

**Letter addressed to His Holiness Pope Francis
On behalf of His Eminence Cardinal Bechara Boutros El Rai
Patriarch of Antioch and all the East
and the Synod of Maronite Bishops for the Canonization of
the Blessed Martyrs: the Three Brothers Massabki:
Francis, Abdel Moati and Raphael.**

Protocol, 1/2022

Holy Father,

After having implored the Holy Apostolic Blessing, it is with an immense hope that we place our request in Your paternal hands, and as Successor of St. Peter, we ask Your Holiness, after studying the archives, the testimonies and the necessary canonical and ecclesial consultations, to agree to elevate the three "Blessed Martyrs: Brothers Massabki" to the rank of Saints. They were authentic witnesses to the faith and their canonization could be a good opportunity "to raise our heads and recognize our brothers as 'the neighbor' to take sides with the one who has fallen on the way" (cf. Brothers All, § 16).

1. The life and martyrdom of Francis, Abdel Moati and Raphael Massabki are a moving personification of the encyclical "Fratelli tutti" on fraternity and social friendship in an Orient, which never ceases to be the crossroads of most geopolitical conflicts of the world. In fact, the East, in addition to hosting the holy sites of the

three monotheistic religions, holds half of the world's hydrocarbon reserves and is located at the crossroads of major world trade routes. And unfortunately, due to the virulence of conflicts and exacerbations, due to the various ideologies and fragmented, deconstructed, emptied (although the list is not exhaustive) nationalism, we discern our not rosy future.

2. Holy Father, in 1860 for the first time Western and Eastern Orthodox and Catholics are united in the same martyrdom; that of the massacres in Syria, and 66 years later, in 1926, Pope Pius XI beatified the eight Franciscans and three lay Maronites martyred in Damascus. At the same time in 1993, the Antiochian Synod of the Orthodox Church proclaimed the sanctity of Father Youssef Mhanna el Haddad fell on the same day under the same circumstances. All these martyrs are commemorated on July 10. As if viscerally the Holy Spirit urges us to celebrate the "ecumenism of blood" so dear to your heart.

3. It is with this spirit that we hereby ask for the canonization of Blessed Brothers Massabki and through them, indirectly the Franciscan religious. The peoples of our countries are so desperately in need of a breath of hope to rediscover the sense of their vocation as lay people and to confirm their presence, their role of bond, unity and pivot in this East sick from so many fragmentations. Especially since all accounts of the 1860 massacres in Damascus mention the courage of many Muslims who risked their lives to protect Christians. Among these Muslims

is the figure of Algerian Emir Abdel Kader, then in exile in Damascus, stands out. According to the then French consul, he saved the lives of nearly 11,000 Christians in Syria. Remembering these facts is part of the joint approach you launched with the Grand Imam of el Azhar, Sheikh Ahmed Al Tayeb in "Human Brotherhood, for World Peace and living together" in February 2019. And it takes awareness to all men of good will that their guarantee depends on the care they take of each other.

4. Even in their burial, the Massabki brothers symbolize the unshakable unity of the Catholic Churches of East and West by unintentionally confusing their bones with the eight Franciscan religious and probably also with many other unknown people who received the honor of martyrdom on that day. They were all killed just because they were Christians and refused to deny their faith.

5. From the point of view of their personal lives, the Massabki brothers were on good terms with everyone around them; they were known for their generosity towards the needy and the "waqfs" (land of communities) both Christians and Muslims. In terms of civil and political commitments, they were good citizens and were never involved, neither they nor their co-religionists in Damascus, in the events that took place in Lebanon. Their exemplary lives of piety and willingness to serve others and the Church, as well as their fidelity to Christ, have made them good

and holy lay people. furthermore, two of them were married and fathers; Francis with eight children and Abdel Moati with five.

6. They were the first faithful of an Eastern Catholic Church, the Maronite Church, to be beatified in 1926, according to the procedure in force in the Roman Church. Before them, our saints were recognized as such on the basis of popular traditions. It took 39 years for the beatification by the Vatican of the monk, the future St. Charbel Makhlouf, OLM (1965). Then of the nun Saint Rafqa Choboq Ar-Ray~s, OB (1985), and the monks, Saint N~emtallah Hardini, OLM (1998), Blessed Este~phan Nehme, OLM (2010) and Blessed Yaacoub Haddad, OFM Cap (2008).

On June 4, 2022, two other Lebanese Capuchins, Leonard Melki and Thoumas Saleh, have been declared blessed.

7. However, we immediately notice that of all this beautiful list of saints and blessed, there are no lay people and fathers except Massabki. Yet they had opened the series. It can be a reminder from God that the fertile ground for saints is indeed the family.

With you, Holy Father, we pray at this crucial moment of our time that all your aspirations may be realized, especially that of fraternity and the encounter between different civilizations for the common good of all.

May the Lord prevent our days from being similar in instability, misunderstandings, divisions, corruption and deviations, and inject them with the lifeblood of an authentic and lasting renewal, sustained by your paternal and apostolic blessing, and by that of the saints. Amen.

And please accept, Your Holiness, our filial devotion to the service of our Mother Church, and imploring your Apostolic Blessing, we assure you of our prayers.

Your Beatitude,

Your excellencies,

I have the honor to present to Your Beatitude and to your Excellencies, the results of the meetings with the President of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome, Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, regarding the case of the canonization of the three Massabki brothers: Francis, Abdel-Moaty and Raphael:

During the work of the Synod of bishops in 2021, and upon my request, being the official supervisor of the Synod of Bishops in our Maronite Church on the canonization of the three martyred brothers, Francis, Abdel-Moaty and Raphael Massabki, a committee has been formed under my chairmanship to follow up this file. And I have commissioned His Excellency Mgr Selim Sfeir, Archbishop of Cyprus, to do this mission before the "the congregation of the causes of saints", in Rome, and he has completed this mission.

Based on an earlier date settled on the 15 of November 2021, in the same congregation, an informal meeting was held and attended by

Cardinal Marcello Semeraro, Prefetto, and the Secretary S. E. R. Mons. Fabene Fabio, Arciv. Tit. di Montefiascone, Segretario, and the secretary deputy Rev. P. Turek Boguslaw, C.S.M.A., Mgr Selim Sfeir presented our request: "to declare the sanctification of the Maronite Massabki martyrs", without waiting for a legal miracle to declare the sanctity of their lives.

After a brief discussion concerning the importance of their holiness glowing and its official declaration by the Holy Church, it was agreed to adopt what is called "equivalent canonization".

Since the fame of their holiness and their miraculous intercession declared historically and without interruption, based on their heroic virtues of their heroism and martyrdom, and being declared beatified, therefore, and based on the foregoing, the public declaration of the Supreme Pontiff to extend the cult of the three saints in the universal Church would be sufficient.

In the last meeting on the 9 of May 2022 with Father Turek, mentioned above, that was held in the building of "the congregation of the causes of saints", they reached the final text, in three languages.

The text in the Italian language, attached to these files, will be adopted.

Equivalent canonization

Saint Hildegard of Bingen, canonized in 2012 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Equivalent canonization or equipollent canonization (Latin: *equipollens canonizatio*) is a form of **canonization** that occurs when the Pope recognizes and orders the public and universal veneration of a Servant of God, without having gone through the procedure normally required by formal canonization, because veneration of the saint has been carried out since ancient times and continuously by the Church.

History

Veneration of Christian martyrs and saints are attested from the first centuries of the Church. However, canonization as an ecclesiastical procedure was not outlined until the 11th century with the aim of seeking to define those Christians who would deserve the universal

reverence of the Church, thus avoiding confusion between local churches and seeking that the virtues of the deceased were fully proven. Already during this time the authority of the Bishop of Rome was appealed to claim to him or to the synods the power to determine said cult.

In the 17th century, Pope Urban VIII began to make pontifical declarations of canonization through papal bulls, the first canonized saints being Philip Neri, Ignatius of Loyola, Francis Xavier and in other bulls he would decree the beatification of other servants of God, Similarly, in 1634, through the bull *Caelestis Hierusalem cives*, he established such powers of beatification and canonization as exclusive to the Holy See.

In the first half of the 18th century, Bishop Prospero Lambertini, before being elected as pope under the name of Benedict XIV, published his maximum liturgical work entitled *De servorum Dei beatificatione et de beatorum canonizatione*, where he expounded the doctrine of "equivalent canonization" and described the possibility of establishing public worship for a person whose reputation for holiness and heroic virtues has long been proven by tradition and for whom there was already a prior worship in the Church.

This doctrine has been reiterated since then by various pontiffs up to modernity without the most recent provisions regarding the canonization process having repealed it as a valid practice, exclusive to the Pope.

Various saints have been included in the martyrology in this way, including Romuald, Norbert of Xanten, Bruno of Cologne, Peter Nolasco, Raymond Nonnatus, John of Matha, Felix of Valois, Margaret of Scotland, Stephen I of Hungary, and Pope Gregory VII. Some of the most recent cases of equivalent canonization were that of Hildegard of Bingen on 10 May 2012, 833 years after her death;³ that of Angela of Foligno on 9 October 2013, 704 years after her death;⁴ that of Peter Faber on 17 December 2013, 467 years after his death; and that of Joseph of Anchieta on 3 April 2014, 416 years after his death.

Requirements

Unlike ordinary canonization, in which a whole canonical process is necessary, in equivalent canonization only the prior verification of

- Public veneration of the servant of God carried out historically and without interruption.
- The fame of holiness and miraculous intercession.
- Heroic virtues or martyrdom.

After the above, only a public declaration of the Supreme Pontiff is enough where the extension of the cult of the saint to the Universal Church is ordered.

+ Guy Paul Noujeim

Lettera indirizzata a Sua Santità~ Papa Francesco

A nome di Sua Eminenza il Cardinale B~chara Boutros El RaPatriarca di Antiochia, di tutto l'Oriente e del Sinodo dei Vescovi Maroniti per la Canonizzazione dei Beati Martiri: i Tre Fratelli Massabki, Francesco, Abdel Mattie Raffaello.

Protocollo, 1/2022

Santissimo Padre

Dopo aver implorato la Santa Benedizione Apostolica, ~ con immensa speranza che poniamo la nostra richiesta nelle Sue mani paterne, e quale Successore di San Pietro, preghiamo la Santità Vostra, perch~ dopo aver studiato gli archivi, le testimonianze e le necessarie consultazioni canoniche ed ecclesiali, accolga di elevare i tre "Beati martiri: fratelli Massabki" al rango di Santi. Essi sono stati autentici testimoni della fede e la loro canonizzazione potrebbe essere una buona occasione «per alzare il capo e riconoscere nei fratelli "il prossimo" per schierarsi con colui che ~ caduto sul sentiero» (cfr Fratelli tutti, § 16).

- 1. La vita e il martirio di Francesco, Abdel Motti e Rafael Massabki sono una commovente personificazione della Lettera Enciclica "Fratelli tutti" sulla fraternità e l'amicizia sociale in un Oriente che non cessa di essere il crocevia della maggior parte dei conflitti geopolitici del mondo. L'Oriente, infatti, oltre ad ospitare i luoghi santi delle tre religioni monoteiste, detiene la metà delle riserve mondiali di idrocarburi e si trova al crocevia delle principali rotte del commercio mondiale. E purtroppo per la virulenza dei conflitti e delle esacerbazioni, per le varie ideologie e nazionalismo frammentato, decostruito, svuotato (anche se l'elenco non è esaustivo) discerniamo il nostro futuro non roseo.

- 2. Santo Padre, nel 1860 per la prima volta ortodossi e cattolici occidentali e orientali sono uniti nello stesso martirio; quello dei massacri della Siria, e 66 anni dopo, nel 1926, Papa Pio XI beatificò gli otto francescani e i tre laici maroniti martirizzati a Damasco, e contemporaneamente nel 1993, il Sinodo antiocheno della Chiesa ortodossa proclamò la santità di padre Youssef Mhanna el Haddad cadde lo stesso giorno nelle stesse circostanze. Tutti questi martiri sono commemorati il 10 luglio. Come se

visceralmente lo Spirito Santo ci spingesse a celebrare l'"ecumenismo del sangue" tanto caro al tuo cuore.

3. È con questo spirito che con la presente chiediamo la canonizzazione dei Beati Fratelli Massabki e da parte dello stesso, indirettamente, dei religiosi francescani. I popoli dei nostri Paesi hanno così disperatamente bisogno di una ventata di speranza per ritrovare il senso della loro vocazione di laici e per confermare la loro presenza, il loro ruolo di legame, di unità e di perno in questo Oriente malato da tante frammentazioni. Tanto più che tutti i resoconti dei massacri del 1860 a Damasco, menzionano il coraggio di molti musulmani che hanno rischiato la vita per proteggere i cristiani. Tra questi musulmani, spicca la figura dell'emiro algerino Abdel Kader allora in esilio a Damasco. Secondo l'allora console francese, in Siria, salvò la vita di quasi 11.000 cristiani. Ricordare questi fatti fa parte dell'approccio congiunto che avete lanciato con il Grande Imam di el Azhar, lo sceicco Ahmed Al Tayeb in "Fratellanza umana, per la pace mondiale e la convivenza comune" nel febbraio 2019. E rende tutti gli uomini di buona volontà consapevoli che la loro garanzia dipende dalla cura che si prendono l'uno per l'altro.

4. Anche nella loro sepoltura, i fratelli Massabki simboleggiano l'incrollabile unit~ delle Chiese cattoliche d'Oriente e d'Occidente confondendo involontariamente le loro ossa con gli otto religiosi francescani e probabilmente anche con molte altre persone sconosciute che hanno ricevuto in quel giorno l'onore del martirio. Furono tutti uccisi solo perch~ erano cristiani e si rifiutarono di rinnegare la loro fede.

5. Dal punto di vista della loro vita personale, i fratelli Massabki erano in buoni rapporti con tutti coloro che li circondavano; erano noti per la loro generosit~ verso i bisognosi e i "waqfs" (terra delle comunit~) sia cristiani che musulmani. In termini di impegni civili e politici, sono stati buoni cittadini e non sono mai stati coinvolti, n~ loro n~ i loro correligionari a Damasco, negli eventi che hanno avuto luogo in Libano. La loro vita esemplare di piet~ e disponibilit~ al servizio degli altri e della Chiesa, come pure la loro fedelt~ a Cristo, li hanno resi laici buoni e santi. Inoltre, due di loro erano sposati e padri; Francesco di otto figli e Abdel Mooti di cinque.

6. Sono stati i primi fedeli di una Chiesa cattolica orientale, quella maronita, ad essere stati beatificati nel 1926, secondo la procedura in vigore nella Chiesa romana. Prima di loro, i nostri santi erano riconosciuti come tali sulla base delle tradizioni popolari. Ci sono voluti 39 anni per la beatificazione da parte del Vaticano del monaco, il futuro San Charbel Makhlouf, OLM (1965). Poi della monaca Santa Rafqa Choboq Ar-Ray~s, OB(1985) e dei monaci, Santa N~emtallah Hardini, OLM(1998), Beato Est~phan Nehm~, OLM(2010) e Beato Yaacoub Haddad, OFM Cap **(2008)**.

Il 4 giugno 2022, altri due cappuccini libanesi, Leonard Melki e Thoumas Saleh, saranno dichiarati beati.

7. Tuttavia, notiamo subito che di tutta questa bella lista di santi e beati, non ci sono laici e padri tranne i Massabki. Eppure avevano aperto la serie. Pua essere un promemoria da parte di Dia che il terreno fertile per i santi ~ davvero la famiglia.

Con te, Santo Padre, preghiamo in questo momento cruciale del nostro tempo, perch~ si realizzino tutte le tue aspirazioni,

specialmente quella della fraternit~ e dell'incontro tra civilt~ diverse per il bene comune di tutti.

Il Signore impedisca ai nostri giorni di essere simili per instabilit~, incomprensioni, divisioni, corruzione e deviazioni e inietti loro la linfa di un rinnovamento autentico e duraturo, sostenuto dalla tua benedizione paterna e apostolica, e da quella <lei Santi. Amen

E per favore accolga Sua Santit~, la nostra filiale devozione al servizio della nostra Madre Chiesa, implorando la Sua Benedizione Apostolica, Le assicuriamo la nostra preghiera.