

April 22

Aho of Syria (ca. 457-556) monk

Today the West Syrian churches commemorate the monk Aho, a hermit who founded several monasteries in the region of Ninive.

Born in Georgina, Mesopotamia during the reign of the emperor Marcianus, Aho was a Persian slave who was secretly led to Christian faith by his master, an official in the Persian army. At around the age of eighteen, Aho arrived in Nisibis and founded a monastery so that he and several companions could dedicate themselves to a life of silence and prayer. Aho travelled widely, visiting first Jerusalem and Antioch, and later going as far as Constantinople, Greece, and the border of Italy.

Before his death he preached the Gospel to the Armenians and strengthened the three monasteries he had founded, whose names were Banael, Ausa, and Hesna. He also shared with the Christians of his own country what he had learned about other churches during his travels.

All that we know about him comes from the Life written by a Jacobite hagiographer. Aho died at the monastery of Ausa on January 25, 556.

Maria Gabriella Sagheddu (1914-1939) nun

Maria Gabriella Sagheddu, a Trappist who died on April 23, 1939 at the age of twenty-five, is also remembered today. Maria Sagheddu was born in Dorgali, Sardinia into a poor family of shepherds. She was a very bright child, but had to give up secondary school to help her widowed mother raise her brothers and sisters.

She had little interest in religion, but everything changed for her at the age of eighteen. She found herself immersed in an intense life of prayer and began to dedicate herself to catechism and apostolic work, gradually recognizing her vocation to monastic life.

Leaving Sardinia, she entered the Trappist monastery of Grottaferrata, near Rome, at the age of twenty-one. Under the enlightened guidance of the abbess, Mother Pia, Maria discovered the spiritual ecumenism of Paul Couturier. She decided to follow the example of other sisters in her community and offer her life and sufferings for the cause of Christian unity.

After just a few months, Maria, who in the meantime had become Sr. Maria Gabriella, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. She spent the time she had left immersed in the prayer Jesus himself had prayed, when he asked his Father that those who believed in him might be one.

Although her story is similar in many ways to the stories of other witnesses who have had a passion for ecumenism, Maria's smallness and simplicity were immediately seen as important signs, showing the Christian denominations how they could walk together towards communion. Maria's life had a strong impact during the years in which the ecumenical movement was taking shape in the Catholic Church, and her story touched the hearts of Christians of every country and denomination.

Sr. Maria Gabriella was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1983, at the end of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (14 barmudah/miyazya):

Maxim (d. 282), 15th patriarch of Alexandria (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Friedrich Justus Perels (d. 1945), witness to the point of bloodshed in Prussia

MARONITES:

Theodore the Sykeote (d. 613), bishop

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Theodore the Sykeote, bishop of Anastasiopolis

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Aho, monastic founder