

## Marriage, Human Dignity, and the Call to End Human Trafficking

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My Dear Family,

Marriage is more than a private commitment; it is a public covenant that helps shape families, communities, and society itself. At its best, marriage affirms the dignity of the human person by fostering mutual love, responsibility, and fidelity. Stable family relationships provide protection, belonging, and formation—especially for children—and help create conditions in which human dignity can flourish.

When these bonds are weakened or distorted, human vulnerability increases. Human trafficking thrives where dignity is denied, relationships are reduced to power or control, and persons are treated as commodities rather than as children of God. In this light, the Church's defense of marriage and family life is inseparable from her commitment to protect the vulnerable and to confront exploitation in all its forms.

This concern is highlighted in the World Day of Prayer and Awareness Against Human Trafficking, observed each year on February 8, the feast of St. Josephine Bakhita. Once enslaved and later a religious sister, St. Bakhita is a powerful witness to freedom, healing, and the inviolable dignity of every human person. Established by Pope Francis in 2015, this day calls the faithful to pray for victims and survivors, to raise awareness of modern slavery, and to take concrete steps to end it.

The 2026 theme, "Peace Begins with Dignity: A Global Call to End Human Trafficking," reminds us that true peace—within families, communities, and nations—cannot exist where human dignity is violated. Protecting the vulnerable, accompanying survivors in their healing, and addressing root causes such as poverty, violence, and displacement are essential to building a just and peaceful world.

As followers of Christ, who came "to proclaim liberty to captives" (Luke 4:18), we are called not only to pray, but also to act. This may include learning the signs of human trafficking, supporting organizations that assist survivors, advocating for just policies, and fostering family and community life rooted in respect and care for every person.

As Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S., reminds us:

"If just one person realizes from this day that they or someone they know is being trafficked, we will have made a difference."

Let us entrust this mission to the Lord, confident in His promise:

"The One who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"  
(Philippians 1:6).

May the Lord bless all of us as we work together to uphold dignity and justice.

Fr. Vilaire Philius,

Pastor