

Mother Marie Alphonsine Danil Ghattas

1843-1927

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INTRODUCTION

To be shared with older students:

"Hail, Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy, our Life, our Sweetness, and our Hope!" This beautiful prayer marks the end of praying a rosary. Over the millennia, Catholics all over the world have developed a special relationship with our Blessed Mother through praying the rosary. One such person was Mother Marie Alphonsine Danil Ghattas.

Born "Sultana Maria" (Arabic for "Queen Mary") in 1843, Mother Marie Alphonsine's birth name anticipated her forthcoming devotion to the Virgin Mary. Sultana Maria was born in Jerusalem to a pious Arab family. Her mother attended daily Mass, and her father often invited friends to their home to say decades of the rosary together. It is no wonder that at the age of 14, Sultana Maria entered the congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Apparition. Upon taking her final vows at the age of 17, Sultana Maria took the name Marie Alphonsine.

Mother Marie Alphonsine was sent to teach at the Sisters' school in Bethlehem, where she was known for her quiet and humble demeanor. While excelling as a catechist and educator, Mother Marie Alphonsine shared her devotion to the rosary with those around her. It was during her time in Bethlehem that she began having visions of Mary, Our Mother. These visions occurred over the course of four years. In them, Our Lady asked Mother Marie Alphonsine to start a new religious order of Arab women devoted to the rosary. Mother Marie Alphonsine shared her visions with only her spiritual director, Father Yousef Tannous. Fr. Tannous started the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters in 1880 while Mother Marie Alphonsine secured permission to switch orders. Mother Marie Alphonsine officially became a "Rosary Sister" in 1883. Throughout the rest of her life, Mother Marie Alphonsine served in parishes, schools, and orphanages. Her humility and devotion to prayer marked the work she did wherever



she went. While serving in Jaffa, she saved the life of a girl who fell into a well by praying the rosary. In 1917, she was given her final assignment, which was to found an orphanage in Ein Karem. In this town, she spent the remainder of her days fulfilling Our Lady's wish that the rosary be recited perpetually. Mother Marie Alphonsine's last act was to pray the rosary with her sister, Hanneh Danil Ghattas, on March 25, 1927, the Feast of the Annunciation. Handwritten accounts of her Marian visions were not shared with her congregation until after her death, according to her wishes.

The Congregation of the Rosary Sisters remains a powerful force in women's education and catechesis in Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Rome, Egypt, Kuwait, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah. Mother Marie Alphonsine's canonization in 2015, along with that of Sister Mariam Baouardy (another Palestinian nun), stand as a powerful sign of hope to Middle Eastern Catholics who face violent persecution in the region. About 2,000 Palestinian Catholics made the pilgrimage to the Vatican for Marie Alphonsine and Mariam Baouardy's canonizations. In his homily at the event, Pope Francis stressed how these new saints demonstrate how to "to live in unity with one another and with charity towards all."

A version for younger students:

In 1843, Sultana Maria Danil Ghattas was born to a very faithful Arab family in Jerusalem. Her name, which means "Queen Mary" in Arabic, showed her family's devotion to the Virgin Mary. Sultana Maria became a nun when she was only 17 years old, and she took the name Marie Alphonsine, which she was called for the rest of her life.

Marie Alphonsine was very humble and loved to pray the rosary. She spent her early years as a nun praying and teaching young women. During this time, the Virgin Mary started to appear to Marie Alphonsine. For four years, Our Lady would appear to the young nun and ask her to start a new order of nuns devoted to the rosary. She told only her friend, a priest, about these meetings with Mary. Together he and Marie Alphonsine began the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters.

For the rest of her life, Mother Marie Alphonsine continued to teach young women in schools, churches, and orphanages. For the last years of her life, Mother Marie Alphonsine spent most of her time praying the rosary, which she did right before she died in 1927. Today, the region that Mother Marie Alphonsine was from is very unstable, and many Christians experience persecution and violence. We pray to Mother Marie Alphonsine for the protection of Christians in the Middle East and for unity among the people that live there.

PRAYER

Dear Lord,
Thank you for the beautiful example of Marian devotion that we have in Mother Marie Alphonsine. Help us to find strength in humility and the quiet of prayer. Through the intercession of Mother Marie Alphonsine, we ask for the protection of persecuted Christians in the Middle East. We also ask for peace amongst all peoples in the Holy Land. Mother Marie Alphonsine, pray for us. Amen.

Or...

Dear Lord,
Thank you for the gift of your Mother. Please help to find comfort in her like Mother Marie Alphonsine. Please also protect all of your people in the Middle East. Mother Marie Alphonsine, pray for us. Amen.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Religion

- Have students research the history of praying the rosary.
- Pray a decade of the rosary every week with your students, and have them present information about the mystery the class is focusing on that week.
- Celebrate Mother Marie Alphonsine on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25.
- Learn to say the Hail Mary or how to make the sign of the cross in Arabic.
- Learn more about the Caritas Internationalis "Share the Journey" Migration Campaign and learn the stories of refugees and migrants from around the world. - <https://justiceformigrants.org/caritas-share-the-journey-campaign/>

Writing

- Have students keep a "Mysteries of the Rosary" prayer journal in which they reflect on individual mysteries of the rosary.
- Have students practice creative writing by telling the story of Mother Marie Alphonsine's apparitions from different perspectives: pretending to be Mother Marie Alphonsine as she journals about the apparitions or writing as Fr. Tannous after he hears about the apparitions from Mother Marie Alphonsine.
- Write letters to Mother Marie Alphonsine asking for the strength to be humble and have a strong prayer life.
- Contact one of the Rosary Sisters schools to inquire if your students can become pen pals with theirs.

Social Studies

- Have students research the history of the Holy Land, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past century.
- Have students do presentations about the significance of the Holy Land in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Have students read and report on "current event" articles about the Middle East.
- Watch these short National Geographic videos about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and discuss with your students: <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/israel-palestine-conflict-zone/student/>

Art

- Create rosaries or decade bracelets using beads, yarn, or other craft supplies.
- Make a collage of multicultural images of Mary.
- Have students research the art/architecture common in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim places of worship.

Home and Family Connections

- As a family, pray for victims of religious persecution in the Middle East.
- Pray the rosary as a family.
- Financially support a refugee family - <https://support.crs.org/donate/donate-syrian-refugees-and-iraqi-families>

Book Recommendations

- A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Mark Tessler (2009)
- The Secret of the Rosary by St. Louis de Montfort (<http://www.catholictradition.org/Classics/secret-rosary.htm>)

Service Projects

- Have students create rosaries that are then sent to people that may not have access to them (children in orphanages, families in homeless shelters, etc.)
- Have students lead rosaries at soup kitchens, homeless shelters, etc.
- Support religious minorities in the Middle East through the work of Catholic Relief Services - <https://www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/where-we-work/middle-east-north-africa>

Relevant Songs

- "Hail Mary – Gentle Woman"
- Chant the rosary or sing the Chaplet of Divine Mercy song (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5TGfisOKMM>)

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