

When the Lebanese Maronite Order decided to build the monastery of St. Joseph al Dahr in Jrabta, Batroun, in 1897, six nuns, led by Mother Ursula Doumit, were sent to the new monastery. Rafqa was among them.

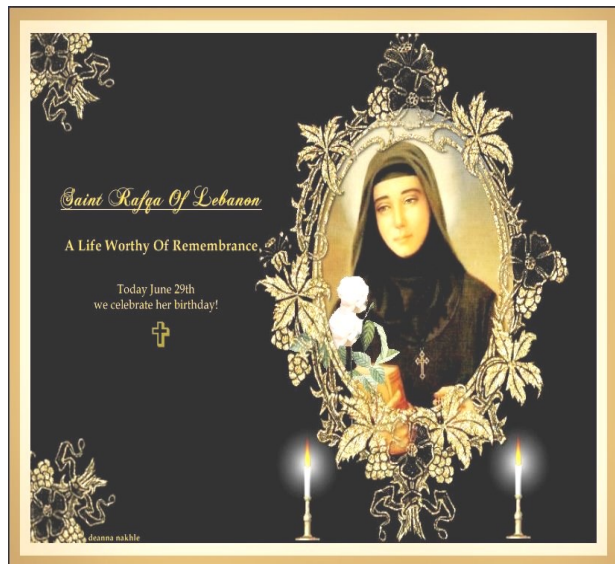
In 1899, she lost the sight in her left eye. With this a new stage of her suffering began, intensified by the dislocation of her clavicle and her right hip and leg. Her vertebrae were visible through her skin.

Her face was spared and remained shining to the end. Her hands stayed intact; and she used them to knit socks and make clothing. She thanked God for the use of her hands while also thanking Him for permitting her a share in His Son's suffering.

Preparing for death, she called upon the Mother of God and St. Joseph. Finally, on March 23, 1914, after a life of prayer and service, and years of unbearable pain, she rested in peace. She was buried in the monastery cemetery.

On July 10, 1927, her body was transferred to a shrine in the corner of the monastery chapel. The case for her beatification was introduced on December 23, 1925, and canonical investigation of her life began on May 16, 1926.

Pope John Paul II declared her: Venerable on February 11, 1982; Beatified on November 17, 1985; a role model in the adoration of the Eucharist during the Jubilee Year 2000. She was canonized on June 10, 2001, at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, Italy also by Pope John Paul II. Her feast day is March 23. \*(excerpted from: [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va))



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## Saint Rafqa (Rebecca) Pietra Choboq Ar-Rayès

Feast Day: March 23



**A ROLE MODEL IN THE ADORATION OF THE EUCHARIST**

## **Rafqa Pietra Choboq Ar-Rayès (1832 - 1914)**

\*Rafqa was born in Himlaya, one of the villages of Northern Metn (Lebanon), on June 29, 1832.. She was the only child of Mourad Saber el-Choboq elRayess and Rafqa Gemayel.

On July 7, 1832 she was baptized and named Boutroussieh. Her parents taught her the love of God and the practice of daily prayer. At age seven, she suffered her first great loss with the death of her mother.

In 1843, her father experienced financial difficulties and sent her into service for four years in the home of Assaad Badawi. Rafqa grew into a beautiful, pleasant, humorous young woman, pure and tender with a serene voice.

In 1841, she returned home to find that her father had remarried. His new wife wanted Rafqa to marry her brother. Conflict developed when her aunt sought to arrange a marriage between her son and Rafqa.

At this time, Rafqa felt drawn to the religious life. She asked God to help her achieve her desire and set off for the convent of Our Lady of Deliverance in Bikfaya, accompanied by two girls whom she met along the road.

When she entered the convent church, she felt deep joy and happiness. One look at the icon of Our Lady of Deliverance, and she heard God's voice confirming her desire to enter religious life.

Following a year of postulancy, Rafqa received the habit of her congregation on the feast of St. Joseph, March 19, 1861. A year later, she pronounced her first vows.

The new nun, along with sister Mary Gemayel, was assigned to work in the Jesuit-run seminary in Ghazir. Among the seminarians were Elias Houwayek and Boutros el-Zoghbi, later to become Patriarch and Archbishop, respectively.

Rafqa was in charge of kitchen service. In her free time she studied Arabic, calligraphy and mathematics and also helped to educate girls aspiring to join her congregation

In 1860 Rafqa was sent to Deir el-Kamar to teach catechism. There she witnessed the bloody clashes that occurred in Lebanon during this period. On one occasion, she risked her own life by hiding a child under her robe and saving him from death.

After a year in Deir el-Kamar, Rafqa returned to Ghazir. In 1862, she was sent to teach in a school of her order in Byblos. One year later, she was transferred to Maad village. There, with another nun, she spent seven years establishing a new school for girls, made possible through the generosity of Antoun Issa.

While living in Maad, and following a crisis in her congregation, Rafqa sought divine guidance. Entering at St. George's Church, she prayed for help. Once again, she heard the Lord's voice confirming her call to religious life. Soon after, she dreamt that St. George, St. Simon and St. Anthony the Great, the father of monasticism, were telling her to enter the Lebanese Maronite Order.

Her trip from Maad to the Maronite Monastery of St. Simon el-Qarn in Aito was facilitated by the generosity of Mr. Antoun ISSA. She was immediately admitted to the Order, receiving the habit on July 12, 1871 and pronouncing her vows on August 25, 1872. She received the name, sister Rafqa, after her mother.

She was to spend the next 26 years in the monastery of St. Simon. In her observation of the rule, her devotion to prayer and silence, in her life of sacrifice and austerity, she was a role model to the other nuns.

On the first Sunday of October 1885, she entered the monastery church and began to pray, asking Jesus to permit her to experience some of the suffering He endured during His passion. Her prayer was immediately answered. Unbearable pains began in her head and moved to her eyes.

Her superior insisted that she undergo medical treatment. After all local attempts to cure her had failed, she was sent to Beirut for treatment. Passing by St. John-Mark's Church in Byblos, her companions learned that an American doctor was traveling in the area. Contacted, he agreed to perform surgery on the afflicted eye. St. Rafqa refused anesthesia. In the course of the surgery, her eye became completely detached. Within a short time, the disease struck the left eye.

For the next 12 years she continued to experience intense pain in her head. Throughout this period, as before, she remained patient and uncomplaining, praying in thanksgiving for the gift of sharing in Jesus' suffering.