

Fr Ryan homily 9-3-23

Read: Jeremiah 20:7-9; Psalm 63; Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 16:21-27

I wanna share with you a story about a young girl who was born in Sudan in 1869. She's part of the Daju people which would be in modern day Dar Fur. Her uncle was the tribal chief, and she had a relatively decent childhood. She said she had some memories of it, and they were largely pleasant. When she was 8 years old she was kidnapped by Arab slave traders and she didn't remember her name, the name that her parents gave her, but the Arab slave traders gave her a name, they gave her a nickname – Lucky which I thought was rather cruel to do that. Because they made her even walk these 800 miles from her village to where they were gonna sell her barefoot. And then for the next 12 years she was bought and sold at least 12 times that she could remember. And one of the owners was a Turkish man and his wife would take delight in torturing Lucky. On a regular basis she would take a knife or a blade and carve designs into Lucky's flesh and then rub salt into those wounds not only to make it hurt more but so that they would never heal properly. Lucky would walk around with those scars for the rest of her life. In fact she counted them – there were 144 scars on her body and every day this woman would beat and torture Lucky. So just to think about that, that this is Lucky's formation from 8 to 20 years old forming her to think this is just how the world works. An 8-year-old kid being taken from a place of comfort, being taken from home, and thrust into a life of absolute misery and pain and you experience people being cruel for no apparent reason. Because they could, because they wanted to, they had power over you and the best you can do in the midst of that is to not care, to become numb, to shut down, maybe steal a few moments of relief in this awful, broken world. And this was Lucky's formation from 8 years old to 20 years old. But there was something even in her as a child, as a teenager because she would say this that even then seeing the sun, the moon, and the stars I said to myself, who could be the master of these beautiful things? And I feel a great desire to see him, whoever he is, to know him and to pay him homage. That even in the midst of this formation towards brokenness, towards death and despair, here is this girl who realized but maybe that's not all there is to life. And I was thinking about all that happened to Lucky, all of this awful formation in light of the readings today because it's true we can be formed by what is around us, by our experiences, what happens to us, our relationships, those experiences, maybe

our scars shape who we are. Our conversations, the entertainment we take in on a daily basis, it all shapes and effects how we interact with the world, how we see the world and the people in it, how we see ourselves. And if we're not vigilant, if we're not careful the world can very easily form us to its ways. We become like the world and then we listen to the absolute clear and straight forward words of Paul and of Jesus. Paul in the second reading today where he says do not be conformed to this age, to this present world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And to think we are so often conformed to the wisdom of the world, what the world tells us is right. You know we're constantly being formed by those relationships and those experiences because we're constantly growing. No one ever stops growing and we're taking it in and letting it form us. And I think for many of us we really stop developing or growing in our Catholic faith whenever the last year was we were in a Catholic school or when we stop going to RE and we don't continue to form ourselves in our Catholic faith. Cause we think no like I'm set. I good to go, I've been formed when I was younger by my Catholic faith. But then what happens is we go off to college or whatever and we let the world start forming us and through that we start to question our Catholic faith, our Catholic education, everything we learned was true begins to falter because that's what we're now taking in. So we're formed by the relationships around us, people who do not share our faith were formed by this world and then we can wind up and choose to be conformed to the world. But always to remember this that we are Christians living in a post-Christian world in a post-Christian society and it's to our own detriment that so many of us continue to believe that the world is our friend. It is not. That living the way everybody else does can get us to Heaven, it will not ever. Or that being Christian means doing and believing everything everybody else does we just do and believe a little bit more in our faith. That Jesus and the church ask us to do a bit extra but that is not the way that it is. Christianity does not alter a few things here and there, make us a bit more charitable, Christianity changes how we interact with the world in it's entirety. Being a disciple of Jesus changes the way we see and look at everything. And so we have to stop again believing that the world is our friend because it's not. That's why St Paul says do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And the word renewal that he uses is from a Greek word metanoia and what that means is to flip the way you think about everything. To flip it around because the way the world sees in it's fallenness is upside down, it's

backwards. And you have to flip the way you think to see the right way. To see the way that Christ intends us to see. We have to change the way we look at sinful behavior that the world says isn't sinful behavior. We have to change the way we understand holiness. We have to change the way we look at what a successful life is because a successful life to Jesus, what that's gonna look like is so different than what the world thinks of as a successful life which brings us to the gospel because here is Jesus and He kinda drops a bomb on Peter. And He tells him you're looking at success wrong. Jesus says here's the deal, we're gonna go to Jerusalem because I'm the king, I'm the messiah, I'm the anointed one and you know who I am, but you don't know what that's gonna mean. When I go to Jerusalem I will be victorious but there will be certain things that happen to Me. And when you see them happening, the suffering that I endure you will believe that I've lost. If you look at it the way the world does it will look like I've lost. And Jesus goes on, He says and if you're following Me it's gonna look like you're losing too. To deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me. So Jesus is preparing us for what life is gonna look like and maybe you're here this morning and for whatever reason you've lost heart. You've lost heart, why because I thought that success, I thought that happiness was supposed to look a certain way. I thought it was gonna be what the world said it was gonna be and Jesus says no. Here's what success and winning look like – I'm gonna suffer, be tortured, you're gonna kill Me. And that's why Simon Peter says God forbid that that should happen to you Lord. And Jesus turns to Peter and He says you're not thinking the way that God does about any of this. You're thinking the way that human beings do. Peter you've been formed to this age. You haven't been transformed to look at it the way I'm looking at it because what's best for Me is giving up My life and that's what is best for you as well. Not seeing what I can get from life. And we know this as well as we hear Jesus say these things, that the best is never the cross on its own, it's never suffering on its own, it's that self-sacrificial suffering of the cross out of love. Right we know this that it's not how much Jesus suffered that saves us it's how much He loved that saves us. It just happens that in this broken world love always involves sacrifice. But how often do we do this that in our love for other people, we wanna spare them. That our love for them would spare them pain and loss and suffering and that's what Peter is trying to do for his friend. But then Jesus calls him Satan. Why because at every moment of Jesus' life up until this time Satan has been trying to get Him off the path towards the cross and now His friend is doing it as

well. A friend who's supposed to support Him. And so He says get behind Me Satan cause you're doing the same thing he's doing to Me. Because our love for others would spare them that pain and loss and struggle but it also means it would spare them from greatness and from redemption. It means how we look at success, at goodness. It would spare them from the opportunity to love heroically. It would spare them from the opportunity to lay down their lives out of love because it looks like losing. And in our desire to make it easier on the people we care about we rob them of the opportunity to love heroically. And so Jesus says love demands sacrifice. You are going to have to deny yourself and pick up your cross just as I picked up mine. And so hearing Jesus say all of this in the gospel today, that we need to bring this into our own lives, I wanna be someone who looks like Lucky. I wanna be someone who is that blessed. I think of that woman, eventually after this life of being sold again and again as a slave throughout her youth, she was taken in by some religious sisters in Italy and in that convent she met Jesus for the first time. And these sisters would tell her about a God who is the most powerful being in and out of the universe but became powerless for her. The sisters told her about this God who is love, who actually loves her, and the sisters told her about a God who also carries scars on His body. Lucky was declared free by the Italian government, slavery is illegal there, but she was already declared free because she had met Jesus. And in the year 1890 when she was 30 years old she was baptized. And she took the name Josephine Margarite, but she actually kept the name Lucky. In Arabic the name Lucky is Bakhita, but she took the Latin form which was Fortunata. So her name was Sister Josephine Margaret Fortunata. Three years after she was baptized she joined that religious community of sisters and became a Bride of Jesus. And throughout that, all that Lucky went through, she came to realize the difference of life and how we look at life as not between the scared and the unscared, it's not between the winners and the losers, it's between those who are loved and those who do not yet know how much they are loved. And for the next 42 years Sister Joesphine Bakhita lived as a Bride of Christ. And this is amazing because she said, she talked about why she kept the name Lucky. Why she kept that name that the slave traders gave her? She said if I were to meet the slave traders who kidnapped me and even those who tortured me, all 144 scars, I would kneel and kiss their hands. And we hear that, and we go are you kidding me? That is insane. But to remember for Jesus it's never the cross by itself, suffering by itself, it's not good by itself, but in your life

and mine we need to look at these moments of loss of cruelty that happen to us as Jesus looked at His cross. Not as Peter looked at Jesus' cross. We need to be transformed by the renewal of our minds and so we think as God does not as human beings do. So Lucky 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 today. If that did not happen, I would not be a Bride of Jesus Christ today. At the end of her life, Lucky experienced this incredible pain. She was confined to a wheelchair and when people would ask her how she was she would smile at them and she'd say I am as my master desires. Not a master who inflicted scars and lorded it over her but a master who had scars himself. And so I wanna be someone who looks at life the way Lucky did. Sister Bakhita became St Bakhita in the year 2000. Canonized by Pope John Paul II. St Josephine Lucky, Josephine Bakhita. And she said this, and I love it, she said I am definitively loved and whatever happens to me I am awaited by His love. So my life is good, my life is a success because I am loved. Because for her that love changed the way even the worst things that happened to her. Because she saw them as God did not as human beings do.

Amen