

The Life of the Blessed Brother Estephan Nehme

His Origin

Born Joseph, son of Estephan Nehme and Christina El Badawi Hanna Khaled from Lehfed – Jbeil. One of six children and the youngest of four boys: Sarkis, Nimatullah, Haykal and Joseph, and the girls Toufica and Froussina. He was born in March, 1889.

He grew up in an agricultural mountainous environment, but he acquired some principles of reading and writing in the village school and in Our Lady of Grace School in Sakii Rishmaya (a school pertaining to the Lebanese Maronite Order).

The Badger Fountain

One day while pasturing the cows near his father's house, Joseph (Brother Estephan) he saw a badger which is a small wild animal, he followed it until it entered a grotto (in the ground). Joseph noticed that there were traces of water in this grotto, so he started digging around the place until water flooded from the bottom of the earth, and this fountain is known today as "The Badger Fountain".

Joining the Lebanese Maronite Order

Two years after the death of his father, in the year 1905 he joined the Lebanese Maronite Order in St. Cyprian & Justine monastery in Kfifan. In the Novitiate he took the name of Estephan, after his father's name and the village patron.

The Novice teacher in Kfifan was then the righteous Father Eghnatious Dagher El-Tannouri. After two years in the Novitiate, he took his monastic vows on 23 August, 1907. He was chosen to be one of the assistant brothers, so he specialized in carpentry and construction, in addition to the work in the field. He was known for his strong built body.

His Service in the Order

He spent his life in the LMO working on the gardens of the monasteries in which he lived: Our Lady of Mayfouk, Saint Antonios- Hoob, Saint Challita – Kattara, Saint Maroun – Aanaya, Our Lady of Help (Maouneit) – Jbeil and St. Cyprian & Justine – Kfifan. In all these monasteries he used to be the head of the field. He used to work with his brothers the monks and the laborers in silence, love and respect. Everybody admits to his righteousness and honesty. He was the faithful disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, reflecting his image wherever he went, and transmitting his Good News to all of his contemporaries.

He was never at rest, his life centered at living the bylaw of the Lebanese Maronite Order and its spirituality with preciseness and integrity, following the steps of the monks who were righteous, distributing his time between work and prayers, till the last days of his life when he passed away on 30 August, 1938 at the age of 49. He was buried in Kfifan Monastery where his corps remained intact. His sanctity was first debated on 27 November 2001, until Pope Benedictus XVI confirmed his heroic virtues on 17th of December 2007 becoming the fourth among his brothers, the children of the Lebanese Maronite Order: Charbel, Rafka and Nimatullah.

The Spirituality of Brother Estephan

(God sees me)

Brother Estephan was distinguished for the silence of his presence while reflecting on his discrete life with Christ, tolerant with his pain, never complaining of any hurt or sickness, abstaining and refraining especially in his food. He was content as he does not seek for anything except to live in the presence of God (who observes me), happy in his life—which was reflected vivacity in his smart work, in his behavior, fair, lover of equality giving every man his right, so he was

respected and loved by those who worked with him. He was a man of prayer, his affection to the land which was a spring of holiness and a source of spirituality for him.

He recognized the value of the land and its real worth. He strived, toiled and mixed the soil with his sweat, pursued steadily to reach the ladder of monastic perfection and to face the light of God and his eternal Word. "He was a satisfied peasant and a hidden sultan". He used to rise up before dawn to pray and work, following the paths of his primary master Jesus Christ.

The serene bright smile was always on his face, tranquil, reflecting on the wheat flower and the abundance of the land, gentle hearted, calm, steady, and solid like a rock; he built his life step by step on strong fixed basis, just as he used to put one rock over another in the fields.

His face, the face of innocence and wisdom, the face of peace and love, his eyes were lit with the light of the Bible and the light of faith, the faith of Cedars and the Lebanese village son, the loyalty of ancestors, the fathers and mothers, the belief in simplicity and joy. Flexible in love, mercy, passion and generosity just like the wheat spikenards in the mild breeze of the morning. He was firm in faith, struggling against sin, solid in justice and sanctity, just like the firmness of the oak in the deep soil. Each time he looked at the sun, he saw the happiness in the light of the face of Jesus Christ, his glory and beauty.

The Tools He used in his Life

His daily task tools were the sickle, the mattock, fork, crowbar, saw, hammer and chisel. These he used in cultivating the land, plowing the soil, scanning and decorating the rocks and manufacturing doors and windows. As for the tools that were the center of his life they were the Gospel, prayers, meditations, the Rosary of Virgin Mary, the brotherhood with the other monks, the Divine Mass that united with him with the divine Love. His life was an act of gratitude and a sacred sacrifice for God; a trip from earth to heaven planting his paths with spikes. He never backed out or shaken by the harsh difficulties that blew over Lebanon during the World War I, he rather carried his cross renouncing himself and following his master, fully trusting him with no hesitation or fear. He detached himself from any hindrance to his attaining the true light, the sun of mercy and justice. Hence, God elevated him highly and will even place him on the Churches' altars as Saint and intercessor for the Church, the Order, Lebanon and all laborers.

Excerpt from the monastery Ephemeris concerning Brother Estephan Nehme

The Reverend Father Antonios Nehme (superior of Kfifane monastery) wrote after his death, the following: "He left the perishable life on Tuesday at 7 pm on the 30 of August, Brother Estephan Nehme the Lehfedian. He was a brother who worked diligently and zealously for the benefit of the monastery benefit. He was of strong built, good health, peaceful, far from hostilities, modest, knowledgeable in handwork, reserving his duties and attached to his vows, accomplishing his requirements the best way".

Some of the sayings of the Blessed

"God sees me"

"Happy is the one who was cultivated with the education that leads to God".

"Love does not need any education or science it just comes out of the heart."