



THE VISITATION

THE PUBLICATION OF THE NATIVITY HOUSE

DECEMBER 2023

VOLUME 14 ISSUE 1

Radical Motherhood

by Rosario Herbst

When I was asked to write about "Radical Motherhood", my initial question was, "Are we talkin' 'all in', Extreme Makeover: Home Edition motherhood?" This was naturally my question as I am typically a "go big or go home" kind of girl. While I would love to be a better contemporary of St. Therese, I struggle with being little and allowing the Lord to do big things in my littleness.

But when I spent time reflecting on what this might mean, I was beckoned to contemplate "surrender it all" Motherhood, "hold life loosely" motherhood, motherhood like Our Blessed Mother. And while I know what Mary did and desire to imitate her perfectly, most days I am vying for Patron Saint of the Try Hards and Most Okayest Mom Ever. However, I do feel that in my own mothering journey, I have been attuned to the parallel life I often walk alongside our Blessed Mother through time and space. It is in these moments that I feel the roots of my call, the depth of my motherhood, and much like Mary's mysteries, I am able to contemplate my own.

Each Advent, as I anticipate the arrival of my sweet Savior in a manger, my mind returns to the years I spent pregnant during Advent. The shared pregnancy experience I had with Mary while I carried my own miracle

was not lost on me. I can recall my own joyful mystery right alongside Mary's. I contemplated what that felt like for Mary, much like what it felt like for me, the hidden mystery that God would reveal to her over the course of Jesus' life, life much like what God would reveal to me over the course of my child's life.

I recall in particular, during my 4th pregnancy, the journey to the manger felt particularly heavy. Holding my own fears following our previous loss, I knew that this beautiful mystery could at any moment be taken away from me without notice. This was new for me— a fear that had not previously been revealed— a new sorrowful mystery to carry. And there I sat, like Mary, in awe of what He does, grateful for the invitation to journey with the Holy Family, and in anticipation and expectation of what He would reveal next. I often wondered whether or not I was strong enough or up to the task of whatever mystery God would draw me deeper into.

I, like Mary, felt young and naive, humbled to be chosen to bring life into the world, unprepared for the journey ahead, scared, yet trusting each moment to a faithful and everloving God. Upon receiving each of my miracles, I knew

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LOVE; Without Question, Is the Answer

by John & Jeanine Jelinek

Grant me, O Lord my God, a mind to know you, a heart to seek you, wisdom to find you, conduct pleasing to you, faithful perseverance in waiting for you, and a hope of finally embracing you. – Saint Thomas Aquinas

Current societal structures can certainly cause undue anxiety in a marriage. Indeed, the marriage vow itself, without the proper perspective and deference to the graces of the Sacrament itself, can be a cause of undue anxiety in a marriage. After all, one is saying "Yes" to a lifetime commitment, not knowing with certainty what they are saying "Yes" to. That is why we stand at the altar to profess our love to each other and state our intentions before God: "for better or worse, richer or

poorer, sickness and health... till death do us part." These vows truly are a great mystery—a mystery not to be "solved" like the secular world so wants to do, but rather "entered into" deeply with a trust in "what God has joined together."

Having recently celebrated 34 years of marriage, raising two wonderful children who have launched into adulthood (one recently celebrating their 1-year wedding anniversary!), I find the above prayer from Saint Thomas Aquinas particularly insightful not just in ordering our pursuit of God, but also for my living with my spouse our marriage vocation. Through the grace of God, this framework is both a shield against

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Letter from the Directors

Dear Friends of Nativity House,

Every year during the Advent season I find myself drawn to reflections and images of a hopeful expectant mother. 13 years ago when we began publishing this newspaper, I drew a rudimentary image of a very pregnant Mary singing her Magnificat to the starry night sky. Each year I am humbly reminded of Mary's courageous trust in God's promise through the gift of each guest mother that Nativity House has welcomed.

Pina, our current guest mom, and Serita are thriving. We can hardly believe that Serita is almost 10 months old. Pina has been working as a nanny and the family she serves has graciously allowed Serita to attend work with her. Pina is diligently saving and planning for her move in early February. We are reminded that a year is such a short time. We will greatly miss Pina and Serita, so we savor every last moment that we have with them.

Krista has been serving Nativity House as our full-time intern since March. She is adept at goat cheese making and various methods of food preservation. I am guessing she would say, however, her favorite thing most recently are Baby Serita snuggles she gets after dinner. That is the time that Krista keeps Serita occupied while Pina packs her meals for the next day of nannying.

We had many volunteer groups this Fall! It was a happy reminder that with the end of the pandemic groups are again eager to help us on the farm! The Community Garden this year was formally closed with a Farm Workday on November 11. Garlic was planted, compost was turned, garden beds were mulched and put to sleep. We have dried many herbs, infused herb oils, processed basil into pesto. Our freezer is full to brimming with 5 gallons of apple juice and grape juice. Krista continues to process the bumper crop of sweet butternut squash. Let's not forget the plentiful harvest of honey that we had this season! Abundance on the farm is definitely a theme this year.

This last September's Farm to Table Celebration was absolutely lovely. Our guest list was a bit shorter than previous years but we met many new faces that will hopefully become treasured community members over the years to come. The night was fair with amazing food, delightful conversation, and good music. Save the date for next year, September 1, 2024. We are looking forward to some winter events. We will have Mass with Abbot Austin on December 16. Also, there will be two roundtable discussions in the new year. We will work on some clarification of thought around the topics of war, peace, fear, and trust. Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King, Jr are just some of the pertinent thinkers we will discuss.

Since the summer months continuing to the present, I have received more calls than ever from expectant mothers in need. On average, I receive 4-5 calls per week. This is what I used to receive in a month. Justin and I find ourselves pondering this uptick in homelessness. Nativity House can offer another bed, raising our guest mom count to two. We can hire more staff so as to help alleviate the needs of one more mom. We can keep working

at fundraising so that we can offer 2 beds. But at the rate of calls that we receive, we will still find ourselves saying, there is no room in the inn. We are a small endeavor of hospitality. We will keep at it. But there are still so many abortion vulnerable that need assistance. Who will welcome the Christ-child?

When we reflect over these thirteen years of publishing The Visitation, eight years of offering hospitality, 11 guest moms, 11 infants, 15 staff, 9 growing seasons, all the beautiful community members, and the countless volunteers - we are overwhelmed with awe and wonder at the work God can do with His people. We are grateful for you, for your prayers and support. This work is not possible without you and we are humbly honored to do this work with you.

Merry Christmas!

Venus & Justin Wozniak

About The Visitation

This newspaper, The Visitation, is a publication on topics of social justice, spirituality, and theology. It is published four times a year by Nativity House. Submissions are accepted from readers everywhere.

To contact us, email us at:

newspaper@nativity-house.org

Past issues are online at:

<http://www.nativity-house.org>

About Nativity House

Nativity House serves as a house of hospitality for first-time mothers in need of residence in the southwest Chicago suburbs. Nativity House operates an on-site community supported farm (CSA) that provides nourishment for the Nativity House and the greater community. Overall, we envision a healing environment focused on the dignity of each person, the dignity of work, and stewardship of the earth.

Nativity House is administered by a board of directors and an advisory committee of individuals with a broad range of experience. Nativity House has formed positive relationships with relevant local organizations that are extremely helpful in carrying out the mission of the house. Nativity House was recognized as a public charity in August, 2011.

To connect with us, please email Venus Wozniak at:

venusad@nativity-house.org

Postal mail should be addressed to:

Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

Donations may be made at [paypal.me/nativityhouse](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?url=https://www.nativity-house.org)

We extend the sincerest thanks to all.

Radical Motherhood

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that delving deeply into long days of small things would be my magnum opus, a gift back to Him in gratitude for all He has given me. And while this great work has been an offering of love, it has also been one of brokenness and imperfection, a constant reminder of how small I really am and how big He is.

This mothering that comes from the roots bears fruit from a deep interior life spent with the Lord. It is in continuous prayer and connectedness to the Father, the unceasing drawing on His strength and nourishment, that sustains me through each mystery. When each child was handed to me, it felt like they were “mine”. But in the moments of clarity, He gently reminds me that none of them are really mine: they were entrusted to me as their caretaker for a brief moment, to form them after the

Will of the Father, to return them to Him when He deems it time. And when I know that they will be returned to Him, there is a deep longing, a profound desire, to get it right for this brief moment ... and this brief moment ... until life becomes a string of brief moments, like the beads of a rosary offering a litany of my life for God.

When contemplating the joyful mysteries of motherhood, there is a bittersweet awareness that this joyful moment is fleeting, and then I am thrust into a sorrowful mystery as well. In the middle of raising our family, I often see that the sorrowful mysteries in our life unfold as the luminous mysteries as well, revealing more of what we need for the journey ahead. And if I trust Him, He will transform these into Glorious

Mysteries as well.

When I contemplate radical motherhood, I am most in awe of Mary’s willingness to allow God to draw her deeply into a Mystery that He would eventually take away from her. And yes, while He would return Jesus to her, and to all of us, in the most magnificent and most Glorious way, Mary offers a complete and total posture of surrender to the will of the Father. God withheld things from her in the same way He also withholds things from me. His withholding an invitation to trust, His summon to patience, His beckoning to the present moment. And if He were to reveal all my mysteries to me at the same time, I would surely flee from the gravity of it all. These beautiful, painful, realities He calls us to are not Extreme Makeover big they are to the bones deep, deeper than

I could ever go alone, if only I allow Him to take me there.

That is the mystery I have been brought to most recently when sending our oldest off to college. Eighteen years just wasn't enough. Did Mary say the same thing? How did 33 years go so quickly? What do you mean I have to give Him up, right when everything is just the way I wanted? But I am comfortable and don't want anything to change. I am His Mother. He is mine.

Only Mary knew at the deepest part of her that Jesus was not really hers. Not only would she return her Jesus to the Father in ultimate surrender, she would usher in the beginning of the end at the wedding at Cana. Like Mary, I am not only called to surrender, but to usher, to be the

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NATIVITY HOUSE - WINTER EVENTS

Gather Around the Hearth



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

2:00 PM MASS WITH ABBOT AUSTIN MURPHY

Followed by a potluck meal, wassailing, a yule log, & general merriment. Bring your musical instrument and a dish to pass.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 12

7:00 PM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION - MERTON & KING

Potluck dinner followed by a panel discussion

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

7:00 PM ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION - ROOTS OF WAR

Potluck dinner followed by a discussion led by Dr. Steven Nawara, Political Science Department Chair, Lewis Univeristy

All events are held at
Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441

for more information follow us at
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The Joy of Community: Farm to Table Celebration 2023

by Krista Starasinich

On September 3rd, 2023, the Nativity House community came together once again for the 9th annual Farm to Table celebration. We were blessed with the most gorgeous sun-shiney day outside as over 100 friends, new and old, joined us for the evening's festivities. To kick off the event, we gathered for Mass, which was so graciously celebrated by Abbot Austin from St. Procopius Abbey. Sharing the Eucharist with one another was such a special way to begin in giving thanks to God for our community and all those brought together to make this day happen. Many, many hands went into preparing for this year's event. It truly takes a village and God always shows His faithfulness in sending people with willing hearts to fill all of the needs. That's the true beauty of community, isn't it?

The night continued on with charcuterie, cocktails, and mingling on the farm before we began with the anticipated 5 course feast featuring Nativity House and local fare. We had many amazing guest chefs this year that delivered one of our most raved about menus to date! I have been on both sides of enjoying Farm to Table in years past, both as a guest and as staff helping serve. This year I was in charge of running the kitchen and serving crew and it totally gave me a new appreciation and perspective. As we plated each course and sent them out, I couldn't help but again, think of all the hands that went into this. Those who helped in the garden here at Nativity House this summer, the friends who took the time to help make the food, our rockstar volunteers who helped serve and clean up after it all. Within all of the beautiful chaos it took to pull everything together, there were so many moments of grace and gratitude.

Although I was helping in the kitchen most of the time, there were a few moments where I was able to step away from the busyness to go and observe the festivities outside. Walking around, I could just feel all of the excitement and joy exuding from everyone. It felt like one big family party! Watching all the kids running around with big smiles and showing me their findings from the scavenger hunt, seeing people make new connections and old friends catching up while sharing the meal, guests happily doting upon the goats and chickens, and some kids enjoying a game of tossing bags with the Abbot before the night was over. As the sun went down and the twinkling lights in the tents shined above, with sounds of laughter and conversation and live music, there was an enormous sense of peace. God's presence was evident all around.

This event is the culmination of the truth, beauty, and goodness that Nativity House has created and continues to cultivate and display with the generous help of our community and supporters. What an incredible gift it is to serve and be a part of. A huge thank you to all those who attended this year's Farm to Table and all who had a hand in making this one of the best celebrations ever! It is a tremendous joy to be in community with you! I think Dorothy Day says it best: "We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."



Krista Starasinich is a live-in intern at Nativity House. She loves spending time with community and enjoys exploring new places in nature connectng with her Creator.



Top to bottom, left to right: Abbot Austin Murphy celebrating the Mass; NH Board Member Sarah Reznicek with her nephew; Annemarie Coman and Jake DeMarais offer music for Mass; Lavender, the rooster & Phil, the goat kid; Caly, the red heeler; Gavin Coyle & Max Dunne play modern Irish folk; the tent; Nicole Jaramillo serves strawberry sorbet; servers bring out goat cheesecake; Krista, Pina, Megan, Serita - the kitchen command crew

**LOVE; Without
Question, Is the
Answer**

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and an antidote to societal structures that are at best indifferent to matters of faith or at worse hostile to matters of faith.

In a special way, the marriage vocation wherein each partner seeks to have a mind to know, a heart to seek, wisdom to find, conduct to please, faithful perseverance to wait, and a hope to embrace—yes, God first and foremost of course, but then also to each other—is a vocation with a durable framework to withstand the gravitational pull of society that wants to pull us away from that self-giving love to self-centered impulses. This isn't a framework that can be built over night. SO, it is vital to have that framework going into the marriage, so as to continue the virtuous pursuit offered in Aquinas' prayer throughout marriage. It's both a destination AND a journey. We often fall short of those virtuous ideals; we're not perfect, but through the grace of God we are journeying with and back to God who is! This is why staying moored to the Sacraments will always be essential to facing these hostile societal structures which often are an obstacle to living that prayer.

Our own parents are a model to observe and imitate. As their virtuous cycle moves along and through our families' generations, we see what is lasting and what is fleeting. Their own marriage vows, rooted in that same mysterious "yes" to an unknown, give us a model both profound and practical. St. Augustine once

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catalyst for the leaving, to initiate, to escort the next new beginning. It is no different than the encouragement I gave as my babies began to toddle away from me so many years ago. That's what he calls me to. And that is who Mary was; it's who she is— all the way to the cross. God gives them to us. He asks for them to be returned. Then He gives them to the world for his glory.

And again this year, as He gives me His own son once again, he invites me to Bethlehem from Nazareth, through a journey where I know little about the way, only that He is leading me, only that I trust Him, only that Mary and Jesus are the radical model for how to live. They will teach me how to journey and how to surrender. Every year, I feel myself being drawn more closely to the manger where I contemplate the Baby that will save me over and over again. Each year, I enter the stable with joyful anticipation of what God is going to birth anew in me this year and the mystery of it all.



Rosario Herbst is a nerdy Catholic who loves the Saints, her husband and 5 kids, and authentic fellowship with faithful companions. In between carpools and chaos, she works as a therapist helping a broad spectrum of clients on their healing journeys.

Easy Essays:

Poor Conservatives

by Peter Maurin
(1877-1949)

Monsignor Fulton Sheen says:

“Modern society is based on greed.”

Father McGowan says:

“Modern society is based on rugged individualism.”

When conservatives try to conserve a society based on greed, systematic selfishness and rugged individualism they try to conserve something that is radically wrong, for it is built on a wrong basis.



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observed “Right is Right even if no one is doing it; Wrong is Wrong, even if everyone is doing it.” Simple, yet profound—and our parents modeled this truth. If we truly are pursuing that which is petitioned in Aquinas’ prayer, then our thoughts and actions will gravitate towards what is Right, and not towards the shallow enticements the world offers.

Another model for us in our marriage vocation is the witness of those who have taken religious vows and priestly promises. We are blessed to count among our good friends Priests and Religious. Their vows and promises, lived each day through their own vocation, are a powerful reminder that being IN the world and not OF the world is a

hallmark of living that prayer.

Once again, if relationship with both God and our spouse is approached and continually pursued, with heart, mind, action, and perseverance, then we can take comfort in “uncertainties” and avoid undue anxiety from societal structures that don’t bring faith to bear on these “uncertainties.”

Finally, a sense of gratitude for ALL of the “better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness and health” will activate in a special way all that is petitioned in that prayer! Writer Kathleen Norris describes gratitude in the following way: “It makes sense of the past, clarifies the present, and gives hope for the future.”

Societal structures don’t often provide a landscape to embrace gratitude. Past, present, and future. My own marriage has 34 years now of “past,” is living through life’s transitions in the “present,” and above all has a framework for hope about what’s to come in the “future.” Each Vocation Witness is unique, but the endearing and enduring petitions in that Aquinas prayer are in my view universally application to all vocations.

Blessings upon you and all as we continually seek to have a mind to know, a heart to seek, wisdom to find, conduct to please, faithful perseverance in waiting for and a hope for finally embracing GOD and our spouse in the marriage vocation.



John & Jeanine Jelinek recently celebrated 34 years of marriage. Both are cradle Catholics who are discovering anew the richness of our faith in all of life's traditions and transitions. Jeanine currently works at St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle. John currently works at his family's business in Chicago. Together, they thank God for His precious blessings of faith, family, and friendships.

Pray with me that men be joined together in love, so strong a love in their march Godwards, that they will draw all with them, that all suspicion, anger, contention, bitterness and violence be burnt away in the fire of this love. And may it open their eyes, the brightness of this love, to the works we can all perform together in building up a new society, in our work for food, clothing, shelter, education and health for all men, for these are the works of mercy, of love and not of hate, the works of good, not evil, of God, not the devil. And where there is no love, put love and we will find love; because love is the measure by which we shall be judged.

Dorothy Day
On Pilgrimage
January I, 1963



World Youth Day, Lisbon, Portugal - The Universal Church

by Venus Wozniak

On August 1-6, the young adults of the Catholic faith and their mentors celebrated the 17th World Youth day in Lisbon, Portugal. It was started by St John Paul II in 1985. This is a special time for the youth of the Church. The Holy Father spends 4 days of encounter, teaching and preaching to the young people, their mentors, and the host country. This celebration is the only of it's kind in the universal Church.

Being involved in ministry to the Church over the last twenty five years, I have been blessed to lead groups of pilgrims on three World Youth Day pilgrimages (Toronto 2002, Krakow 2016, Lisbon 2023.) My first experience of this remarkable celebration was as a teen in 1993, Denver, Colorado, with Pope John Paul II. As a young person, I was overwhelmed by the notion of the universal Church. I will never forget the first time that I heard hundreds of thousands singing the Gospel acclamation, "Alleluia." I was convinced that it was an experience of heaven on earth. It has been an honor to walk with so many young people over the years through the experience of World Youth Day. Below are some accounts of the young people I was privileged to journey with this last summer in Lisbon, Portugal.

World Youth Day was an amazing experience to be surrounded by over a million other Catholics because it showed me how universal the Church really is. The most memorable part was the vigil in the park because it was such a cool experience to have Mass and adoration led by the Pope and surrounded by so many others who share the same faith. WYD helped me grow in my faith and my relationship with God because I was able to see how many Catholics continue to have a relationship with God and express their faith despite the challenges that we as Catholics face in the world today.

Charlotte Stapley
St Scholastica Youth Group
Woodridge, Illinois

I went into World Youth Day not sure what to expect. During WYD, I was filled with joy and energy from the millions of Catholics working together. I left WYD energized to do what God has called us to do.

Nia White
Coordinator, Mission & Ministry
Lewis University

Spending a week with a million and a half of young Catholics was the craziest thing I have ever done. It gave me insight into the magnitude and universality of the Church. I imagine that this was a foretaste of Heaven.

Meg Galuska
Peer Minister
Lewis University



Charlotte Stapley and Gracie Wozniak travel half way around the world to meet up at a World Youth Day Catechetical Session



Venus Wozniak and her Lewis University compatriots Meg Galuska, Nia White

Excerpts from Pope Francis' Message World Youth Day Mass August 6, 2023

...The first word: to shine, so be radiant; then, listen in order not to take the wrong path; finally the third word: to be unafraid. Do not be afraid. We often find these words in the Bible, in the Gospels: "Do not be afraid". These were the last words spoken by Jesus to the disciples at the moment of the Transfiguration: "Do not be afraid!" (Mt 17:7).

As young people, you have experienced these days of joy – I was about to say of glory, and indeed our encounters have been a kind of glory. You have great dreams, but often fear that they may not come true; sometimes you think that you are not up to the challenge, which is a kind of pessimism that can overcome us at times.

As young people, you may be tempted at this time to lose heart, to think you fall short, or to disguise your pain with a smile. As young people, you want to change the world – and it is very good that you want to change the world – you want to work for justice and peace. You devote all your life's energy and creativity to this, but it still seems insufficient. Yet, the Church and the world need you, the young, as much as the earth needs rain. To all of you, dear young people, who are the present and the future, yes to all of you, Jesus now says: "Have no fear", "Do not be afraid!"

Now, in a brief moment of silence, each of you repeat these words, in your own heart: "Do not be afraid!"

Dear young people, I would like to look into the eyes of each of you and say: Do not be

afraid. I will tell you something else, also very beautiful: it is no longer I, but Jesus himself who is now looking at you. He knows each of your hearts, each of your lives; he knows your joys, your sorrows, your successes and failures. He knows your heart. Today, he says to you, here in Lisbon, at this World Youth Day: "Have no fear, take heart, do not be afraid!"





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Nativity House
17141 W. 143rd St.
Lockport, IL 60441



St. Josephine Bakhita

Feast Day: February 8th

Patron of Sudan and victims of human trafficking

by Cassie Volpentesta

St. Josephine Margaret Bakhita was born in 1869 in a village in Sudan, Africa. She grew up very happy, thriving, and joyful as a child because she did not understand what suffering really was at a young age. Sometime around the year 1877, when she was around the age 8 years old, she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders. Even though she was just a child she was forced to walk over 500 miles barefoot! This started a life of abuse and slavery for the next 12 years of her life.

She was bought and resold over 12 different times and after spending so much time in captivity she forgot what her real name was. She was given the name Bakhita by an owner. At one point, she was beaten so badly that she was incapacitated for a whole month. Another owner, a Turkish general, gave her to his wife who beat her daily, having someone draw patterns on her skin with flour and then cutting into her flesh. Her wounds were rubbed with salt to make them permanent. From this abuse alone,

Josephine suffered a total of 114 scars.

In 1883, she was sold to an Italian Vice Consul whom was a much kinder master and did not beat her. He took her back to Italy and gave her to a family as a nanny. The family she was with had to travel and during their time away she was in custody with the Canossian Sisters in Venice. During her time with the sisters she learned about God for the first time. Josephine states that she had always known about God but didn't know who He was. By the time that the family returned, Josephine discerned a call to religious life and refused to go back and work for them. The sisters pleaded on her behalf and the case eventually went to court. It was determined that slavery had been outlawed in Sudan before Josephine was even born, so lawfully, she could not be made a slave and she was finally declared free.

For the first time in Josephine's life she was free and could choose what to do with her own life. She

chose as a free woman to be a bride of Christ and on January 9th, 1890 she was baptized and took the name Josephine Margaret. A few years later she became a novice with the Canossian sisters and took final vows in 1896. For the next 42 years of her life she worked as a cook and a doorkeeper in the convent.

Saint Josephine Bakhita died February 8, 1947. She spoke her last words, "Our Lady, Our Lady!" Pope John Paul II canonized her on October 1, 2000 and her feast day is celebrated on February 8th. She is a model of feminine strength, courage, compassion and forgiveness. She

is the patron saint of Sudan and victims of human trafficking.

Josephine endured indescribable suffering while remaining so hopeful. Where in your life do you need to have more trust and hope in the Lord? Like Josephine, the Lord does not put us through suffering and trials for no reason. Lord, help us to experience your presence in the midst of our own suffering.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, pray for us!



Artwork by Sarah Jaramillo



Cassie Volpentesta is a NET Ministries alum and friend of Nativity House.