Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Things that come from within are what defile” (Mark 7:14).

Memorial for Saint Josephine Bakhita

Jesus follows his critique of critics for their obsession with external cleanliness with a lesson about where uncleanness originates. It is not what enters us from without that harms us morally, but what flows from our own thoughts and motivations.

His words describe our ordinary experience. If we are hurt or attacked, we are filled with anger, an impulse that can poison our perspective. Yet, it has no power to control our reaction or damage our integrity if we don't allow it to take root. Martin Luther King Jr often emphasized this truth when encouraging those suffering the effects of racism. It was not their fault or their responsibility. They could remain self-possessed by not giving in to hatred or the desire for revenge. They could transform their experiences into a deep commitment to demand justice.

The damage inflicted by others is a stain on their own character, not the victim's. Hatred poisons the person who harbors and expresses it. The child abuser bears full judgment for what they have done, not the victims of their violence. Today we remember Saint Josephine Bakhita (1869-1947), a Sudanese woman who was kidnapped and repeatedly abused until she escaped and devoted her life to quiet service and advocacy for other victims. Instead of being destroyed by the evil she suffered, she turned her heart to gratitude and love.

Jesus knew this from experience. He endured attacks on his character, was accused of being in league with Satan, was verbally assaulted and maligned by his enemies. Yet none of this abuse could break his inner confidence as he fulfilled his Abba's will. Even when he was arrested, imprisoned, tortured, condemned and executed, Jesus was free of the evil others had accused him of, and he was even able to forgive his executioners from the cross.

The journey of discipleship begins in our own hearts. God's mercy is the balm that heals the sin-sick soul. There is no use pretending we do not harbor the potential for sin we see in others. But God's mercy is the foundation of all holiness, and God gives it as a pure gift to anyone who prays for it.