

in a  
**Word**<sup>TM</sup>

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NATIONAL  
DAY OF  
PRAYER  
FOR THE  
AFRICAN  
AMERICAN  
AND  
AFRICAN  
FAMILY

FEBRUARY 1, 2015

Photo by Father James Pawlicki, SVD



# GOD OF MERCY AND LOVE

we place our African American and African Families before You today. May we be proud of our history and never forget those who paid a great price for our liberation. Bless us one by one and keep our hearts and minds fixed on higher ground. Help us to live for you and not for ourselves, and may we cherish and proclaim the gift of life. Bless our parents, guardians and grandparents, relatives and friends. Give us the amazing grace to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Help us, as Your children, to live in such a way that the beauty and greatness of authentic love is reflected in all that we say and do. Give a healing anointing to those less fortunate, especially the motherless, the fatherless, the broken, the sick and the lonely. Bless our departed family members and friends. May they be led into the light of Your dwelling place where we will never grow old, where we will share the fullness of redemption and shout the victory for all eternity. This we ask in the Precious Name of Jesus, our Savior and Blessed Assurance. Amen. Holy Mary, Mother of Our Families, pray for us.

Prayer composed by  
FR. JIM GOODE, OFM,  
who in 1989 founded this National Day of Prayer  
for the African American and African Family.

I AM PRAYING FOR YOU  
ST. JOSEPHINE BAKHITA  
GEE

# COURAGE

FOR THE STEP I'M ON  
ST. JOSEPHINE BAKHITA

By THERESE WILSON FAVORS and Rev. JAMES E. GOODE OFM

Courage is an interesting and powerful virtue to obtain. When we step into a foreign scenario that requires faith and hope, we pray for a double portion of courage. Believing folk know that courage emitted at the right time and deposited onto the right situation can make way for confidence and grace. Believing folk know that courage can become both strength for the journey and shield to combat the evil that finds its way to your address; huffing and puffing ...trying to blow you and your house down. Life challenges will lead you to pray courage for the step you are on! For echoes of Jesus' words reverberate in our souls... Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me (John 14:1).

Our Jesus stands ready to aid and assist, administering courage for the step you are on. Jesus says... "Come to me". That means that Jesus will meet you where you are in life and move you to take up just enough courage for the step you are on. Don't take for granted this intimate closeness that Jesus' desires to provide. Jesus' call to Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28) is not a maybe; it is a sure and blessed act of love. Oftentimes the rest needed is courage. Courage coupled with faith gives you the ability to face impossibilities and turn improbable outcomes into miraculous realities.

St. Josephine Bakhita knows both the joy and benefits of courage. She needed it for survival. From slavery to homelessness, St. Josephine Bakhita prayed Courage. Snatched from her family, displaced to sojourn into a foreign land, still in the chains of bondage, she prayed Courage. St. Josephine Bakhita prayed Courage because she knew that Courage is the flip side of despair. When St. Josephine Bakhita

entered religious life, her primary mission was to stand at the door of the convent and await visitors. She did not know their past nor their situation in life but St. Josephine was in the ministry of letting people in and out, through those doors. Surely, she became an encourager saying... "Courage, I am praying for you". Those unfamiliar to her ultimately became her family for sometimes in life, you make family where you find family. Courage was the wisdom she passed on to them along with the blessed assurance that she would pray for them.

Once you pray Courage; trust and believe that God will mount you up with strength as if on eagles wings. God's courage; God's grace embedded within you will carry you to a new destination in life, flipping that desperation into God's restoration project of hope. Perhaps this is why St. Josephine Bakhita passed on to her circle of sojourners this spiritual wisdom ... "Courage, I am praying for you" along with... "What a great grace it is to know God."

Take courage Brothers and Sisters, for St. Josephine Bakhita and all our righteous ancestors of faith are praying for you. Take courage, Brothers and Sisters for our Jesus is praying for you. Now, let us pray for ourselves and each other for our families need courage in order to overcome the daily demons of this world. Our families need courage ...to raise their children and other folks children. We need courage to conquer violence in our communities... Courage to build up our people when daily dosages of helplessness haunt us... Courage to keep on loving when it is difficult and draining... Courage to be on mission among those who our world wants to dismiss.

Take Courage, dear Brothers and Sisters. St. Josephine Bakhita is praying for you. Take Courage, dear Brothers and Sister, our Jesus is praying for you and your family. Our Jesus will dispatch just the right amount of courage for the step you are on. Let's "raise our eyes toward the mountains, from where our help comes! Our help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. God will not let your foot slip and our God never sleeps (Psalm 121:1-4). Pray dear Brothers and Sisters for Courage is on its way, let's take it and fly as if on eagles wings!



*A short biography of the life of St. Josephine Bakhita can be found on page 5 of this issue. It was originally published in the February 2003 issue of IN A WORD.*

## in a word or two



**Monsignor James P. Robinson** S.S.E., 83, died Jan. 9, 2015. He was a professed member of the Society of St. Edmund for 63 years and an Edmundite priest for 57 years. He served in a number of positions in the Edmundite order and various parishes in Vermont, New York, New Jersey North Carolina and Alabama. As pastor at St. Catherine Mission, Elizabeth City, N.C. (1964-1969). He was actively involved in civic affairs and was a moving force in

desegregating the public schools of Elizabeth City, which led to a new high school, Northeastern High.

He brought Headstart into the area and was instrumental in getting the largest grant for a tri-county area in North Carolina that included Elizabeth City for the War Against Poverty programs. He spoke out against inhumane prison conditions and pushed for a new humane prison. In 1967, he was a founding member of the national Black Clergy Caucus. In 1971 Msgr. Robinson returned to his hometown of Selma, Alabama as assistant director of the Edmundite Mission and became involved in civic and political affairs. In Selma, he became known as a peacemaker and bridge-builder. He helped coordinate the city's 10-year commemoration of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery voting rights marches, which are now highlighted in the movie "Selma."

During Robinson's involvement in Selma's civic and political affairs, he helped bring feuding interests together and forged a behind-the-scenes partnership with Selma's mayor, Joe Smitherman, who died in 2005.

Msgr. Robinson "did more to bring the races together at a critical time after the 1965 Voting Rights demonstration than any black leader I know," Smitherman was quoted as saying in a 2001 internal publication for the Society of St. Edmund.

Msgr. Robinson had a deep impact on race relations during a campaign to change how Selma voters elected council members. The Catholic priest helped convince 11 white council members to approve electing council members by district instead of at-large, and subsequently five black members were elected, Smitherman said.

He also championed a plan, known as "The Selma Accord" between feuding interests to bring federal dollars to the city for revitalization and development efforts. He also was instrumental in obtaining funding from HUD and the Office of Economic Opportunity for Urban renewal, which provided new houses, paved sidewalks and streets and playgrounds for the underprivileged.

In September, 1976, Msgr. Robinson was called to Detroit, Mich. His first assignment was pastor of St. Catherine/St. Edward Parish on the east side of the city. In April of 1983, Msgr. Robinson was named rector of the Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Cathedral thrived and many improvements were made under his administration. He served in this position until 2003.

Monsignor Michael LeFevre, the current rector of Blessed Sacrament, said his friend's "gift was truly an organizational gift." "It's what he did in Selma. And when he came up here ... he came

to know and understand Detroit's fracture between white and black and he stepped into that breach," said LeFevre.

**Brother Hugh Henderson, C.P.P.S.**, 66, died on Monday, January 5, 2015, at his residence in Cincinnati.

Brother Hugh served in education and parish ministries throughout his years as a religious brother. His early ministry sites included St. Edward Church, Holy Trinity Church, and Polyclinic Hospital, all in Cleveland; and St. Anthony Church, Detroit. From 1999 until his death, he was in parish ministry in Cincinnati, first at St. Mark Church and then at the Church of the Resurrection. In November 2013, he was honored for his ministry to African-American Catholics by the Archdiocese of Cincinnati. The Church of the Resurrection had planned to honor him with a Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Keep the Dream Alive award on January 19, 2015.

Brother Hugh had a large personality, which came along with definite opinions, a quick smile and an orator's voice. He jokingly called himself "the Archbrother," and when roll was called at the Community's annual assembly, he answered with, "In living color."

Beneath it all was a giving heart, which those around him were quick to detect. He had lived through many health issues in recent years, and he used them as a springboard from which he could understand the sufferings of others. "All the things that I have lived through have made it easier for me to listen, and to share my experiences too," he said. "It does bother me on the inside, but you have to be able to tell others that things are going to be all right. I try to be positive, and leave the rest to God."

In his ministry at the parish he spent hours visiting people in nursing homes and hospitals. People urged him to make a quicker exit, not to spend so much time in each room, but he never could. "Sometimes, people in nursing homes feel lonely, rejected," he once said. "I take the time to listen to them. A big part of my ministry is listening, even if I can't solve their problems. I try not to walk in and walk out."



**Divine Word Missionaries** is an international missionary community of over 7,000 brothers and priests. In 1905 the SVDs began working among African Americans in the Southern United States. Today, Divine Word Missionaries work in over 35 parishes in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas.

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Correspondence to Media Production Center, 199 Seminary Drive, Bay St. Louis, MS 39520, 228-467-1097, Cell phone 504-908-6343. Electronic messages to our Internet address, editor@inaword.com.

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# St. Josephine Bakhita

1868-1947

*Feast day is February 8*

*Born in Obeid, Sudan*

St. Josephine Bakhita was born in Sudan in 1869. At the age of nine she was captured by slave traders. During the next ten years she passed through the hands of five different slave owners.

Bakhita was not the name she received from her parents at birth. **The fright and the terrible experience she went through made her forget the name her parents gave her. Bakhita, which means “fortunate”, was the name given to her by her kidnappers.**

Sold in the markets of El Obeid and Khartoum, she experienced the physical and moral humiliations and sufferings of slavery. Her third owner was a Turkish military officer and his family. **The women of the house mistreated Bakhita terribly, regularly beating her for**

**no reason. They were so cruel to her they even tattooed her with a needle inflicting severe pain to the point she almost died.**

In the Sudanese capital, Bakhita was bought by an Italian consul, Callisto Legnani. 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 with love and cordiality. In the consul's residence Bakhita experienced peace, warmth and moments of joy, even though veiled with nostalgia for her own family whom, perhaps, she had lost forever.

The political situation forced the consul to leave for Italy. Bakhita went with him and a friend of his, a certain Mr. Augusto Michieli. On their arrival in Genoa, Mr. Legnani, at the request of Mr. Michieli's wife, agreed to leave Bakhita with them. She followed the new “fam-



*I have given everything to my Master: He will take care of me...the best thing for us is not what we consider best, but what the Lord wants of us!*  
**-St. Josephine Bakhita**

ily”, which settled in Zianigo, near Mirano Veneto.

When their daughter Mimmina was born, Bakhita became her babysitter and friend. The acquisition and management of a large hotel in Suakin on the Red Sea forced Mrs. Michieli to move to Suakin to help her husband. Meanwhile, on the advice of their administrator, Mimmina and Bakhita were entrusted to the Canossian Sisters of the Institute of Catechumens in Venice. It was there that Bakhita came to know about God, whom “she had experienced in her heart without knowing who he was” since she was a child. *“Seeing the sun, the moon and the stars, I said to myself: who could be the Master of these beautiful things? And I felt a great desire to see him, to know him and to pay him homage...”*

This African flower, who knew the anguish of kidnapping and slavery, bloomed

marvelously in Italy, in response to God's grace, with the Daughters of Charity, where everyone still calls her “**Mother Moretta**” (our **Black Mother**”).

She asked for Baptism and after several months in the catechumenate, Bakhita received the sacraments of Christian initiation and was given a new name, Josephine. It was January 9, 1890.

On December 8, 1896 she took vows with the Daughters of Charity of Canoosa who welcomed her with open arms. For the remaining years of her life her sanctity shone through her whole life. Everyone great and small were touched by her.

At the cathedral in Obeid, Sudan, a painting of Bakhita hangs next to that of the Blessed Mother, the Queen of Africa.