

Fathi Baladi

Information from "A Star from the East"

"Do you want to understand life? Hold a weeping infant in your arms. Dry the tears of a mother who has lost her child. Life is often hidden, but never completely disappears. Indeed, one can never forget past moments, nor the hours of childhood. One cannot forget those who have left us. Although they seem far from us, they are closer than ever, in silence, we hear their gentle voices; in their stillness, we see them in the act of moving.

If you sometimes feel cold at night, look around you and notice those who are shivering even more than you, and you will be warmed. If you suffer hunger or thirst one day, look around you at those who are dying of hunger and thirst, and you will be calmed. Do not look for life in distant wonders, it is close to you in the very act of looking, it awaits you with arms outstretched, smiling, bearing the sheaf of wheat and heather of flower."

Fathi Baladi, the only son of a pious Christian family belonging to the Melkite-Greek Catholic Church, was born September 22, 1961 in Beirut, Lebanon. Abboud Baladi, a bank manager, and his wife Nelly Medawar-Baladi, lived their Christianity with conviction, and passed this trait on to their three children: Nicole, Fathi, and Gina.

From the time he was a small child, Fathi saw life on earth as a gift given by God with a mandate for service to others. As a teenager, he wrote in his spiritual diary: I believe in one God, whom I love: the one and only great God, in whom one must believe; ... for those whose life is no more a joy I pray; to those who suffer, starve or die, I cry for them. Children of the

world, I love you. O my God, I love You! I swear You are great... I thank You, O God, for having created me, for having adorned me, and for having glorified me."

Fathi's childhood was characterized by his eagerness to learn. He enjoyed school. He loved to read, and catechism and art were his favorite subjects. From the age of six, he particularly loved to draw pictures of the Virgin.

Fathi had a sweet, calm temperament, and was always obedient to his parents. Just like any other normal children, Fathi and his sisters shared their things and played together. The rare times they squabbled, little Gina was usually the instigator. Although she was also a good student, Gina loved to play and when her brother tried to ignore her, she took his things and hid them. Even then, without becoming angry, he would try in a nice way to get her to leave him alone. Sometimes he resorted to making a deal with her to keep her from pestering him. Once he gave her some money telling her that if she went to buy him some chocolate bars he would give her one of them plus a dollar.

Compassionate and helpful, Fathi enjoyed visiting the elderly and the sick with his father. He enjoyed just talking and listening to them, kindly and respectfully..

A bright student, he was always willing to help his classmates with their homework. He was so willing, in fact, that when a friend didn't really care about his school work, Fathi offered to stay with him in the classroom during recess to help his friend do the assigned work.

When the school asked the children to bring donations for the poor, Fathi

asked his mother to let him take some of his good clothes, not just the worn out, old ones. He also asked for some of her homemade jam because it was so tasty he knew the poor would enjoy it. And, of course, he also would often also give his own pocket money.

When Fathi was a ten year old student at Holy Wisdom School in Beirut, his catechism tutor, who knew his soul, told him, "Fathi, one day you will be a great saint!"

Apparently, Fathi had begun to think of a vocation to the priesthood. Twice he told his mother, "If I devote myself to the clerical life, I can accomplish great things."

Lebanon has been afflicted with a civil war for many years. Fathi, like many of the Lebanese youth knew of the problems and prayed for their end. He shared the common human discouragement, but he took the problems of his country to God in prayer. Although he prayed for himself, his constant prayers were for others: " I think that the future is dark for I feel that the whole world is even more dark. I fear that the war will destroy both our hearts and our homes. One is sad for those who are loved. One must refuse to accept their death, their suffering, their exhaustion. One rebels; one is distraught; one grieves. Lord, hear this melody which is being sung; do not leave us like this, O You who are so great and powerful. Look upon us! Remain in us."

"One is saddened, yes, for it is necessary. One weeps, for it is necessary to weep. One is left desolate in order to be found. And you decline all this; nevertheless, it is joyful. The tears are beautiful; sadness is a path to You; and solitude is a hymn of glory to Your greatness and to man. "

"Lord, do not abandon me. Do not abandon those who suffer, those who are hungry, thirsty, those who are bound by the cruelty of men, those who are behind the bars of prison. Do not forget those who are loved, who are lamented, who see life as of simple men, whom You love above all, and whom You look upon, lifting up the head as they smile and glorify Your goodness and strength. Lord, help us."

On New Year's Eve in 1980, Fathi was on his way to Araya to visit a fellow student, to wish him a Happy New Year and to review some of their classes in architecture. He did not return. His parents found him riddled with bullets, lying on the seat of his car. His arms were folded in the form of a cross. His face was serene, suggesting a peace of soul and resignation to his tragic fate.

After Fathi's death, his mother looked through his notes and his books. She found an array of religious drawings and a number of prayers that he had written for the weak, the hungry, the miserable and prisoners. Fathi kept a spiritual journal, recording his thoughts, while the war in Lebanon evolved around him. His notes show a spiritual maturity rare in one so young.

Some days after the death of their son, his parents were favored with an amazing consolation. Plunged in grief, they suddenly heard the voice of their son, Fathi. He spoke with them, calling them by name. He told them not to grieve, assuring them that he was in heaven with the angels and saints. The house was suddenly permeated by the fragrance of exquisite incense and filled with a radiant light.

Fathi was buried at the Greek Catholic cemetery of Beirut which is located on

the green line that once divided Beirut into two sectors.

Word of the consoling event experienced by Fathi's parents soon spread.

Friends of the family, and then others, began to ask his intercession.

Miraculous healings and apparitions began to be claimed. Soon these events were brought to the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities.

Fathi's body was transported to the monastery of St. Saviour in Sarba, Jounieh, a house of the Aleppian Basilian Fathers. Many remarkable phenomena described as prodigies are attributed to his intercession, including cures, apparitions, lights, tongues of fire, voices, strains of music and fragrances of incense. To those, volumes of signed statements bear witness.

On July 30, 1994 the Holy Synod of the Melkite Church made a decision to pursue the procedure for canonization. His cause for beatification was opened on November 23, 198(?)4 under the presidency of the late Archbishop Peter Rai.