February 8th: Memorial of Saint Josephine Bakhita, Virgin

Gospel text (*Mt* 25:1-13): Jesus told his disciples this parable: "The Kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones, when taking their lamps, brought no oil with them, but the wise brought flasks of oil with their lamps. Since the bridegroom was long delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight, there was a cry, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' Then all those virgins got up and trimmed their lamps.

The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise ones replied, 'No, for there may not be enough for us and you. Go instead to the merchants and buy some for yourselves.' While they went off to buy it, the bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked. Afterwards the other virgins came and said, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us!' But he said in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, I do not know you.' Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

"But at midnight, a cry rang out: 'The bridegroom is here, come out and meet him!'"

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today we give thanks to Divine Providence for His goodness in rescuing the young Bakhita from the most abject slavery and leading her to the loving service of God. Josephine Bakhita was kidnapped (taken from her parents) when she was still a child. Up to five times she was sold and resold in slave markets, suffering all kinds of humiliation and mistreatment.

The last "master" she had, a member of the Italian consular corps in Sudan, treated her kindly and cordially. But, in reality, this was not her last "master". In Italy —where the diplomat had to return— Josephine met the real "Owner", the true Lord. A Great Lord who has allowed himself to be mistreated on the Cross for defending our freedom! He is the Good Spouse who has rescued us from the worst of slavery: the orphanhood of God, the distance from God.

Bakhita means "fortunate". In fact, taking the name of Josephine, in 1890 she had the good fortune to be baptized and to know that she was a daughter of God. A few years later, this admirable virgin gave herself to the Bridegroom through the Institute of St. Madeleine of Canossa (the Canossian Mothers). In her

encounter with God, the suffering she experienced was for Josephine a school of hope, an oil that animated the torch of faith in God.

Let us think about our case: how much has it cost me to find God? What price am I willing to pay to keep this torch burning? Because, let us not forget, the comfort - not to say lukewarmness - installed in our societies lulls us to sleep and... then we are late: " Therefore, stay awake, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13).

Let us carry in our hearts the collect prayer of the mass of this saint: “O Christ, whom the holy virgins like Josephine Bakhita have loved as their only spouse, grant that nothing separates us from your love and that with watchful hope we may encounter you."