

### Celebrating St. Bakhita's Day

Sisters Annie from the Birmingham community and Carmel from Walsingham met at St. Chad's Cathedral to join in the Ecumenical Celebration in thanksgiving for the life and inspiration of St. Bakhita.

This National Service of Prayer was led by The Archbishop of Birmingham, Rev Bernard Longley and the main speaker was the Anglican Bishop Alistair Redfern. The Salvation Army played a big part in the organisation while their Band from the Army Citadel played all the music. The choice of Hymns was very moving – Guide me, O thou great redeemer.., Brother sister let me serve you.., Amazing Grace.., And 'Beauty for brokenness..,

The First Reading was taken from The Book of Proverbs – Prov. 31; 8

'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who  
Are destitute.  
Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy'

The Gospel Reading was taken from Luke Ch 4: 18, 19. and read by Major Clare Alman of the Salvation Army –

'Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:  
The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the  
Good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the  
Downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour...this text is being fulfilled today even  
as you listen'.

In his following Homily Bishop Alistair Redfern, called the participants to develop awareness as to what may be happening all around us in the area of vulnerable people being kept hidden as slaves through trafficking. He spoke from his personal experience of situations which he discovered. These were sad and heart breaking for the victims. Being freed and taken to 'Safe Places' opened a new life of freedom for victims but the painful road to healing goes on. "God sees into their situations and suffering" he said and "we need to pray that we may be able to see with the compassionate eyes of God and do something to help".

While the words spoken my Bakhita were read slowly, we were invited to come forward and light a candle in thanksgiving for her faith, that other victims may be freed and that we may see the end of this terrible abuse.

"If we had no hope in God, what would we do in this world"  
"If I were to keep kneeling the whole of my life, it would not  
Be enough to express my gratitude to the Good God."

From the midst of the gathering, voices were heard of trafficked people telling their stories and of their joy in being freed and taken to 'Safe Houses'. These Safe Houses are those provided by the 'Medaille Trust'. ArchBishop Longley led us in very moving prayers.

We were all invited to a great selection of 'Bites' in the Conference Room afterwards. It was a time of finding out more , especially in the way in which people can help especially as Volunteers in our areas and of course in prayer and thanksgiving for the way God's Spirit is at work in our world.

Annie  
Carmel