

Dear Friends,

I pray that you have all stayed warm and dry. I know many are ready to be done with the white stuff, but for me, as I woke up on my birthday last Saturday, I was taken back to my childhood in Montana. Nearly every year, I woke up to fresh snow on my birthday (which I always hoped for). Remembering those days, I was then led to contemplate the great gift of our memory. God has given us this gift to ponder the depths of His love for us. The enemy can also use the memory to try to make us focus on the not so good stuff that has happened and in so doing, stir up in our hearts resentment and pain, discouraging us from trusting in God. This prevents us from progressing in our lives in a healthy way and stunts our growth in relationships, especially with Jesus, who came to liberate us from these things, to set our hearts free, to know Him, and to know who we are as God's beloved children.

In my homily last Sunday, I told the story of St. Josephine Bakhita as an example of that which I described above. She was born in the Sudan at the end of the 19th century and at the age of 9 was kidnapped and given the name Bakhita, which means lucky. Not one of us would probably consider her situation a "lucky" one, yet she persevered with a kind and gentle spirit. She was sold and resold as a child. At one point in her captivity, due to a small mistake, she was beaten so badly by her master's son that she was left unconscious and then incapacitated on a mat for over a month. She then described how a woman skilled in the "cruel art" of tattooing or scarring, came to mark her body. She related, *"When she had made her patterns; the woman took a razor and made incisions along the lines. Salt was poured into each of the wounds. My face was spared, but six patterns were designed on my breasts, and sixty more on my belly and arms. I thought I would die, especially when salt was poured in the wounds. It was by a miracle of God I didn't die. He had destined me for better things."* She also said, *"If I were to meet the slave-traders who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, I would kneel and kiss their hands, for if that did not happen, I would not be a Christian and Religious today."* St. Josephine Bakhita was able to see what St. Paul said, *"All things work for the good of those who love God."* She did not know God before and it was His love that sustained her in her trial and afterward gave her the grace to forgive and even thank them for what had happened.

In our lives, we all experience suffering and trauma to greater or lesser extent and even little things can leave a deep wound if we focus on the negative aspects and hold on to the pain and resentment. God wants to relieve that burden. He wants to heal our hearts. The first step is to take it to Jesus in prayer. Our Lady is always ready to help us with her maternal care to sort things out and take it to her son. St. Josephine Bakhita said, *"Mary protected me even before I knew her."*

As I am writing this on Monday morning, a message just came into my inbox from Fr. Frank in Haiti. He related that the people in Haiti have been in public turmoil with violent protests due to the corruption and injustice of the government which has led to crippling inflation. Please pray for our brothers and sisters suffering in Haiti, that they will have what they need to survive and that there will be an end to the violence and corruption.

May Our Lady and St. Josephine Bakhita guide all of us to trust in Jesus and bring our memories to Him, so that we may see all that has happened in the light of His love and so enjoy the healing streams flowing from the side of Jesus in the sacramental life of the Church.

Sincerely yours in Jesus Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Jack D. Shrum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Fr. Jack D. Shrum
Pastor