

Blessed Massabki Brothers

Feast Day: July 10

Death: July 10, 1860

Beautified: October 10, 1926

Canonization: October 20, 2024

The Massabki brothers, Francis, Abdel Moati and Raphael, whose feast we celebrate on 10 July, were Maronite martyrs, slain in Damascus in 1860 in part of a dramatic anti-Christian uprising in Syria and Lebanon from April to July of that year. During that time, more than 60 villages were destroyed in the Shouf and the Matn.

Of the Massabki brothers, Francis and Abdel Moati were each married with children. Raphael, the youngest, who apparently was not well, remained single. They had another brother, the priest Fr Abdallah, who was not with them at the time of their martyrdoms.

Of the brothers, Francis was the best known. He was a generous man and a successful silk trader, famous in Lebanon and Syria alike. He represented the Maronite Patriarch when His Beatitude needed to conduct business in Syria. All three were known for the amount of time and the fervor which they devoted to prayer. They performed much of their charitable work from the Franciscan monastery in Damascus.

When the 1860 attacks and massacres by Muslims in Damascus and Druze in parts of Lebanon started, Muslims set fire to the Christian neighborhood of Damascus. The brothers, along with a large crowd of Christians, took refuge in the Franciscan monastery. There, they prayed and celebrated the mysteries of forgiveness (confession) and the Eucharist for the last time.

While Francis was alone in the church, kneeling and praying before the statue of Our Lady of Sorrow, he was filled with supernatural hope. After midnight, a band of armed Muslim rioters broke into the monastery.

The Christians were terrified: some managed to run away, and others hid themselves. The murderers said to him: “Sheikh Abdallah has sent us to save you from death; you, your brothers, your families, and all those who depend upon you for protection, on the condition that you deny your faith and convert

to Islam.”

Francis courageously replied: “Sheikh Abdallah can take the money I lent him, he can also take my life; but my faith, no one can make me deny. I am a Maronite Christian and in the faith of Christ I will die. As our Lord Jesus commanded, we do not fear those who can kill the body.”

This is a reference to *Matthew* 10:28 where Our Lord taught: “And fear not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body in hell.” As Francis began to pray, they murdered him with swords and daggers. He had lent the sheikh eight hundred thousand pounds! It was a vast fortune in those days.

Abdel Moati was seized at the chapel door, and also told to deny his faith in order to save his life. In a clear voice, he said: “I am a Christian, kill me, I am ready.”

Raphael was found and given the same order—convert or die. He fell to his knees in prayer. Both of them, like their brother, were cut down. They were later buried with the Franciscan priests who had also been martyred that night. But Christ crowned their martyrdom.

Pope Pius IX declared them Venerable in 1860. On 10 October 1926 they were beatified by His Holiness Pius XI and on 23 May 2024, Pope Francis approved the canonization of the three Massabki Brothers, along with the eight Franciscan Friars, murdered on that same night. The date for their canonization was recently set for 20 October 2024.

Today, when the faithful of Damascus and all Syria have been decimated by the scourge of intolerance and hatred, it is more important than ever that we remember the Massabki brothers, profit from their example, and pray for their intercession.