



PERSONALITY OF THE MONTH

Mariam Baouardy and Marie Alphonsine Ghattas Two Saints from Palestine



“Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth and good will toward men”

This year was a year full of joy and pride as two stars shone upon our dearest country, Palestine, where they lightened the way of many of our countrymen in the Middle East as well as in the whole world. Palestine, the Land of Holiness, still bears saints and was declared as the birthplace of two saints: Mariam Baouardy the well-known saint Mary of Jesus Crucified, and Mary Alphonsine Daneil Ghattas who co-founded the congregation of Sisters of the Holy Rosary of Jerusalem (Rosary Sisters). These two modern Palestinian Saints have made it known to the whole world that Palestine is the country of peace and love.

Mariam Baouardy was a mystic born in Ibilin who is said to have received the stigmata – bleeding wounds like the ones Jesus received on the cross – and died at the age of 33 in Bethlehem, where she had founded a Carmelite-order monastery that still exists today.

Marie Alphonsine Ghattas was born in Jerusalem in 1847, opened girls’ schools, fought female illiteracy, and co-founded the Congregation of the Sisters of the Rosary that today boasts dozens of centers all over the Middle East, from Egypt to Syria, that operate kindergartens, homes for the elderly, medical clinics and guest houses.

This year, Bethlehem celebrates Christmas with a unique and different spirit; it is the spirit of sanctity by which both saints followed the star towards the secrets of the Kingdom of God, in humbleness and self-denial.

What is sanctity under the current circumstances of our lives? To become a saint, one should have a heart that is throbbing with peace at every beat, bursting with love in every vein, wishing for others what one wishes for oneself, and giving to others without limits; and one should simply be human and fill the world with love.

To give up one’s very self – to think only of others and of how to bring greatest happiness to others – that is the true meaning of Christmas. Only by creating a world full of love, peace, harmony, and equality you embrace Jesus who came to spread love, equality, peace, and joy. He came to this world poor and humble; he came to serve and not be served; he came for love and only for love. This was the message of both saints who adopted unlimited love, unlimited benevolence, and unlimited patience as the bases of their lives. They knew deep within that after all obstacles, God will be there for us with His unlimited love. Two saints have renewed hope within us, enlightened our way with the Holy Spirit, and wished to place each one of us in the path of life that can be achieved only through righteousness towards God.

This is the real meaning of Christmas, at which time we remember and celebrate that the Word of God has become flesh and dwells among us.

This year, there are two shining stars above us, near the star of Bethlehem, who advise us to love God wholeheartedly and to love thy neighbor like yourself. By this, they tell us that life is a gift from God and that we should preserve it as much as we can. We should accept others as they are; love them, respect them. By this, we will be able to follow Jesus and enter the

kingdom of heaven so we may become sons and daughters of God and makers of peace.

Through our saints, we tell Palestine and the whole world to consider the blessing of holiness in order to overcome the world’s current political and social challenges that are negatively impacting our feelings of joy, love, and forgiveness.

From the Carmel Convent in Bethlehem, I wish you Merry Christmas! I wish for you from the house of peace and joy and the country of Jesus that you and your families may have the most blessed, peaceful, joyful life and that peace may rule over you and over this holy country that welcomes pilgrims from all over the world to the place where Jesus was born.

Sister Ferial of Infant Jesus, Convent of the Carmelite Sisters in Bethlehem – Carmel of the Holy Child Jesus, Bethlehem, Palestine.

TWIP: While this feature is generally reserved for living members of Palestinian society who have contributed in a significant way and may serve as an example, we feel that this issue on Bethlehem, published for the month of December and with the beginning of Christmas season, allows us to make an exception and feature two non-living Palestinians who have been sainted recently.

