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Reflection
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Today we remember two resilient and persevering women.

The Syrophoenician woman in the gospel and St. Josephine Bakhita, the saint we honor today, which is fitting since we are celebrating Black History Month. Both women carried heavy burdens and were marginalized.

St. Josephine Bakhita was born in the southern Sudan region of Darfur, to a relatively prosperous family in 1869. Her life changed drastically when she was kidnapped from her family as a young child and enslaved by Arab slave traders. She was passed to so many different owners that she forgot her birth name. That's human trafficking!

Over the next 15 or so years, she was beaten, mutilated with 114 patterns cut into her skin which were then rubbed with salt and flower. She reportedly said of that traumatic experience, "I thought I would die, especially when salt was poured in the wounds...That's torture. She goes on to say, it was a miracle of God I didn't die. He had destined me for better things."

The exact details of her emancipation vary but sometime around 1890 she was declared free. She joined the Canossian sisters and converted to Catholicism. She exhibited great resilience through all her suffering and was able to recover from the trauma of past horrors.

That's amazing grace!

She was known for her charisma, gentleness, humility and warm smile when welcoming others. She was loved by many and a great comfort during the bombing of World War II. She was even able to express gratitude that the past had brought her to her present life. That's holiness! She is the patron saint of Sudan and of victims of human trafficking.

In the Gospel, Jesus is in gentile territory. Even though he didn't want to be recognized he was already well known. A Syrophenician woman asks for healing for her daughter. Jesus' initial refusal with his comment about the dogs was his way of saying that the Jewish people have a primary claim on his ministry.

The woman doesn't accuse Jesus of racism or discrimination and is not put off by this comment. There is a kind of friendly banter between the two. She calls him Lord or Adonai which means universal savior for all people, which now included her. She challenges and reminds Jesus that his mission is to everyone and not only the Jewish community. The "dogs" don't wait until after the children have eaten, but eat simultaneously, even if they only get the scraps. That's courage and assertiveness!

She did not give up on her desire for her daughter's healing and well-being. Her powerful faith was immediately rewarded, and her daughter was healed.

That's determination and passion!

Neither woman passively accepted their fate. They did not replay in their heads all the ways they had been victimized in the past. They did not allow their life experiences keep them bound as victims but moved beyond victimization and worked for the good of others. They were transformed by their experiences.

Let us pray that all of us may embody the gifts of these two valiant women, no matter the difficulties, hardships, or setbacks we experience. May we continue in our pursuit of justice in ending human trafficking, healing racism, supporting migrants at our borders, and working for an end to war. May, we create a culture of inclusion and right relationships with all people and with the whole earth community, our common home. This is our call now.

We ask this unnamed Syrophenician woman and St. Josephine Bakhita, to pray for us.