

International Solidarity Days-February 2020

February 6—International Day of Zero Tolerance to Female Genital Mutilation

Myth about FGM



February 6th is a day to promote the UN's campaign to raise awareness and educate people about the dangers of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Although often thought of as a traditional practice "of the past", the UN statistics estimate that today over 200 million girls and women are living with the horrible effects of this practice. On February 6, 2003, Stella Obasanjo, the then First Lady of Nigeria and spokesperson for the Campaign Against Female Genital Mutilation, made the official declaration on "Zero Tolerance to FGM" in Africa during a conference organized by the *Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children (IAC)*. The UN Sub-Commission on Human Rights adopted this day as an international awareness day. It is well recognized that FGM can lead to serious health problems, and can also have dire psychological consequences, affecting women for the rest of their lives. It is considered a form of violence against women and women in most countries still allowing this form of violence are

standing up and speaking out against FGM. Raising awareness of the practice and its harmful effects are the first steps towards eliminating this practice worldwide.

Holy One, thank you for the wonderful bodies with which you have gifted us. As a part of creation, our human bodies reveal the wonders of your divine presence with us. These "earthen vessels" have their origins in the same cosmic stardust that birthed the earth itself. Teach us to honor our bodies as to treat ourselves and one another with respect, honor, care and tenderness as we work to create a world free of all forms of violence.

February 8—International Day of Prayer and Awareness against Human Trafficking



The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace and the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) has designated February 8 as an annual day of prayer and awareness against human trafficking. February 8 is the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita, who was kidnapped as a child and sold into slavery in Sudan and Italy. After gaining her freedom, Josephine became a Canossian nun, and dedicated her life to serving the poor and suffering and raising awareness about human trafficking. Since her canonization in 2000, she has become a symbol of the worldwide struggle against human trafficking. Today, the International Labor Office estimates that over 25 million children, women and men are victims of human trafficking. Pope Francis has stated "Human Trafficking is a crime against humanity." "It's a disgrace" that people are treated "as objects, deceived, raped, often sold many times for different purposes and, in the end, killed or, in any case, physically and mentally damaged,

ending up thrown away and abandoned," he said. (Source: *Catholic news Services Dec 12, 2013*) On this day, let us all educate ourselves about how to recognize and report suspected human trafficking, as we pray and work for an end to this modern-day form of slavery.

O God bless all those who are suffering as victims of human trafficking. May they come to know that they are not forgotten and give them the courage to look for a means of escaping this modern-day slavery. Give each of us open hearts so that we can recognize trafficking and report it to authorities for investigation. Never let us turn around and pretend that we don't see. Help us to act to free our brothers and sisters. Open the hearts of those who profit from trafficking. Make them understand the pain they are causing and turn away from a way of life that exploits others. Help us all to grow in love, respect and empathy for one another.

February 11—World Day of the Sick



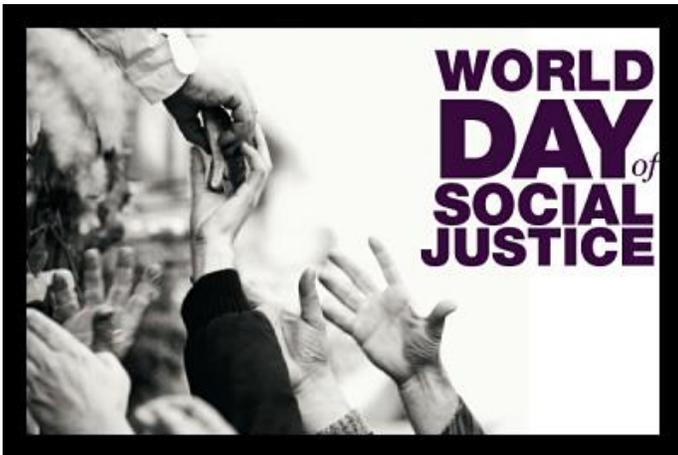
The World Day of the Sick was instituted in 1993 by Pope John Paul II and celebrated on the feast day of Lourdes. On this day, Catholics the world over pray for those who suffer from illness or injury, that they may be healed, comforted and cared for. It is also a day to pray for those who minister to the sick and injured, and to thank them for their generous and compassionate care for those who suffer. This is also a day to pray for those who do not have access to healthcare because of poverty, war, fear, poor nutrition or hopelessness. We remember how precious a gift good health is. We are grateful each day for those who care for us when we are sick and offer our love and assistance wherever we can to those who are ill and in need.

For Pope Francis' address for 2020 World Day of the Sick go to:

www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/papa-francesco_20200103_giornata-malato.html

God of healing, hope and wholeness, we thank you for all the ways that we experience good health. Help us to reach out to those who are sick, bringing them compassion, hope and care in whatever ways we can. Comfort those who suffer so that they will know your love through us.

February 20—World Day of Social Justice



Social Justice is the underlying principle that makes peaceful, respectful and cooperative coexistence among nations possible. The theme for 2020 is: If you want peace and development, work for social justice. The United Nations recognizes that social justice is the main principle for bringing about peace and sustainable development. No development is possible without a sustainable peace. All lasting peace must be built on a foundation of justice. Intimidation and war only stoke fear and distrust, and only serves to increase retaliation and violence. True justice can only be achieved through dialogue and open listening, that eventually can bring us to understand and respect one another.

Holy One, bless us as we encounter one another with openness and compassion, so that together we might create a world of justice and peace. Bring us to new levels of understanding as we learn to listen to one another and to share our stories.

February 23—International Stand Up to Bullying Day—wear a pink shirt



Bullying is unwanted, aggressive behavior that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying includes actions such as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group on purpose. International Stand Up to Bullying Day is a day when people are urged to wear pink shirts to indicate solidarity in their stance against bullying. The person who wears a pink

shirt is letting victims of bullying know that they are willing to stand with that person to provide safety and security. The pink shirts worn on this day also let bullies know that many, many people are willing to provide safety to victims and will actively intervene to stop bullying.

God, we ask that you bless us with courage as we seek to confront and stop bullying. Help us to refuse to be silent when witnessing bullying, but to step forward in a loving and respectful way to put an end to it. We ask that you comfort those who suffer from bullying so that they will not sink into despair, loneliness and hopelessness. Help us to reach out to victims of bullying and to support them.