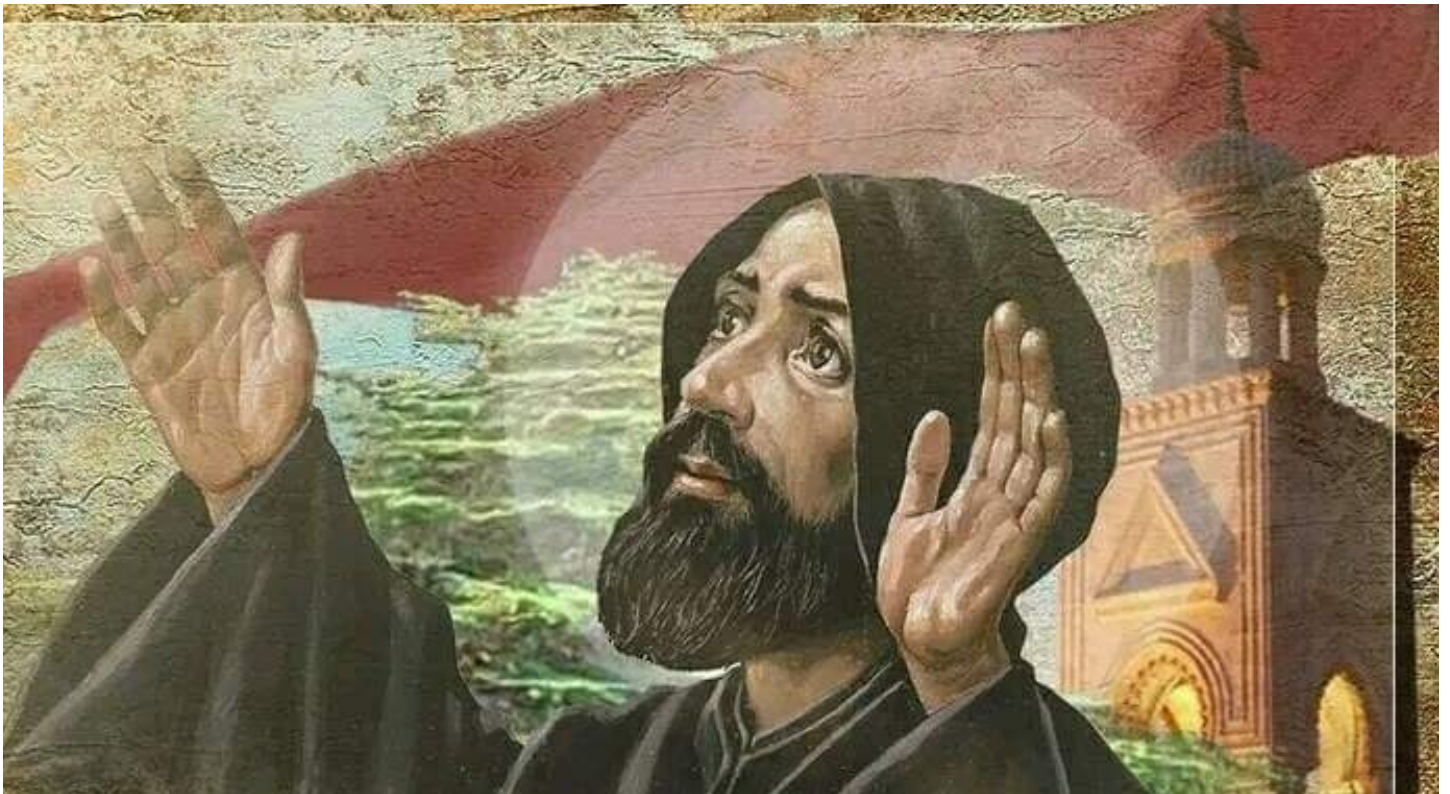


# Once Upon a SAINT

Rebecca O'Loughlin

## St. Nimatullah



My dear children, in 19th century Lebanon, in the town of Hardini, a boy named Youssef Kassab was born. He was part of a happy Maronite Catholic family and one of seven children. Youssef went to school at a monastery and grew to love religious life.

Youssef joined the monastery as soon as he could and was given the name Nimatullah, which means "Grace of God." Brother Nimatullah devoted himself to common tasks, including manual labor and mastering the art of book binding. He was ordained a priest on Christmas Day, 1833 at age 25! What a gift!

Father Nimatullah soon got a reputation in the monastery. He ate very little, often only a dish of greens during the day. He loved to pray for hours in front of the Precious Gifts, gazing at the Tabernacle with adoration and love in his eyes and his arms stretched out like a cross. He was hard on himself but often

criticized for being too lenient on other monks. He told his brother and fellow monk, Father Elisha, that sometimes it was very difficult to be a monk with people always around (there was civil unrest and illness at the time, so lots of unhappiness). Father Elisha encouraged him to become a hermit, but Father Nimatullah insisted that salvation would come about through learning how to live as a loving brother to his brothers. This is something we can all learn too, as we try hard to get along with the rest of our family, those that live with us, and also relatives or friends we may be visiting with during Christmas. Father Nimatullah once said that "A monk's first concern, night and day, should be not to hurt or trouble his brother monks." Similarly, we can promise ourselves not to hurt or trouble those around us, and by always thinking of others, we can become holy and make those around us more loving, too! When our sibling is annoying us with their habits we can exercise patience and ask them kindly to stop, or we can try to suffer in silence, offering up our sufferings for our sibling or someone else who needs the prayers. We can make sure that the things we are doing aren't making other people work harder, like leaving our dishes on the table for someone else to clean up or using the bathroom longer than necessary.

Father Nimatullah was known for his ability to foresee certain events. One day Father Nimatullah told the monk in charge of the cattle that he needed to remove the cows from the barn.

"But Father," replied the monk, "The cows are happy where they are!"

"Nevertheless, please find them a new home."

"What?! Move all the cows?"

"I insist." Father Nimatullah announced. "The cows must be moved to a new building, and quickly."

No sooner were the cows out of the barn, when the walls and roof of the barn caved in. But the cows were saved.

Although he was capable of greater miracles than this, another favorite story of mine is when Father Nimatullah was preparing for Liturgy and his altar server boy did not show up. Father Nimatullah marched to the boy's home only to find that the boy had a high fever.

"Get up!" Commanded Father Nimatullah, "I need my altar server!"

With these words, Father Nimatullah took the boy's

hand and made him stand up. The boy was instantly well and served at Divine Liturgy. I suspect every father and mother wished there was someone around who had the ability to heal their children like this!

After a particularly frigid winter, Father Nimatullah became ill. He was unable to recover and died while holding an icon of the Blessed Virgin. His last words were a prayer he said often: "O Mary, to you I entrust my soul." Saint Nimatullah's body is incorrupt and exudes lovely fragrances. He is a wonderful intercessor if you want more peace in your home. Saint Nimatullah's feast is on December 14th. Around this time, many Maronite Catholics decorate their crèche with small seeds: chickpea, lentil, mustard, broccoli. The seeds are placed on a damp towel and regularly misted or watered, and by Christmas the Nativity scene has a beautiful edible mini garden growing all around it, signifying the new life of the Christ Child. A traditional dessert is Meghli, a rice flour pudding to celebrate the birth of a new child. There are many such recipes but here is one:

Combine ½ cup rice flour, ½ cup sugar, 1 Tbsp cinnamon, 1 Tbsp caraway, 1 Tbsp anise, 4 cups water. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer, stirring often until a pudding consistency (about a half hour). Decorate with a variety of chopped nuts, coconut and raisins.

