

Nasara

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The R. C. Mission of Afghanistan Newsletter

25 March 2017 AD

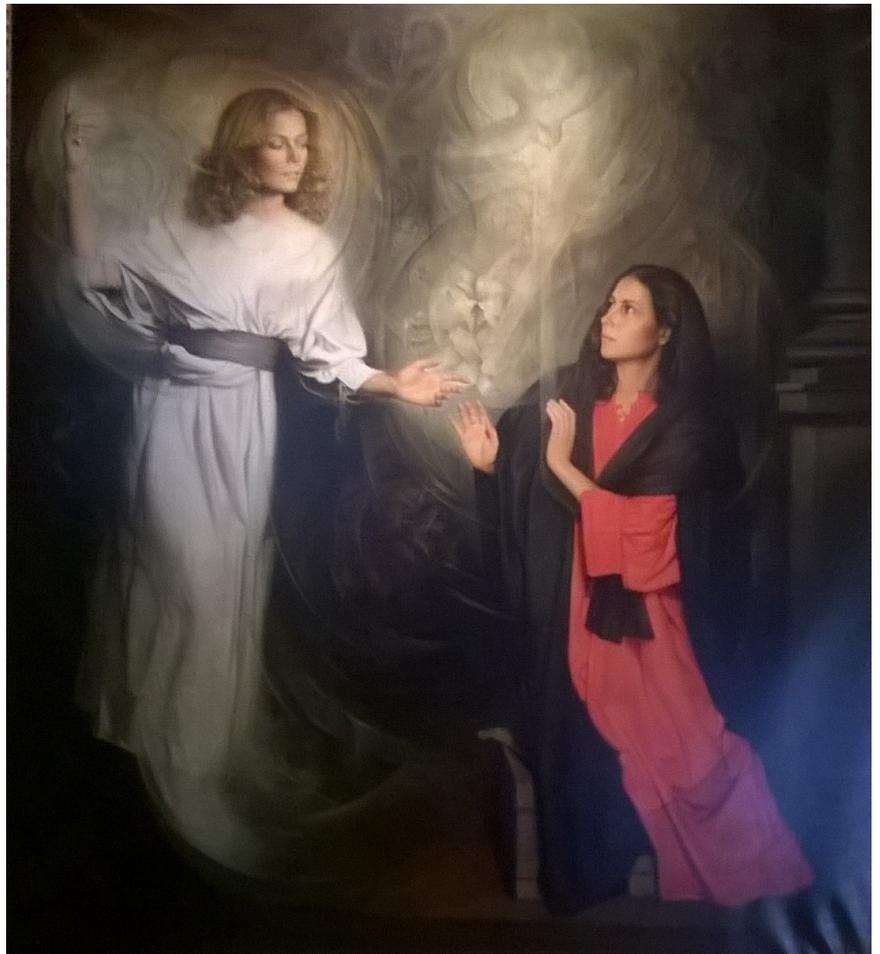
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THE NAZARENES

In the Acts of the Apostles the followers of Jesus Christ term themselves in different ways: *brothers* (1:15); *believers* (2:44); *disciples* (6:1); *holy ones* (9:13). But we find in the same book other two names, used by outsiders, to label them: *Christians* (11:26) and *Nazarenes* (24:5). The origin of these designations is quite clear; each of them derives from one of Jesus' titles: *the Christ* (= the Messiah, i.e. the "Anointed One") and *the Nazarene* (= coming from Nazareth; even though the term is often confused with *Nazorean* or *Nazarite*). Both of these designations most probably had, at the origin, a pejorative sense (see the phrase used in Acts 24:5 "the sect of the Nazarenes"); but this did not prevent the diffusion of them, so much so that they became the common titles used to identify the disciples of Christ respectively inside (*Christians*) and outside (*Nazarenes*) the borders of the Byzantine Empire. *Christians* little by little lost its derogatory nuance and imposed itself across the whole world as the main designation for the followers of Jesus. *Nazarenes*, instead, has kept its negative shade up to the present day: in Muslim countries, it is often used as a kind of insult; Christians have never employed it as a self-designation, even because it is utilized to identify them in the Quran (thus preferring to resort to the Arabic equivalent of *Christian*, namely *Masîhî*). *Naşârâ* (= Nazarenes)

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Ulisse Sartini, *Annunciazione* (1997), O. L. of Divine Providence Mission Church, Kabul

The Annunciation of the Lord

*Et Verbum caro factum est
et habitavit in nobis*

has come to the fore again recently, when ISIS militants began to target Christians in Syria and Iraq, marking their houses with a *nun* (ن). This has caused a widespread movement of solidarity, especially through the social media: *We are all Nazarenes!*

That is why, as we had to choose a title for the newsletter of the Mission, we thought to name it *Nasara*. We are *Nazarenes*, and we are proud of it! To be sure, we are not native Afghan Christians; we are just alien Christians temporarily living in Afghanistan; but we like to call ourselves with that politically incorrect term.

When, two years ago, I arrived in Afghanistan as the new Ecclesiastical Superior of the Catholic Mission, I intended to set up a website, so as to give visibility to the presence of the Catholic Church in this country. Then security reasons counseled to give up the plan. But the desire and the need for a connection instrument had remained and resulted in the decision of preparing a newsletter. This has the advantage of being a *targeted* means of information (and such it should remain for the above-mentioned security reasons).

Nasara is a newsletter without pretension: it just intends to be a means of communication among the members of the Afghan Catholic Community and with friends around the world. Even the number of its pages is on purpose limited to four, so that it can be easily printed on one A3 sheet folded in half. I do not know with what frequency this newsletter will be issued. For the time being, we can say: whenever it will be necessary. Then we will see how things shape up, and we will decide. We start this new adventure on the solemnity of the Lord's Annunciation, which is the beginning of the world's redemption. Let us hope it may be auspicious for us. We put this newsletter under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the "Morning Star." May she always protect our little flock!



Happy New Year!

Happy New Year? At the end of March? Yes, Happy New Year! Just four days ago, on March 21, the first day of spring, the Afghans, along with countless other peoples in Asia, celebrated their New Year's Day (*Nowruz*). Afghanistan does not follow the lunar Islamic calendar (*Hijri calendar*), but the solar Persian one (*Jalali* or *Hijri Shamsi calendar*). Even though years are reckoned from Hijra in 622 AD (so that this year is 1396, while according to the lunar calendar it is 1438), the year is divided into twelve 31- or 30-day months, called after the names of the zodiacal signs (e.g., *Hamal* is the Arabic name for "Aries"). It is a calendar closely connected with the rhythm of seasons, so much so that the New Year's Day coincides with the spring equinox. During the Taliban rule, *Nowruz* was banned as a pagan holiday.

On reflection, even we Christians follow a pagan calendar. The one we call *Gregorian calendar* (after Pope Gregory XIII, who reformed it in 1581), before its reform was the *Julian calendar* (after Julius Caesar, who reformed the ancient lunar Roman calendar in 46 BC). Well, Julius Caesar fixed the spring equinox on March 25. It was the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) that, because of the inaccuracy of the Julian calendar, moved it to March 21. We do not know why the Annunciation was established on March 25, but it is possible that that date was chosen exactly because it was the spring equinox. It is no accident that in many places the Annunciation was considered for ages the New Year's Day (it is the so-called "Florentine style," because Florence was one of the main places where it was adopted, or "style of the Incarnation," since it reckoned years *ab Incarnatione Domini*). So, for a double motive, Happy New Year! *Sâl-e now mobâarak!*



OBITUARY

We commend to the prayers of our readers the soul of Mr. HADER BARAKAT, brother of Sr. Razia OP, Superior of the PBK Community, suddenly passed away one month ago, on February 26. *May his soul, through the mercy of God, rest in peace!*

AFGHAN AMONG THE AFGHANS

The LITTLE SISTERS OF JESUS, after more than sixty years of uninterrupted presence in Afghanistan, have retired. On February 12 the Catholic Community bade them farewell and thanked them for their precious witness and service. The following is the valedictory speech addressed to L. S. Mariam and L. S. Catharina by Father John at the end of the Mass.



In my capacity as Superior of this Mission, I feel bound to express to the Little Sisters of Jesus my personal gratitude and that of all the faithful of the Catholic Community in Afghanistan. I think I have also to give voice to the feelings of the countless Afghans that the Little Sisters encountered during the more than sixty years spent in this country.

During this long period the Little Sister have performed no astonishing deeds; they just were here, with their silent witness and humble service. By living and working with simplicity among the Afghans, they made present Christ and his Church. Their presence was like the Eucharist: a silent, prayerful and sacrificial presence. It was an uninterrupted presence, even during the darkest period in the history of Afghanistan. In some moments, when even the priest was forced to leave the country, they stayed here and were the only Christian presence left.

Now this presence ends up. All human things, sooner or later, come to an end; therefore, we are not surprised that even the Little Sister have to leave Afghanistan. Nonetheless, their departure makes us sad. But we know that their sacrifice will benefit our community and our country. When we have done all we could do, there is nothing left to do but offer ourselves.

L. S. Mariam and L. S. Catharina, please respond now to the call of God with the same generosity as when he called you to Afghanistan. You can still do very much for this country and

for the Church in it: by praying and suffering, you can keep serving this people. The Trappist Monks of Tibhirine in Algeria said: "We are here to adore God, to pray and to give glory to the Lord. *Ainsi pour nous vivre ou mourir c'est la même chose.* Living or dying is the same thing." So much more, living here or there is the same thing: if our purpose is to adore God, to pray and to give glory to him, we can do it wherever we are.

Allow me to read to you two messages. The first one is from the Apostolic Nunciature in Pakistan, on which we depend:

Dearest Sisters,

Thank you very much for your precious service in Afghanistan for more than sixty years, even under civil war and Taliban rule, which shows your strong faith and your commitment to the mission of the Church.

I assure you of my prayers for your Congregation. May Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, grant you good health and also continue to strengthen your commitment of love.

*In union of prayer and service to the Church, I remain,
Your sincerely in Christ,*

Msgr. Joseph Maramreddy, Chargé d'Affaire, Apostolic Nunciature, Islamabad, Pakistan



The second message is from my predecessor, Father Giuseppe Moretti:

Dearly beloved Little Sisters,

You are in my heart since 1977, when I landed at Kabul for the first time; and since then you have been an essential part of my life.

I wish to convey my deepest, meaningful and sorrowful emotions. In the intricate medley of feelings that I am experiencing at this moment I would like to express my gratitude to you especially for two reasons: your solicitous care when I was injured during the 1994 civil war and your prayer every Friday in the deserted chapel of the closed Embassy during the Taliban period.

What have you been for the Church in Afghanistan? The creative silence of God's love.

A big hug. May God shower you with his blessings.

Father Giuseppe Moretti, Barnabite

L. S. Mariam and L. S. Catharina, **تشکر**

After his valedictory speech, Father John presented the Sisters with a plate worded as follows:

The Catholic Community in Afghanistan to the LITTLE SISTERS OF JESUS grateful for their more than sixty-year presence, witness and service in this beloved country, Afghan among the Afghans. "GOD LOVES A CHEERFUL GIVER". Kabul, 12 February 2017.



EASTER CELEBRATIONS 2017

9 April: PALM SUNDAY

5:30 p.m. Commemoration of the Lord's Entrance into Jerusalem (Procession of Palms)
Mass of the Lord's Passion

12 April: HOLY WEDNESDAY

5:30 p.m. Chrism Mass

13 April: HOLY THURSDAY

5:30 p.m. Mass of the Lord's Supper
Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
(*Plenary Indulgence*)

14 April: GOOD FRIDAY (*Day of fasting & abstinence*)

5:30 p.m. Celebration of the Lord's Passion
Adoration of the Holy Cross
(*Plenary Indulgence*)

15 April: HOLY SATURDAY

8:30 p.m. Easter Vigil in the Holy Night
Renewal of Baptismal Promises
(*Plenary Indulgence*)

16 April: EASTER SUNDAY

5:30 p.m. Solemn Mass of the Lord's Resurrection
Apostolic Blessing (*Plenary Indulgence*)

23 April: SUNDAY OF DIVINE MERCY

5:30 p.m. Holy Mass

25 May: ASCENSION OF THE LORD (*Holyday of Obligation*)

5:30 p.m. Holy Mass

4 June: PENTECOST SUNDAY

5:30 p.m. Holy Mass

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The Roman Catholic MISSION OF AFGHANISTAN

— *Missio sui juris Afghanistaniensis* —

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ORIETUR STELLA



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The INDEPENDENT MISSION OF AFGHANISTAN (*Missio sui juris Afghanistaniensis*) is a jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church, immediately subject to the Holy See, covering the whole territory of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. It is a "particular church"—that is to say, a portion of the people of God—likened to a Diocese (Can. 368). By the law itself, it possesses juridical personality (Can. 373). It was established by the Holy See on the 16th of May, 2002 and entrusted to the care of the ORDER OF CLERICS REGULAR OF SAINT PAUL—BARNABITES (CRSP). It is presided by an Ecclesiastical Superior (*Superior ecclesiasticus*), who acts as the Local Ordinary (Can. 134 §2).