had a new future.***

The healed woman is just part of the story Mark tells, of course; Jairus' daughter too receives a new life, taken by the hand by Jesus with those touching words: "Talitha, koum" – Little girl, arise! Death had entered the world through the envy of the devil, as the Letter to the Hebrews says; but that hateful envy and the power of darkness is overwhelmed by Light and Love in the flesh, in Jesus. And so already death is undone for this young girl, at least for now; but that miracle was only a hint of far greater things – that like St. Josephine, we are given the gift of hope because we too are known, loved, valued, AWAITED, by God, in a life where death no longer has power.

Today, as you are in the Communion line, bring your uncertainties, your fears, your questions and doubts, your regrets, your emptiness of spirit, to the Lord, the same Master of all masters who is here among us, and know that we too can be healed, raised to a new life. God's mercy does not change or erase our past, but it gives us a new future as Jesus reaches out to us and says: ***"Child of my heavenly Father, I say to you, arise!"*** ... and in the Eucharist, gives us Himself, His own eternal life and love, to eat.