

NO. 3 MAY-JUN 2022

FROM THE BEES TO THE ROSES



The Magazine
of Saint Rita of Cascia

BIMONTHLY
OF THE AUGUSTINIAN
MONASTERY
OF SAINT RITA
OF CASCIA



WAITING FOR RITA

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On the cover: Waiting for Rita.
Photo: Giovanni Galardini

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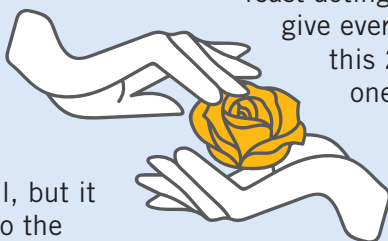
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What do we ask for this 22 May?

Even though it is only March as I am writing to you, I already feel all the emotions that we experience together at every feast of Saint Rita. There is no hurry, however, because the wait is essential. Only by taking this time can we understand what to ask for on 22 May and what we are willing to do to make our wishes come true. Rita's intercession is powerful, but it is our choices that guide us to the grace we seek. That is why in this issue you will find the testimonies of the four women who will receive the "Saint Rita International Recognition Award 2022": understanding how each of them has made a difference in their stories can make our



steps more decisive and spur us to imitate their example, which recalls and carries forward that of our Rita. Only by being more similar to her, in fact, will we feel the special grace given out through her feast acting in us. We nuns ask Rita to give everyone a real sign of change this 22 May. We pray that each one of you will receive a new perspective, that of our saint. And so, may you bring the root of the love that you have felt into your life, to graft it, make it grow and share it with others. Love is what Rita has always offered us and it is precisely with love that we hope that you can revolutionise your path. Happy Feast of Saint Rita to all of you!



by Marta Ferraro

In the “Terra dei Fuochi” you die while still living



The social, environmental and sanitary catastrophe of Campania

The presence of illegal waste has been correlated with the increase in leukaemia and tumours

The “Terra dei Fuochi” (Land of Fires) is an area of Campania spanning about 1076 km², in which 57 municipalities converge and where approximately 2 and a half million inhabitants live: 33 municipalities in the Neapolitan area and 24 in the Caserta area, which are affected by the burial of toxic and special waste, the presence of numerous scattered illegal landfills and the uncontrolled ignition of waste fires that spread dioxin and other polluting gases.

The expression “Terra dei fuochi”, which according to Monsignor Antonio Di Donna, Bishop of Acerra, is not only a geographical area but a real phenomenon, appeared for the first time in 2003, when it was used in the Ecomafie Report published by Legambiente that year. From an investigative point of view, the first suspicions about illegal toxic waste disposal were highlighted in the first half of the 1990s by an investigation by the State Police, conducted by the then Criminalpol Inspector Roberto Mancini. Years later, in 2015 in Calvi Risorta, the

State Forestry Corps discovered an area of waste spillage, considered the largest underground toxic waste landfill in Europe. According to the surveys carried out, the Camorra has allowed unscrupulous northern industrialists to bury hazardous waste in these lands, which has polluted the groundwater and is now claiming young lives. Roberto Mancini's investigations and the statements by Camorra informant Carmine Schiavone showed that Campania was destined to become an open-air landfill, especially in terms of toxic materials including lead, nuclear waste and acidic material. In 2021, the Court of Naples recognised the causal link between the Camorra and illegal landfills.

The presence of illegal waste is correlated with the increase in the number of specific diseases such as leukaemia and tumours. In this regard, in 2016, in collaboration with the Experimental Zoophylactic Institute of the Mezzogiorno of Portici, the Campania Region launched the SPES project for environmental and population analysis in relation to exposure to pollutants.

“I'm fighting for my daughter”

New life can be born from pain

Tina Zaccaria is a brave mother who, after trying to snatch her daughter Dalia, who died of Hodgkin lymphoma, from the jaws of death, is now committed to protesting, decrying the absurdity of the many unjust deaths in the “Terra dei fuochi”. “Dalia's absence taught me that nothing makes sense but life itself.” That is why today she is committed to helping families who are suffering what she already experienced through the “Associazione Angeli Guerrieri” (Warrior Angels Association): days poised between hope and pain, hospital trips and treatments, anguish and anger at a situation causing the citizens of that land to endure anguish through no fault of their own. “Being a mum here is hard. When I decided to live in Casalnuovo, to raise my children away from the chaos of Naples, I didn't know what was hiding here, and this makes me angry. The state denied it until 2004 and I denied it myself, until the disease knocked on my door. The frustration is that many years have gone by and nothing has changed!” There are many who try to keep their attention on the case. “On 15 November 2012, Don Maurizio Patriciello organized a march featuring a parade with photos of the victims of pollution. Dalia had passed away 12 days before and I didn't have the strength to get out of bed. I

wanted her picture to be there, though. At the end of the March, it stayed in the church and then went around the world as a symbol of this environmental tragedy. I understood then that I couldn't be Dalia's inconsolable mum, I had to fight for her since she had proven her-



self to be a warrior even though she was only 12,” said Tina. This is how the Associazione Angeli Guerrieri came into being, which “gives me the opportunity to share my pain with other parents. Being with them made me change perspective: while before I prayed for the miracle of healing, with them the question is now ‘why should the Lord have performed a miracle for me?’” she concluded.

WOMEN OF RITA 2022

Concetta Zaccaria from Casalnuovo di Napoli, known to everyone as Tina, is receiving the Saint Rita International Recognition Award for having been able to transform the pain of the loss of her daughter Dalia into an opportunity to help others. With the association Angeli Guerrieri, she supports all the families of the Terra dei Fuochi who are fighting against cancer and denouncing the environmental catastrophe experienced by the citizens of her area.

Victims of a sick love



When the monster
sleeps next to you

Lives broken
by the
murderous
fury of those
who claimed
to love them

Francis, Lin, Esther, Arietta, Nunzia and Anna are just some of the women killed in Italy in 2018. They are just some of the 142 lives shattered by the murderous fury of those who claimed to love them. They are just some of the victims of femicide. Maria Antonietta, whose story we will tell later, only avoided being one of them by a hair's breadth.

Femicide is now all too frequent, so much so that the world institutions have been working for years with the aim of combating it, with harsher legal regulations and days dedicated to raising public awareness on the issue of gender violence. Femicide is only the tip of the cruel and unjustified ferocity to which men who do not know how to love subject women, who they consider their exclusive property.

The term was used for the first time in its modern meaning, that is, as "the killing of a woman by a man for reasons of hatred, contempt, pleasure or sense of possession of women"

in 1990, by the American teacher Jane Caputi. Since then, the Council of Europe has undertaken a series of initiatives that led to the adoption of the Istanbul Convention in 2011. It is "the first legally binding international instrument that creates a comprehensive legal framework to protect women against all forms of violence", and focuses on the prevention of domestic violence, the protection of victims and the prosecution of offenders.

The Treaty characterises violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination. It also establishes a series of crimes: psychological violence, acts of persecution – stalking, physical violence, sexual violence, including rape, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and forced sterilization, sexual harassment.

Despite these efforts, however, the phenomenon seems far from being resolved and 116 women were killed in Italy in 2021.

“I forgave him but I want justice”

Faith, the strength to live again

It is nice to talk to Maria Antonietta, because she exudes an unending attachment to life.

Her ordeal began on 12 March 2018 when she was warned that her ex-husband had escaped from house arrest in Herculaneum, Naples. She did not make it to the Carabinieri station in Reggio Calabria, where she lives with her children, before her car was blocked: he was there, throwing gas canisters at her and screaming “die”. Stubbornly, she replied: “I won't die, I'll go back to my children.”

After more than 20 months of hospitalisation and over 100 surgeries, she has no words of hatred for him, only a desire for justice. “Everyone chooses who they belong to. I chose the Lord, he chose someone else,” she said when I asked how she could forgive such an atrocious act. “I clung to the Lord. I gave him my hand, he took mine and so we walked, together. Faith is the only thing that helped me



move forward, both before and after the attack. I always had a picture of Saint Rita in my kitchen and I always asked her for the strength to continue. She helped me, even when my husband was at home with us and our daily life was marked by violence. For me, this Recognition was like touching the sky with my finger. When I received

the phone call from the Rector giving me the news, I had just learned that I had contracted Covid. That call made me realise that I would pull through once again, because I would go to Cascia to testify.”

Thinking about all the women who are victims of violence and abuse by men who say they love them, but don't know how to do it, I asked her what she recommends. She replied with determination: “Report them. However, I would ask the institutions to be closer. My children and I have often felt alone. If my father hadn't taken care of so many things, we wouldn't have made it.”

WOMAN OF RITA 2022

Maria Antonietta Rositani, from Reggio Calabria, is receiving the Saint Rita International Recognition Award for having been able to see the presence of Christ in all the painful times of her life. Even in the terrible moment of the attempted femicide, she shook the hand of the Lord, who showed her the way of forgiveness without renouncing justice. With courage and determination she is facing numerous surgeries with the awareness that she is not alone, but rather she is supported by the faith and example of Saint Rita, who she loves very much.



by Rita Gentili

ALS, the disease that erases people



Life with a neurodegenerative disease

You become less and less autonomous until you are totally dependent

It's spelled Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis but we understand it as anger, dismay, pain and physical and psychological devastation. This applies to those who are affected by it and those who are close to them, especially children.

ALS, to use the acronym it is generally known by, is a rare disease for which there is still no cure, which progressively leads to paralysis of the voluntary muscles, those that we use to move, talk and swallow. It also affects the respiratory ones. Degeneration of the nerve cells of the spinal cord causes the muscles to stop receiving nerve impulses and nourishment, and they atrophy. They don't work any more.

The illness has no specific symptoms and different and repeated examinations are needed to confirm the diagnosis, which is often reached by means of exclusion. In the stories of those who have lived or are living with the disease, weakness and muscle stiffness are some of the first

signs: a sudden difficulty in grabbing a pen, lifting a cup of coffee or articulating a word, a change in their tone of voice.

As the disease progresses, you become less and less autonomous, until you are totally dependent. When the degeneration affects the respiratory muscles, the only solution is a tracheotomy: a hole in the throat through which a tube forcibly pushes air into the lungs. It causes you to lose your voice. All that's left is silence.

The hospital bed becomes your whole world: a single bed surrounded by monitors, tubes and cables, in which it is impossible to accommodate the warmth, smell or breath of a child or a partner. It means total isolation.

Your eyes, however, continue to communicate: thanks to sophisticated computers, their movements become words, of pain, anger and suffering but also of love, joy and gratitude. Because every person is a universe in their own right.

“For me it was an opportunity for rebirth”

Silvia speaks with her eyes but opens our hearts

ALS is an illness that steals your future, especially if you are diagnosed when you are 39 years old, with an 11-month-old daughter and dreams and plans with your life partner. When it happened, I cried. I screamed and thought about throwing myself under a car. It was 2009. For the first 10 years I lived relatively well, mostly in a wheelchair, and with an unconscious and irrational sense of guilt for my illness, especially towards my daughter and my husband. In 2019 I took the difficult decision to have a tracheotomy to keep living, despite the fact that I would lose my voice and then my sense of smell, and that once admitted to the hospital I would be bound to the bed there. I cried for months. But for me, ALS was also an opportunity for rebirth. I was entirely focused on work, but it gave me the opportunity to be an affectionate mother and not a sterile parent, and it taught me that there are infinite forms of Love. I attended the parish until I was 17. I was a catechist, but when the priest exiled a couple of teenagers because they were expecting a child, I was disgusted and shocked. So I gave up everything, even the good Lord, until I was 50. I was reading about Blessed Carlo Acutis. It was 5 September 2020, and I began



to cry floods of tears: a theologian told me that the Holy Spirit had opened the doors of my heart to God. The signal had arrived 2 years earlier, however: I had felt an absolute certainty that I would be healed at the age of 50. I was thinking about my body but instead it was my soul. After that day, I asked my husband to be married with a religious ceremony. I tracked down a person I had hurt and asked for and received her forgiveness. I received the strength and humility from the good Lord to be able to forgive those who had hurt me. I entrusted myself totally to God, like Saint Rita, whose roses I have attached to my computer, in the conviction that doing so is an active choice that must be renewed every day, because being a Christian is anything but easy.

WOMAN OF RITA 2022

Silvia Battini, from Sesto San Giovanni (Milan), is receiving the Saint Rita International Recognition Award for the wonderful testament of love and faith that she gives to anyone who meets her and writes to her, teaching us that “even if the flesh is weak, the Spirit gives life”, and that “loving and being loved” is the meaning of life.



by Nicoletta Di Benedetto

Lay missionaries, at the service of others



The gift of oneself as
a life vocation

With sacrifice
and
dedication
they offer
their time
and
professional
skills on
behalf of the
needy

The term missionary is usually associated with religious figures, consecrated men and women sent by their congregations or by an ecclesiastical authority to territories where the local Church needs to be supported by the apostolate, including through social and charitable works.

Over the years, these people have been joined by others defined as secular, that is, not belonging to the clerical state, who offer their time and their professional skills on behalf of the needy, with sacrifice and dedication. These people generally find themselves operating in the parts of the planet ruled by poverty and disease, such as Africa and Latin America, but not only.

The structures in which they work can belong to the Church or to NGOs, Non-Governmental Organisations or voluntary associations, which have been providing for those needs not addressed by

the States for many years. These lay people are women and men who are professionals in the fields of health, research or cooperation projects, or just simple citizens who offer their time to others.

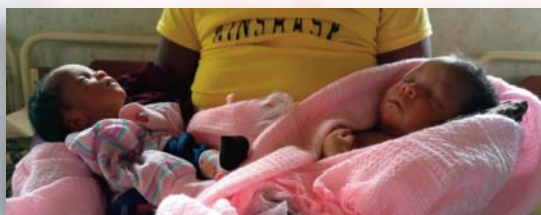
The commitment of lay missionaries is acquired through different life experiences. Many of them, especially those who work alongside religious figures, come from paths forged in their own parish, in their local diocese or simply through knowing and being friends with a friar, nun or consecrated person, who told them about their own experiences upon returning from a mission, as well as the help that could serve the people among whom they found themselves carrying the Gospel.

And then there are those who, like Dr. Chiara Castellani, who I will tell you about shortly, have made their profession a reason to live, to be by the side of people who suffer.

The doctor of mercy

Faith as a human gift

Born in Parma in 1956, Dr. Chiara Castellani graduated in medicine and surgery at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Rome, specialising in gynaecology and obstetrics, and in tropical diseases. Since 1983, the year of her first mission to Nicaragua as a volunteer doctor, she has been a champion of the right to health for all. She found herself carrying out surgery and orthopaedic interventions from Latin America to Africa, wherever there were conflicts. Above all, however, in her long career she has dedicated herself to assistance programmes for pregnant women and women in poor areas of these countries. Today she lives and works in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she has been running the Kimbau Hospital for more than 30 years. Hers is more than a profession, it is a mission. "I feel like a lay missionary," she says. "In fact, legally I am a *fidei donum* (gift of faith) of the Diocese of Verona to that of Kenge." The office that deals with medical works (BDOM), called on her to direct the 29 health facilities of the Diocese of Kenge. She says that in Congo, "there is a high standard of medicine for the rich, but the health of the poor is linked to religious



medical structures." As a gynaecologist and obstetrician, she mainly assists women during childbirth. The midwives of the villages do not have the opportunity to study, which is why she has worked hard to open centres for assistance with childbirth and gestation and for training local social and health personnel. She has also fought for free access to essential medicines, such as for AIDS or the Ebola epidemic. The right to health, she says, "also involves having a clean and tiled operating room, like ours here in Kimbau. It is a sign that can combine accessibility and quality of existence." And, speaking of signs, after learning of the recognition, the doctor found herself trusting in Saint Rita: "Here in Congo she is widely venerated, and groups in the Diocese are inspired by her. I begged for her protection for a very seriously ill child, who would have been impossible to save with my skills alone."

WOMAN OF RITA 2022

Chiara Castellani, originally from Parma, is receiving the Saint Rita International Recognition Award for having dedicated her whole life to children and the forgotten people of the world. In Nicaragua and Congo, she makes her professional skills available to the poor and sick on a daily basis. With faith and courage, she is committed to training new health professionals attentive to people's overall development.

A bequest, a gift of love

Remembering
who is most vulnerable
in your will can change someone's life
for ever

Allocating even a small bequest to the Monastery of Saint Rita of Cascia means leaving a sign of your generosity in time.

Thanks to bequests, we can support the Beehive of Saint Rita, a hope for all Little Bees, the children who will inherit your love.

Write to us at monastero@santaritadacascia.org and you will receive information on how to help the children in difficulty that need you.





Blessed Teresa Fasce, portrait of a 20th century woman

“Holiness consists of the small things that occur every minute rather than in the great things that rarely occur.”

Blessed Mother Maria Teresa Fasce



by Alessia Nicoletti

A life-changing encounter

“I want to be an ambassador of Mother Fasce”



Carmela Mascio

Looking at the image that shows the beatification of Mother Fasce, I think that she is always down here for those who need it. She even goes to those who do not know her and answers questions that do not yet exist. So it was for Carmela Mascio, who had an encounter with the blessed woman. The story behind it is one of love, pain and rebirth.

Carmela is a teacher in Rome, who grew up surrounded by Catholic values and devotion to Saint Rita in her family. For her, the pilgrimage to Cascia always inspires a unique emotion, but she did not expect an extraordinary discovery on that day 20 years ago. “By chance, I found myself in the lower Basilica, in front of Mother Fasce, who I did not know. I thus experienced her



shining example of faith and life.” The meeting of the two was so strong that it would make a difference in Carmela’s darkest period. “That day I had to prepare myself for something. Shortly after, in fact, my mother fell ill with breast cancer and that news might have driven me crazy, but instead I prayed to Saint Rita and I remember Mother Fasce. She had tended the same tumour like a treasure, and I realised that that pain had to be my teacher and make me grow. I started to feel better and less alone. And then my mum healed. The oncologist who treated her for years says that science did its part, but God did the rest.” Today, Carmela is certain of the meaning of that en-

counter with Mother Fasce, which changed everything, helping her to regenerate herself with her testimony. “I am grateful to Saint Rita for introducing me to her friend (Mother Fasce, ed.) and I want to be her ambassador, so I wrote a book about her.” This book, “Il Polline di Dio” (The Pollen of God, published by Il pane buono edizioni, 12 euro) encapsulates Carmela’s determination to help Mother Fasce spread her message: “We are losing the courage that Mother Fasce had in carrying forward the story of love that God began with humanity to generate His love for everyone. Everyone can do it: neither diseases, nor walls, nor our limits can stop us.”



I realised
 that that
 pain should
 allow me to
 grow

THE WORKS OF BLESSED MOTHER FASCE

A home for pilgrims

Starting in 1925, the flow of pilgrims to Cascia increased so much that it became necessary to accommodate them. To this end, we deduce that Mother Fasce involved the owners of hotels in the town, who responded enthusiastically. We recall Casa del pellegrino (House of the Pilgrim), in Piazza Garibaldi, run by the Rasi family, where pilgrims could eat and rest for free. The monastery also set up a venue with benches and tables for people who came from afar,

who ate and spent the night there. Mother Fasce wanted to create larger facilities in order to accommodate more pilgrims, but the lengthy construction work on the new Basilica and the war slowed the project down. However, it materialised 9 years after Mother Fasce's death: in 1956 the Hotel delle Rose was inaugurated in full working order, originally with the name Casa del Pellegrino, probably from the first structure that had touched the nuns so much. (*Mauro Papalini*)

RITA AND TERESA



Although more than five and a half centuries have passed, Saint Rita is felt as close as if she were part of the family. This is her strength, based on the normality of her daily example. And the message she spreads is timeless with no borders, and it is capable of touching the hearts of many in every part of the globe, even those of different religions.

In communion with her beloved saint, Teresa was able to speak to the highest classes of society as well as to the humblest. She never had limits in fulfilling her mission of generating fruits of love towards everyone. Today, although she has been gone for less time than Rita, her work is constant and knows no obstacles. Many people can testify to that.



by Mother Maria Rosa
Bernardinis OSA

I BRING YOU JESUS

Get to know Jesus and learn to love Him
with the Prioress of the Monastery of Saint Rita of Cascia

The relationship between Saint Rita and Crucified Jesus is a beautiful, demanding and delicate topic to consider. This is because she left no written texts, even though her life was a school of love through the harshest trials, precisely because she lived the Gospel of Jesus. But I want to try. Knowing God and myself, day by day I learn a lot from her who, like Saint Paul, can say: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

Many times, I have asked myself what understanding and depth of the mystery of the redemption wrought by Christ Rita reached. After the violent death of her husband and her children, followed by her forgiveness and commitment to peace between families, during the time she spent in the monastery she came to ask Jesus to participate in His Passion. What resemblance did she have to Christ, if the Lord gave her a thorn that she bore for 15 years?

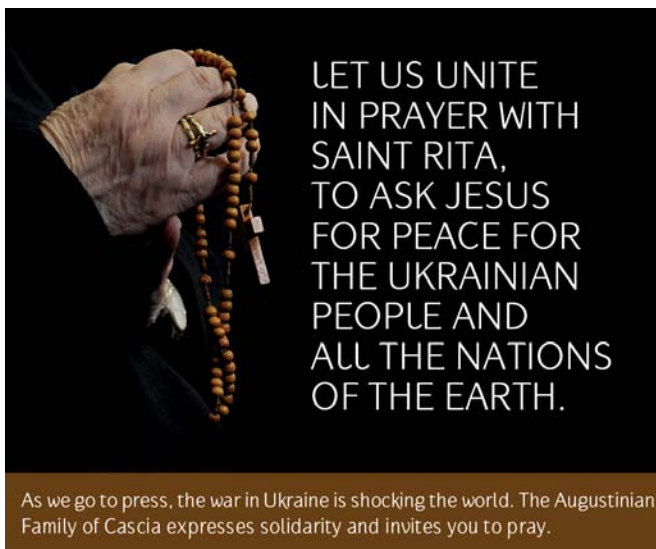
St Thomas Aquinas writes: "the Passion of Jesus is sufficient to guide our whole lives." Rita certainly fed the holy name of Jesus with motherly milk, and her familiarity and friendship with Him was increased and strengthened by the loving attitude of her parents. Educated in Augustinian spirituality, Saint Rita will have prayed with the words of Saint Augustine: "How much you have loved us, good Father, who did not spare your only Son for us, to save us!" Jesus is in fact the manifestation of God's love, precisely with his Passion, death

Rita and Christ: a great love

and Resurrection! It is a humble love that is patient, benevolent, welcoming, trusting and protective. Only in anticipation of the Resurrection is it possible to face the test of the cross. Only united to Christ does pain make sense and, if redeemed, it becomes a force of attraction! Rita shows us this with her life.

Let us thank the Lord for having given us Saint Rita, and let us also say thank you to Rita, who is submissive to the Holy Spirit and has shown us a way to live out our vocation.

What
resemblance
to Christ
did she
achieve?





by Father Rocco Ronzani OSA

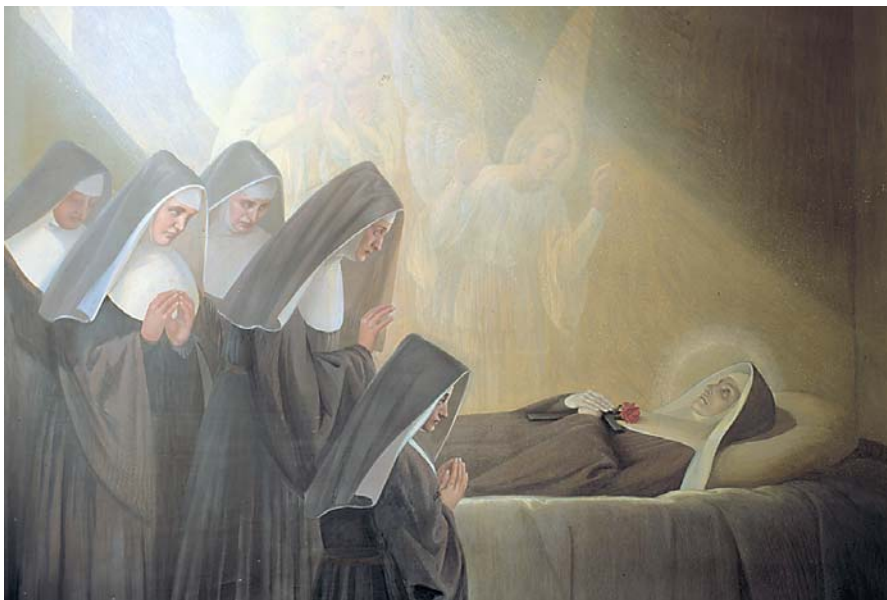
The signs of a timeless devotion

The people already proclaimed Rita a saint at the time of her death

There's a large crowd, because they're all eager to see her

The most definite chronological reference in Rita's life is the date of her death. Traditionally established as 1447, this was later rectified by historians, with good if not excellent reasons, who deemed it to be 1457, which is stated in the epitaph written on Rita's wooden sarcophagus. It is also the start date of the *Codice dei miracoli* (Codex of Miracles), a manuscript that collects miraculous signs, formerly preserved in the Monastery of Santa Maria Maddalena in Cascia, and another collection published in Perugia and reprinted multiples times for use by

the devotees. The miracles cover a period of time that goes from 25 May 1457, a few days after Rita's death, to the end of the sixteenth century. From the acts of the canonization process from 1626, we know that short biographical notes, printed devotional images for pilgrims and prayers and hymns dedicated to the saint had been circulating for a long time. For example, there was the one entitled *Salve Rita generosa* (Greetings generous Rita), used in the commemoration of the then Blessed Rita, which Monsignor Mario Sensi believed dated back to



Transit (Galizzi - 20th century) Basilica of Saint Rita

about 1480: an eloquent sign of very historical public worship.

Another sign of early devotion are the pilgrimages and the processions that began in great numbers after Rita's death. We relive this in the story of one of the witnesses to the historic canonization process: "Ever since I came into the world, on the day of the feast of the blessed one, on 22 May, I have always seen the people come in procession: men, women and children from many nearby places. They carry candles, money and other gifts in procession to Blessed Rita and they come singing verses in praise of her, along with other devotions. Then they all go to the church of Blessed Rita and pay reverence to her holy body, where they leave gifts. With much veneration, the nuns show the body of the Blessed woman and these large numbers of people kneel devoutly, pleading to the Blessed woman. There is a great crowd, because they are all eager to see her, and I know this because I have been present for many years and this can be attested by all of Cascia. I have also

PRAYER

Saint Rita, You are the source of our hope, the burning light that illuminates our path, the dew that awakens the gift of faith in our hearts at dawn.

Teacher of life and humility, we trust in You, in Your infinite goodness, in Your gentle comfort... Take us by the hand. With You we will walk on the paths of charity, we will discover new horizons of fraternity and we will rejoice in Your sweet presence.

Saint Rita, beloved nun of Cascia, humble disciple of the Crucified One, pour upon us the grace of Your immense Love.

Oh saint of peace and forgiveness, rose perfumed in the garden of God, wrap us in Your tender embrace and, looking up to heaven, intercede for us with Lord Jesus.

by Rosario La Greca (Brolo - Messina)

heard it from the elders, and there is a public voice and fame in this town about this veneration and gathering of people around Blessed Rita on the day of her feast, which has happened since her death." And that pilgrimage still continues today, without interruption, from every part of the world!

THEY LIVE IN CHRIST

To you, Lord, we humbly recommend these our dead because, as in their mortal life they have always been loved by You of immense love, so now, freed from all evil, may they enter by Your grace into eternal rest. Amen.

Adele Brufani (Cannara PG - Italy)
 Amelia Franceschetti in Bonatti (Colà di Lazise VR - Italy)
 Antonia Simoni (Spello PG - Italy)
 Aura Topa (Macerata - Italy)
 Aurora Colli (Ladispoli RM - Italy)
 Carla Matella (Pogno NO - Italy)

Evelina Farsetti (Arezzo - Italy)
 Giuseppina (Pina) Miletta (Chiswick - Australia)
 Lorenzo Bondi (Canada)
 Luisa D'Alicandro (Quarto NA - Italy)
 Maria Salamone (Caltanissetta - Italy)
 Maria Antonietta Minerva (Milan - Italy)
 Maria Dora D'Agostini (Canada)
 Maria Rita Peverada (Cavriana MN - Italy)
 Mario Frisoni (Canada)
 Natalina Bellini (Arce FR - Italy)
 Porzia Di Tullio (Bari - Italy)
 Rosa Basile (Campo nell'Elba LI - Italy)
 Sante Bini (Cannara PG - Italy)
 Sebastiano Frazzetto (Licodia Eubea CT - Italy)

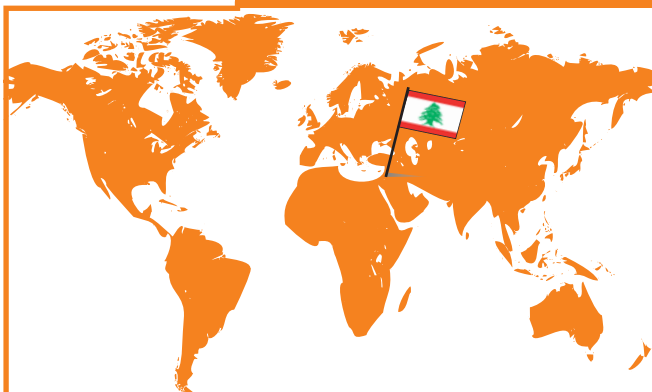


by Rita Gentili

A Muslim touched by Rita

Talal Khrais, between Lebanon and Italy

RITA IS ALSO HERE



Country: Lebanon

Good to know: Lebanon is a narrow strip of land overlooking the Mediterranean and protected by mountain ranges that reach a height of almost 3000 metres to the back. It is a land in which ancient civilisations built their empires, giving rise over the centuries to a multi-ethnic country capable of providing a safe harbour for refugees of every ethnic group, and showing the world peace and brotherhood among peoples. Unfortunately, it has also been the setting of a heart-breaking civil war and is located in an area where economic, cultural, historical and political interests are a continuous source of instability. For some years, moreover, Lebanon has been experiencing a dramatic social and political crisis, which was further exacerbated by the explosion at the port of Beirut in August 2020. As a sign of closeness to the Lebanese people, from October 2020 to May 2021 the Augustinian community of Cascia celebrated a Mass in the Basilica of Saint Rita in the Maronite and Arabic languages, broadcast via live stream to enter the homes of Lebanese friends.

He is of Lebanese origin but has lived in Italy for years. He is an established journalist and war reporter, but, before becoming one, he completed a degree in medicine and another in political science. He is of Muslim faith but is a great devotee of Saint Rita. Today, he is the only Arab journalist accredited by the Holy See. We are talking about Talal Khrais, whose words are a testimony of faith, of paying attention to the lowliest, of respect for others and for one's own history.



Talal, tell us a bit about yourself. “I was born in Beirut in 1952. I come from a poor family. I studied thanks to the support of a newspaper, *Zartounk*, which deals with the Armenian diaspora. I



The statue of Saint Rita, placed at the gates of Cascia in 2015, is a gift from a Lebanese devotee

worked there as a boy, in the printing press. During the day I worked to help my family and in the evening I went to school. Thanks to a scholarship, I was able to study medicine in Bulgaria and, after graduation, thanks to a fund that Italy had made available for Lebanon, which was at war, I came to Italy. I came to study medicine but I loved journalism, so I enrolled in Political Science at L'Orientale in Naples. After a while, there was the earthquake in Irpinia, which I started writing about, and since then I have continued to work as a journalist."

What is your connection to Saint Rita? "In December 2020 I had a heart attack, a very long arrhythmia that caused me to lose consciousness. I dreamed that Saint Rita was touching my head. It was halfway between dream and reality, because I felt her hand and still, when I feel good, I feel her closeness. After I left the hospital, I continued to be ill for several months. Then I was in Cascia with some priests from the Maronite community. After that visit, I had no more pain. Personally, I met Saint Rita when I arrived in Italy, but she is very loved in Lebanon.

She's our patron. We are the third country in the world in terms of number of devotees, after Italy and Brazil. These include both Christians and Muslims, it makes no difference. I am a Muslim, but I have always gone to churches. I feel good when I do. That's how we are in Lebanon. Many Christians do Ramadan: they are invited by Muslim friends and out of respect they fast too. And the Muslims go to ask St. Charbel (a Christian monk of Lebanese origin, *ed.*) for help. Lebanon is a small country but there are 10 patriarchs, 18 religious communities and 3 ethnic groups, and we are proud of this."

Talal, in your work you always seek out the lowliest subjects, those who have no voice. What drives you to do that? "I come from suffering, from mourning, from poverty. I don't want to betray my roots. I go to distant lands where others do not go, to tell what others do not tell. I would like to talk about the Christians in Iraq, about the Christian minorities that are no longer being discussed, about Yazidi women. On TV today, we tend to talk more about the journalist who has gone to the war zone than about the war or the people who suffer, the many priests who die throughout the world to be with the people. The newspapers talked about Afghanistan because everyone was talking about it at the time but, as the attention dropped, they stopped doing so, and they forgot about the people who stayed there. I go where there is suffering, where there is war, and I bring with me a past of which I am proud."

We are the third country in the world in terms of number of devotees, including both Christians and Muslims

I go to distant lands to tell what others do not tell



by Alessia Nicoletti

On 22 May we will make a dream come true together

Support The Home of Saint Rita

This year, together, we can make sure that the Feast of Saint Rita is truly a day when anything is possible. We will even make a dream that seemed unattainable just a few months ago come true. It is a dream that bears the name the Home of Saint Rita, a hospitality project by the nuns to support the families of patients at the Cascia Hospital, which you can help us to build.

From Christmas to today, thanks to the support and donations of the many of you who have embraced the fundraising campaign of our Saint Rita of Cascia Non-Profit Foundation, we have come very close to achieving the first goal: 130,000 euros to start the work necessary to upgrade the systems and install the heating. These works will only be the beginning, but they will allow us to begin the project concretely and thus transform the 240 sqm apartment, located on the 2nd floor of the hospital rehabilitation centre of national excellence, into a second home that will be safe and welcoming for many families from all over Italy.

But even though we've done a lot, we can't stop here. Raising funds to complete the work and open the Home of Saint Rita as soon as possible will be our mission, especially on 22 May. Indeed, Rita's day will be a boost for everyone throughout the world, as well as a response or sign that everything will change. And we want to send that response loud and clear to the patients, who are waiting for the time when

LET'S LOOK TO TOMORROW TOGETHER

We ended 2021 by starting to build a dream together. This is the Home of Saint Rita, the new project by the nuns, who want to create a place for hosting the families of the sick who are hospitalised in the Cascia hospital and are far from home. Now they are alone, but with a donation you can change things and help us make our dream come true.

Support the project in the name of Saint Rita and this year her feast will be even more wonderful for everyone!

Here's how to support the **"Home of Saint Rita"** project

- **Bank transfer**
IBAN IT64T0306905245100000003558
- **Post office** account no. 1010759072 made out to Fondazione Santa Rita da Cascia
For both methods, specify "The Home of Saint Rita" in the description
- **Credit card** and **Paypal** on fondazione.santaritadacascia.org/donate-now
- **Qr Code** alternatively, you can scan the QR Code here to make your donation directly from your mobile phone





they will never again be alone in their hospital beds, far from their loved ones. For them, family is an extra possibility, an effective medicine that gives them the courage to face another day, keeping fear at bay and bringing happiness closer.

The Home of Saint Rita means security, presence and support for so many families who face great sacrifices every day, and for so many sick people forced into solitude. These include Sandro and his wife, from the province of Pescara. He is 58 years old and has been living with multiple sclerosis for 27 years. The disease keeps getting worse and he can no longer get around without a wheelchair. He could always count on the presence of his wife, but, after being operated on for a tumour, she now finds herself on her own, 100 km from home. "It would be nice to be close to her at all times,"

Sandro told us, "because it would be good for her and for me too. The Home of Saint Rita would be perfect for us. So I hope that the work will be done quickly." For Sandro and his wife, seeing the doors of the Home of Saint Rita open would put an end to their anguish. This is the same anguish felt by so many families, who just want the opportunity to fight for their loved ones' lives alongside them.

For the Feast of Saint Rita, you can find how to follow the live streamed events and support the home that will bear her name on santaritadacascia.org. You will be the protagonist of the special magic of this day that has always transformed the devotion you feel in your heart into a desire to participate actively, to spread that love that brings hope into the lives of those who need it most.

RITIAN MAY

SUNDAY 1 MAY

FAMILY CELEBRATION

18.00 - BASILICA OF SAINT RITA

Wedding anniversary commemoration

(1st, 5th, 10th, 15th, 20th, 25th, 30th, 35th, 40th, 45th, 50th and subsequent individual years - Book via +39 0743 75091). At the end of each Holy Mass of the day, there will be a talk on Saint Rita for the little ones and **the blessing of the children**

FROM 12 TO 20 MAY,

NOVENA OF SAINT RITA

Presented by the Christian communities of the Diocese

The daily programme, which other pilgrims can also join, includes:

16.00 - Visit to the Monastery and story of the history and message of Saint Rita

17.00 - Guided tour of the

Penitentiary and possibility to confess

18.00 - Eucharist presented by the host communities and, at the end, passage alongside the Urn of Saint Rita

SUNDAY 15 MAY

PROCESSION OF THE BANNER

21.00 - PIAZZA DANTE

Procession through the streets of the city to the **Basilica of Saint Rita** and entrustment of the Municipality of Cascia and hamlets to Saint Rita with the traditional banner. We want to give thanks for the protection received by the saint over the centuries against the many calamities and invoke the gift of Peace and Forgiveness in the families and inhabitants of the Municipality

FEAST OF SAINT RITA 2022

FRIDAY 20 MAY

21.00 - ROCCAPORENA

Arrival of the **Torch of Forgiveness and Peace** from **Tuscany**. Prayer and walk up to the **Rock of Prayer with the Torch**

SATURDAY 21 MAY

10.10 - HALL OF PEACE

Presentation of the women receiving the "Saint Rita International Recognition Award 2022": Chiara Castellani, Maria Antonietta Rositani, Silvia Battini, Tina Zaccaria.

Presented by Luca Ginetto, editor-in-chief of TGR Umbria

12.00 - CASCIA ROSE GARDEN

Planting of roses by the Mayor and the civil and religious authorities and the women awarded the "Saint Rita International Recognition Award 2022"

16.30 - BASILICA OF SAINT RITA

Eucharistic Celebration of the

Augustinians, presided over by Father Alejandro Moral Antón, Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine

17.30 – Award ceremony of the "Saint Rita International Recognition Award 2022" and message from the Prioress of the Monastery of Saint Rita, Mother Maria Rosa Bernardinis

18.00 - Solemn Celebration of the Transit of Saint Rita

20.30 - PIAZZA GARIBALDI

Meeting of the standard bearers of the Municipalities of Valnerina, of the civil, religious and military authorities and of the delegation from Krakow. Procession to the Sanctuary of Saint Rita

21.30 - AVENUE OF THE SANCTUARY

Reception of the delegation from Krakow and the award-winning women.

Exchange of gifts between the twin communities and **reception of the Torch of Forgiveness and Peace**

22.00 - CHURCHYARD OF THE BASILICA

Lighting of the tripod and official start to the 2022 Ritian celebrations. Then, entry to the Basilica for a **final prayer of entrustment to the saint**

SUNDAY 22 MAY

FEAST OF SAINT RITA

6.00 - Festive ringing of the bells

Holy Masses will be celebrated in the Basilica and/or Hall of Peace at: 6.00, 7.00, 8.00, 9.00, 10.00, 12.00, 16.00, 18.00, 19.00

8.00 - HALL OF PEACE

Concelebration presided over by Father Alejandro Moral Antón, Prior General of the Order of Saint Augustine

9.00 - Concelebration presided by Father Giustino Casciano, Provincial Prior of the Augustinians of Italy

10.00 - AVENUE OF THE SANCTUARY

Arrival of the **historical procession** of the characters of the life of Saint Rita and **Procession** from Roccaporena

10.30 - Solemn Pontifical

11.30 - Supplication to Saint Rita and **Blessing of the Roses**

19.00 - BASILICA OF SAINT RITA

Eucharistic Celebration for the Benefactors of the Shrin, presided over by Father Luciano De Michieli, Rector of the Basilica of Saint Rita





by Sister M. Giacomina Stuani OSA

With the prayer of supplication, Rita listens and talks to us through the roses

Two of the events most eagerly awaited by the “Ritian” people scattered throughout the world on 22 May are the prayer of supplication to Saint Rita and the blessing of the roses. What is the meaning of these two gestures, which we experience at the end of the Solemn Pontifical on the morning of the Feast of our beloved Sister Rita?

It is true that God lives in our hearts, but we need the help of sacred signs that always remind us of His presence in us. A sacred sign goes beyond a representation. It is a question of confer-

ring the power to carry out the benevolence of God on realities through a sign. However, this power is linked to the state of grace and to the use of those realities according to God's sanctifying plan. Blessing is not a sacrament, but it is a sacramental. This means that it does not have immediate power, but depends on the grace and de-

votion of the subjects who use it. The Church makes use of sacramentals. Their purpose is laid out in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* Dogmatic Constitution: “They are sacred signs by means of which, in imitation of the sacraments, they are signified, and above all spiritual effects are obtained through the intercession of the Church. Through them, people are prepared to receive the main effect of the sacraments and the various circumstances of life are sanctified.” The privileged symbol of blessing is water, which is indispensable for life. And that is why the blessing is given by sprinkling with holy water: to effuse life, gifts and thanks.

After this introduction, let us return to our blessing of roses... On her deathbed, Saint Rita asked for a rose from her parents' garden. It was winter. However, a flowering rose was found in the snow. For her, in that particular moment of suffering, that rose meant God's blessing, His love for her, His consolation, the certainty of His presence in every sad and joyful moment of her life. Today the blessed roses still represent the benedictory presence of God beside us, but also that of the intercession of our friend Rita. It is as if, through that rose we bring



For her, that
rose meant
God's
blessing

home, she were telling us that we must imitate her in putting God at the centre of our hearts, to trust Him and to spread the sweet fragrance of the Son, living with the same feelings with which He lived.

The prayer of supplication, according to the meaning given in the dictionary, is “fervent and imploring invocation; in a religious sense, invocation addressed to God, to the saints or to the Virgin for the attainment of particular graces.”

The supplication to Saint Rita is a humble request placed before God, to ask for spiritual gifts and graces, for ourselves and for the needs of others. Having experienced the different conditions of life always extended *in Deum*, Rita

is a mediator who can help us obtain wisdom of the heart, to bear witness to evangelical life, drawing on the strength of instruments of forgiveness and fruitful operators of peace, lovers of the Good, the True, the Beautiful and the Righteous. This supplication is made by those who believe they are heard and answered; by those who have a precarious belief and ask her for the same courage of faith; by those who are distrustful and want to be inspired by Rita and her vital force; by those who passively suffer the pain of a heavy cross and look to Rita with the hope of receiving help to open themselves to Love that gives life to friends and enemies and not to close themselves up. Happy feast of Saint Rita!

It's like she's telling us to imitate her by putting God at the centre

“Doing is a word that indicates practicality, dexterity, creativity, involvement. It asks us not to stand by, to take part, to take sides, not to remain neutral. The vocation will not come down from heaven already fully completed, like a ready-made project packaged down to every detail by the hands of God. Vocational research and its discernment requires responsibility, that ability to respond that involves our freedom, our hands, our acts. The vocation arises from a personal encounter with the Lord and his Word recognised as a promise; vocation is never just ‘for me’ but always ‘for someone else’ in service. It is life spent for the love of someone.”

(All brothers, 116)

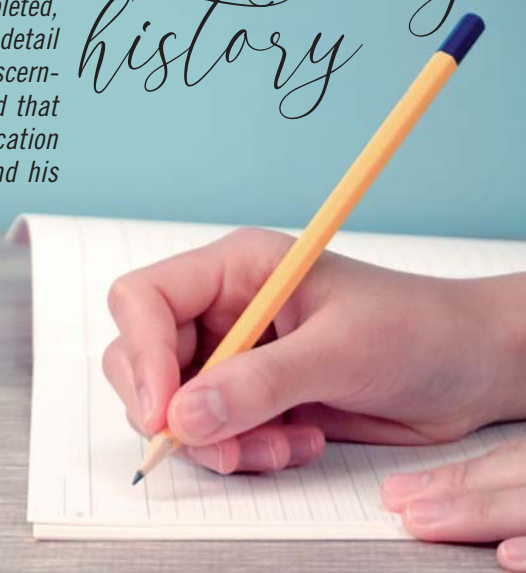
We offer you a few days for listening, praying, discerning, living at the school of Jesus, the inner Master...

FEMALE VOCATIONAL ORIENTATION COURSE
from 8 (dinner) to 13 (breakfast) August 2022

For information: Monastery of Saint Rita

Viale Santa Rita, 13 - 06043 Cascia PG - tel: +39 (0)743.76221 - e-mail: monastero@santaritadacascia.org

Making history



We embrace their hopes. Together.



THE BEEHIVE OF SAINT RITA IS A FAMILY WHERE HOPES ALSO FEED ON LOVE. Founded by Blessed Mother Fasce in 1938, the Beehive of Saint Rita has become home, school and assistance for many young girls. A real family that includes all our supporters who, with their help, continue to give a future to thousands of young people in difficulty. Stay close to us, your love is the most solid foundation on which to build new hopes. alveare@santaritadacascia.org • santaritadacascia.org/beehive

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