

Palestine the Sacred Land of Saints



Canonization of Two Nuns from Palestine

St. Mariam of Jesus Crucified Baouardy and St. Marie Alphonsine Ghattas

The Vatican - 17 May 2015

قَدِّيسَاتَانِ مِنْ فَالَسْطِينِ

فَالَسْطِينِ بِلَادِ الْقَدَّاسَاتِ

Two Saints
from Palestine

Saint
Mariam Baouardy
(1846 - 1878)

Rome 17.05.2015

Saint
Marie Alphonsine
(1843 - 1927)

President Mahmoud Abbas' Statement

President of the State of Palestine - Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization

We thank God the Almighty for the blessings He has bestowed on two holy women from Palestine: Mariam Baouardy Haddad from Ibillin village in the Galilee and Marie Alphonsine (Sultana Daniel) Ghattas from Jerusalem.

Our Holy Land has become a bastion of virtue for the entire world, and we are grateful to His Holiness Pope Francis and the Catholic Church for their observance and interest in the seed of virtue that has grown in Palestine. Palestine is not a land of war; it is rather a land of sanctity and virtue as God intended it to be.

St. Mariam Baouardy Haddad was born in 1846 in the Galilee during the Ottoman era and died in Bethlehem in 1878. She lived in Alexandria, Beirut and France. Since her childhood, she was no alien to pain and agony. She sensed the voice of God calling her to a life of spirituality, joined the Carmelite Order in France and dedicated her life to the Lord, who lavished upon her spiritual gifts and blessings. She prayed, interceded and did miracles, and in 1876 established a convent in Bethlehem which still exists until today. Nowadays the convent resonates with prayers for the relief of the suffering of the Palestinian people; Christians and Moslems alike.

St. Marie Alphonsine was the name given to Sultana Daniel Ghattas after ordination. She was born in Jerusalem in 1843 during the Ottoman era and died in 1927 at the outset of the British Mandate over Palestine. St Marie lived in the streets of the Old City of Jerusalem, which still holds the indelible traces of Jesus Christ. Until today Jerusalem is daily witnessing the suffering of the Palestinian people and affecting their human dignity and holy places. St. Marie set up the foundations for a monastic life for the women of Palestine and the Arab world known as the Holy Rosary Sisters dedicated to their education and empowerment. Today the Holy Rosary Sisters have reputable schools in Palestine and in other Arab countries.

Both St. Mariam Baouardy Haddad and St. Marie Alphonsine represent a generation of virtuous and pious women that are capable of confronting challenges and conveying a special message particularly in Palestine and in the Arab countries:

It is an inspirational message which coincides with the commemoration of our people's Nakbah of 1948, emphasizes our unity, and affirms our determination to build a sovereign, independent and free Palestine based on the principles of equal citizenship and the values of spirituality and sublime humanity. On this holy occasion we would like to express appreciation to our Palestinian Christian brothers for their steadfastness and effective contribution to building the Palestinian nation, and we call upon them to stay with us and not to be easily swept by the tide of migration. We call on Palestinian Christians to stay with us and enjoy the rights of full and equal citizenship, and bear with us the difficulties of life until we achieve liberty, sovereignty and human dignity. Through truth and justice we can decide our own fate, and with the prayers of sincere and faithful believers all our endeavors will be realized.

St. Mariam Baouardy Haddad and St. Marie Alphonsine are two daughters of our people representing a unique and powerful voice that tells us that the power of spirit is in us and guides us towards the State and its capital Jerusalem. A woman from Ibillin village in the Galilee, St. Mariam Baouardy Haddad teaches us that God is for the oppressed because she was oppressed and she faced hardships and suffered from displacement. But later she devoted herself to spiritual life and established the Carmelite Convent in Bethlehem.



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St. Marie Alphonsine (Sultana Daniel) Ghattas who emerged from the heart of Jerusalem tells us that the city of Jerusalem will always remain the city of God and the city of justice and peace for all believers of all faiths. Jerusalem, St. Marie told us, will remain a spiritual heart for every believer in the world. We say: Based on this spiritual foundation, Jerusalem will be our capital, God willing.

These two Palestinian saints add a very distinctive dimension to our national struggle, namely the moving humanitarian and spiritual principles that our land inspires us with. The land that God has made sacred, the land of dialogue between heaven and earth, God and man, and man and man. These are the uplifting spiritual principles that Christians and Moslems share in our Holy Land, and they are the same principles that we seek to form, the bases for the establishment of our State and for our national and social life.

As we celebrate this holy occasion, we would like to congratulate our brothers and sisters in Ibillin and Jerusalem as well as in the rest of Palestine and the whole world. We reiterate our gratitude to the Papacy of the Catholic Church for the canonization of two nuns from Palestine. We ask God the Almighty to lead us all and guide our steps toward the achievement of justice, peace and tranquility in Palestine and the whole world.

St. Mariam Haddad of Jesus Crucified

Baouardy (1846-1878) - Foundress of the Carmel of Bethlehem

St. Mariam Giries Haddad Baouardy was born on 5 January 1846 in Ibillin village in the Galilee. Her father, Giries, and her mother were Roman Catholics from Tarshiha village. Her twelve brothers and sisters died when they were children, and the birth of Mariam came as God's response to the prayers of her parents in the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem. Mariam's father died when she was three and she was brought up by her uncle. When she was eight, she went to live in Alexandria, Egypt.

At the age of twelve she learned her uncle wanted to give her in marriage but she refused and decided to offer herself to God. Later, she went through dire and compelling circumstances and ended up in cave where she saw sitting near her a woman that resembled the nuns that took to a church and left her there. Mariam said the woman who was sitting beside her in the cave was the Virgin Mary.

In 1865 when St. Mariam was nineteen, she went to Marseille in France where she made the acquaintance of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. However, at the end of the two years of novitiate she was not admitted into the Congregation, and eventually she found her way to the Carmel of Pau in south western France. In 1867 St. Mariam joined the Carmel of Pau and received the religious name of Sister Mariam of Jesus Crucified.

In 1870, St. Mariam went to India with a group of sisters and founded the first Carmelite Convent in Mangalore. After returning to Pau she received a divine message exhorting her to go back to her hometown of Bethlehem and found a Carmelite convent opposite the Church of the Nativity where Jesus Christ was born. In this way St. Mariam brought back the Carmelite monastic life to the East, to Palestine, to her homeland. She founded the convent in 1876 on the south western part of Bethlehem outside the old city.

Saint John Paul II said about Jesus Crucified Baouardy, "A woman who was born in the land that was the life of Jesus Christ who spent her life in Nazareth, the land that is unforgettable for our concern and a center of conflict. The humble maid, Sister Mariam of Jesus Crucified, brought the people of the East in terms of her life and travels. Today she is their



Carmel of Bethlehem founded by St. M

St. Mariam of Carmelite nun who witnessed the Holy Childhood in Bethlehem today a cause center of painful suffering of Christ, St. Mariam belongs to the Carmelite race, vocation and representative."



St. Mariam of Jesus Crucified

© Carmel of Bethlehem

St. Mariam wanted also to found a convent in Nazareth. In 1878, on her way to Nazareth where she hoped to buy a site to build the convent, God revealed to her a place called Emmaus where Jesus broke bread with His two disciples. St. Mariam purchased the place for the Carmel from Berthe Dartigaux.

St. Mariam Baouardy died at the age of thirty-three. She was beautified by Pope John Paul II on 13 November 1983.

The Carmel of Bethlehem, founded by St. Mariam of Jesus Crucified Baouardy, is one of the most important convents and religious sites in the world. It is visited by millions of pilgrims from all over the world for prayers, meditation and veneration of St. Mariam whose intercessions achieved many miracles. The Carmel of Bethlehem is also one of the ancient landmarks of Palestine frequented by young people from Europe, the United States of America and Latin America to do voluntary work and learn about the life of the Palestinian people and the geography of Palestine. In fact, pilgrimage to the Carmel of Palestine has changed the perspective of many foreign visitors about the Holy Land and Palestine. They arrived to Palestine with bright smiles and left it with tears of sorrow and empathy because of the turbulent political situation that prevails in the country. The Carmel of Bethlehem has proved to the rest of the world that Palestine is a country of peace and that its people are advocates of peace and love. In addition, the convent has had an instrumental role in the life of the Palestinian community in Bethlehem, attracting Palestinian women and strengthening their faith and attachment to the land of Palestine.¹

1. Interview with Sister Firial of the Child Jesus, Carmel of Bethlehem.

St. Sultana Daniel Ghattas

“Marie Alphonsine” (1843-1927) - Foundress of the Dominican Sisters of the Most Holy Rosary

Born Sultana on 4 October 1846 to a Palestinian family in Jerusalem, St. Marie Alphonsine Ghattas was known for her piety and love for her Church and land. Her father, Daniel Ghattas, was a carpenter, and her mother, Catherine Youssef, was a dedicated and devout housewife. Sultana went to St. Joseph School in Jerusalem and at seventeen she joined the Congregation of St. Joseph of the Apparition as a postulant and took the religious name of Sister Marie Alphonsine. After taking her first vows, St. Marie was assigned to teach catechism in St. Joseph School in Jerusalem where she also founded the Sisters of the Immaculate Conception and the Sisters of Christian Mothers.

Later St. Marie moved from Jerusalem to Bethlehem where she cared for girls and women. One night the Virgin Mary appeared to her, grasped her hand and whispered in her ears, “I want you to start the Congregation of the Holy Rosary.” The Virgin Mary ordered St. Marie to go and see the Patriarch and reveal the message to him. The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem consented to her request upon the strong recommendations and entreaties of Father Youssef Tannous Yamin who was a priest in the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem at that time. Hence the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary was founded in 1883 comprising eight novices from Jerusalem. The Congregation grew rapidly and in 1959 the Sisters of the Holy Rosary achieved pontifical status directly following the Holy See of Rome.

The Virgin Mary said to St. Marie Alphonsine Ghattas, “I am glorified.” This is also the motto that guided St. Marie. From her we learn how to be happy and how to carry pain without which life would have no meaning. In Palestine, we are happy for our existence. We were born with pain and happiness, freedom and victory will persevere.



Rosary Sisters Schools: Walking in the steps of St.

s, "In Palestine I rejoiced, felt pain and was in founding the Rosary Sisters monastic life. over happiness to other people; from her we n order to achieve triumph and glory we have ite of the excruciating pain that prevails in rn here and we will stay here, and eventually meate our life and our State of Palestine.



. Marie Alphonsine Ghattas

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St. Marie Alphonsine traveled to different regions including Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Nablus, Nazareth and Jaffa, teaching and counseling. Her life was full of love, modesty, magnanimity, tranquility and patience. She died in Ein Karem in 1927. St. Marie Alphonsine Ghattas was known for her love and attachment to her Church and homeland. She gave special attention and care to Arab women and, inspired by the Virgin Mary, founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary. The Virgin Mary appeared to St. Marie in a vision and instructed her to educate Arab women at a time when women were deprived of education and religious teaching.

Today the Congregation of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary expends tremendous energy and time for the empowerment of Arab Christian and Moslem women. The Rosary Sisters have schools and convents in Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth, as well as in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and other countries in the Middle East. The Mission of the Sisters of the Holy Rosary is to mobilize Arab women, preserve their faith and translate it into practice. The Rosary Sisters aim to deepen the role of Arab women in human and communal communication, raise their representation on the decision making level, eliminate marginalization of women while accommodating for social traditions and customs, and promote women participation in every aspect of life.

The Rosary Sisters Schools in Arab countries are devoted to the education of women, assisting them in shouldering the difficulties of life with patience and perseverance since they are the ones mainly responsible for the upbringing of children and keeping families united. Our Palestinian community bears witness to the efficiency of Rosary Sisters Schools' graduates and their refined abilities to engage in the political and national life and occupy high positions in the decision making hierarchy and structure.²

2. Interview with Sister Superior Hortance Nakhleh, Principal of Rosary Sisters School in Jerusalem and Advisory Board Member in the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters.

“The canonization of the two nuns from Palestine, the country of holiness, is a blessing that presents to us challenges and hopes. The holy nuns are a blessing indicating that God is escorting Christians in the Holy Land and enlivening it with His Holiness. The holy nuns also challenge us to elevate ourselves to the level of their sanctity with the grace of God so that all the nations of the world would be blessed through us. In the dire circumstances our country and believers are passing through, the holy nuns are our hope, reminding us that the final word in our life and in the history of the world is the word of God Almighty, and it is always a word of life and light that we courageously carry in our hearts. The word of God is the beacon that lights up our lives, strengthens our will to live and supports us in our difficulties. We are the people of the East, which God chose to be the cradle for His call, message and mission.”

(His Excellency Patriarch Fouad Twal, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem)

“Holiness is humility, love and simplicity. It is self-denial and sacrifice for the other. The declaration of the sanctity of a new saint in the world is evidence that God is love and that He exists in spite of the harshness, racism and death that we see daily in our life. God granted us life to live with love and no one has the right to take life away from us. Let us love each other, let us love our brothers and neighbors and whomever we are living with. With love we accept other people and live with them despite differences between us. With love we can plant seeds of hope in our communities. In spite of the Wall and the blockade, we can create a healthy environment for our children to live without fear. Sanctity is not excluded to priests and nuns; it is rather a path full of love. A heart that does not palpitate with love is a dead one.”

(Sister Firial of the Child Jesus, Carmel of Bethlehem)

“Our message to every Arab woman is to have a saint from our land as a role model, a saint who will act as an incentive and supporter to preserve our deep faith and trust in God just like St. Marie Alphonsine who faced diverse difficulties but overcame them with blind faith in the Virgin Mary. We urge Arab woman to drink voraciously from the fountain of knowledge and education because women form the basis of global communities and key instruments of nation building. Let us all have the saint of the Holy Land as our role model in order for us to be messengers of peace and justice in private and in public.”

(Sister Superior Hortance Nakhleh, Principal of Rosary Sisters School in Jerusalem and Advisory Board Member in the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters)

Monastic life (Consecration):

Life based on the three evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. Jesus Christ called on His disciples to consecrate themselves to spreading His word and live by His teachings and the teachings of the Church. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 914)

Vow:

Full devotion to God according to the three evangelical counsels. The vow is made to witness to God and Jesus Christ in the world and is regulated by specific rules recognized by the Church. (Catechism of the Catholic Church 915)

Sanctity:

God's call to us to live a Christian life full of love. God calls on every person to live a life based on love, divine virtues, the Holy Scriptures and Church Catechism. (Light to the Nations 40). The call to a sanctified life is at the core of Christian life. Jesus says, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:48).

Before candidacy for sainthood, the Church conducts a detailed posthumous study of the person's life nominated for such an elevated position in Church. The life of asceticism, austerity and piety a person has lived which depends on the heavenly and moral qualities or virtues of Christian life are *sin qua non* for nomination for sainthood. The declaration of sanctity comprises three stages: (1) veneration, that is the person has lived a virtuous and pious life; (2) beatification, that is the person has performed a miracle; (3) sanctified beatification, that is the performance of a second miracle after beatification for the verification of which an investigation on the level of the parish takes place. After that documents are taken to Rome and looked into (on theological and scientific basis) by the Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum. The Pope signs in person on the decree acknowledging the existence of a miracle. A miracle confirms God's existence and His Kingdom on the earth. The acknowledgement of the miracle points to the fact that the miraculous phenomenon has been examined and that it is unfathomable by the human mind. The miracle is also related to prayers to God interceded by God's servant or maid.

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State of Palestine
Palestinian Embassy to the Holy See

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