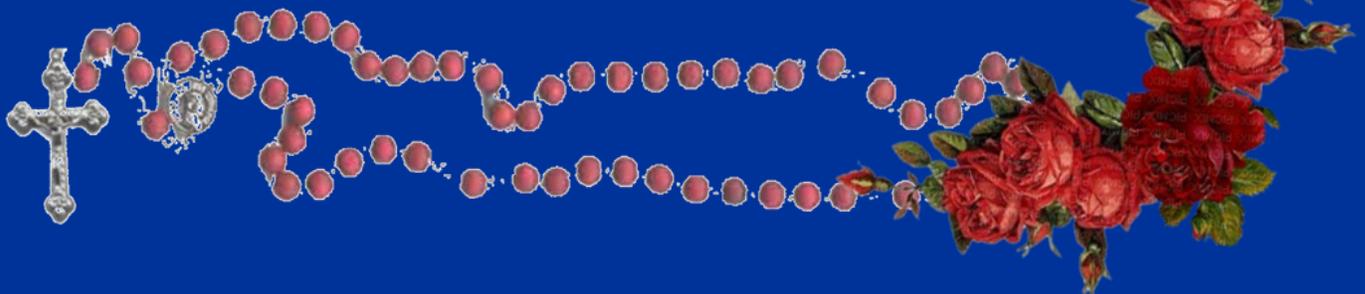


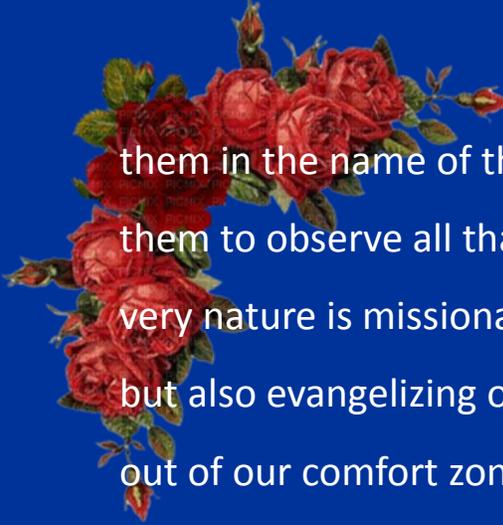
*Mary, Mother of the Persecuted*

**Introduction: Persecution, the sign of Christ's true followers**

Mary is mother of the Persecuted, Jesus, the suffering Servant of the Lord. She is also mother of the Mystical Body of Christ. As members of His Body, we should expect to be persecuted if we are faithful to Him and be suspected if the world praises us instead; as the beatitude says: "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt. 5:10-12)" Or in Luke's version of the beatitudes: "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Lk. 6:26)" Please note that it says persecuted for righteousness sake – for Christ's sake, not for our own sins or arrogance. We ought to apologize for our sins, but not for following Jesus Christ. Whether it is our secularized culture or the Islamic State telling us we must either deny our Faith or live it so quietly that no one can tell we are followers of Jesus, dhimmitude (forced subservience of non-Muslims in Islamic societies) is not acceptable.

The fearlessness of Pentecost needs to return to Catholic communities. Jesus' command to us was "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing



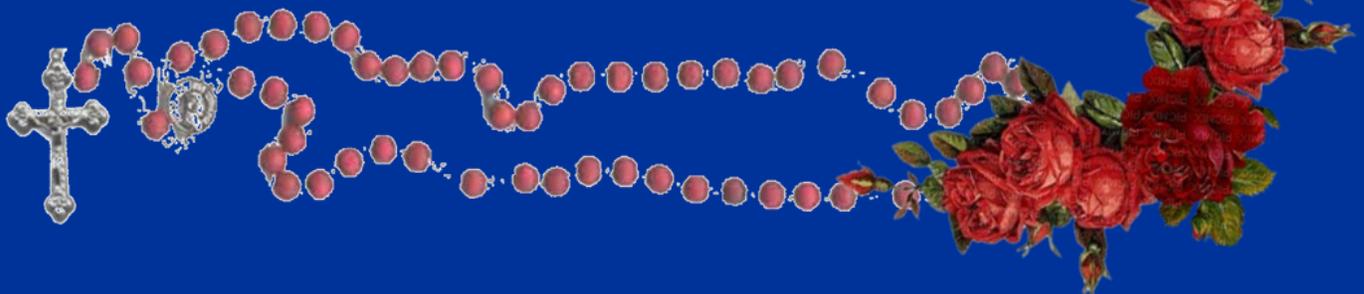


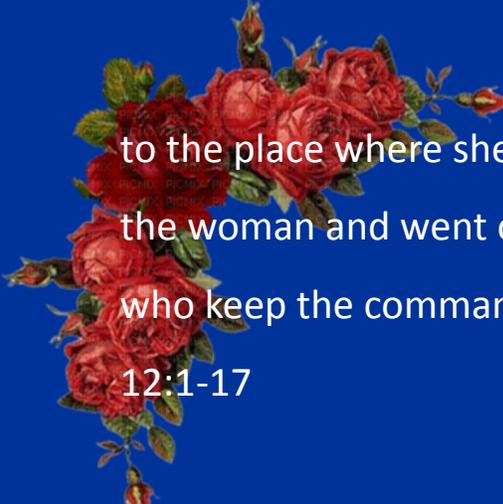
them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ...(Mt. 28:20)” The Church’s very nature is missionary. Following Christ involves our own conversion - Yes, but also evangelizing others. As Pope Francis keeps urging us we need to get out of our comfort zone and start reaching out to those outside of the Church as well as those who have fallen away. Does that possibly make our hearts quail? Yes, but let us not forget the rest of Mt. 28:20 “... and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Let us also remember that Mary was at Pentecost, praying with the disciples and that she continues to pray for us and urge us on in continuing the mission of Her Son.

### **The Woman at enmity with satan.**

“I will put enmity between you and the woman, between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head while you strike at his heel.” Gen. 3:15

“A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars... Another sign appeared in the sky; a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept away a third of the stars... and when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had borne the male child. But the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness,

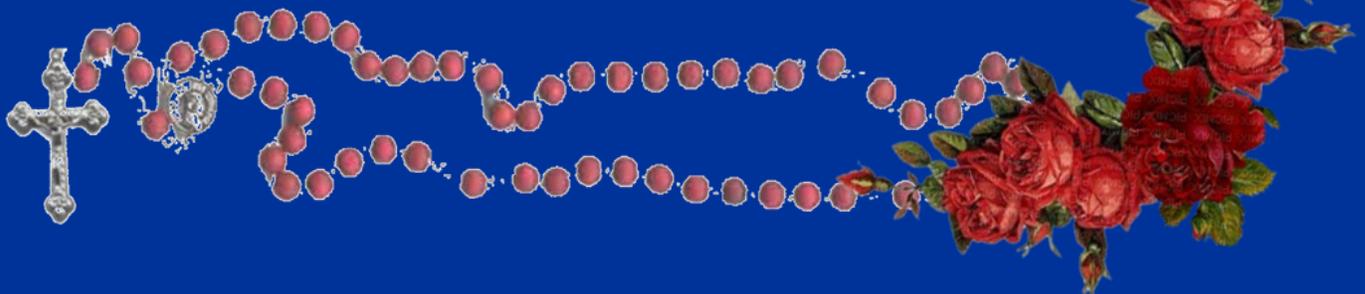


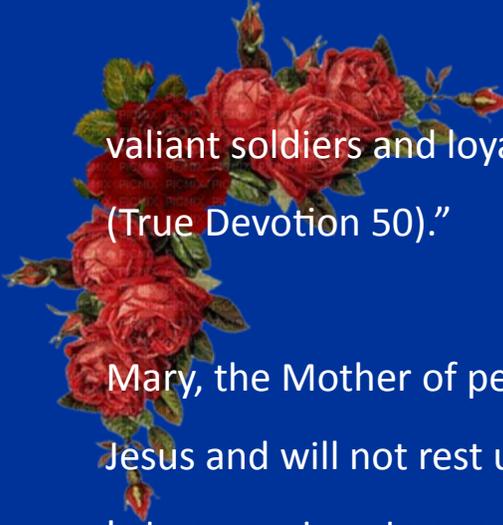


to the place where she is to be nourished ... then the dragon was angry with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus...” Rev. 12:1-17

These quotes are from the first and last book of the Bible. In the news today, we see increasingly things that we thought were in the past: beheadings, burning at the stake, and other brutal executions of Christians. On the other hand, we see Western culture rushing toward a total disregard for natural law that may even surpass Sodom and Gomorrah in depravity. These things need to be seen in the context of Salvation History and Mary’s role in that plan.

As Rev. 12:17 states, Mary’s children are those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus. St. Louis de Montfort (as well as other saints) says that as the second coming of Jesus Christ draws near, Mary will “shine forth more than ever in mercy, power and grace: in mercy, to bring back and welcome lovingly the poor sinners and wanderers who are to be converted and return to the Catholic Church; in power, to combat the enemies of God who will rise up menacingly to seduce and crush by promises and threats all those who oppose them; ... in grace to inspire and support the





valiant soldiers and loyal servants of Jesus Christ who are fighting for his cause (True Devotion 50).”

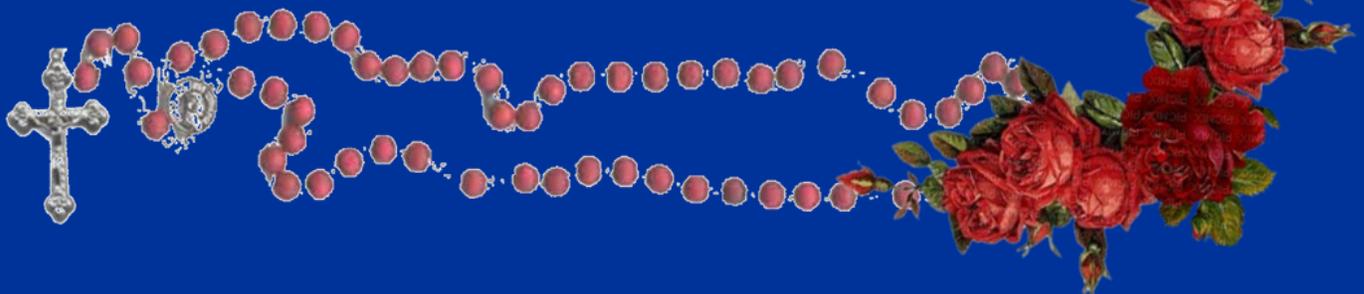
Mary, the Mother of persecuted Christians will aid them as they bear witness to Jesus and will not rest until all her children are safe in the kingdom of Her Son.

Let us now turn to some instances of Mary’s activity in the past, so that we can enkindle our trust in her help in the present.

### Mary’s interventions in history

Let us remember even as we are experiencing the third wave of Muslim expansion that Mary’s intercession has helped stem the first and second of Islam’s attempt to subjugate the world. Ferdinand and Isabella attributed the reconquista to the intercession of Mary under the title of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Estremadura)

As the Moslems swept through Spain in the 8th century, a great religious treasure was buried for safe-keeping in the earth, high in the Estremadura Mountains. It was a much venerated statue of Our Lady holding the Divine Child Jesus that was a gift of Pope Gregory the Great to Bishop Leander of Seville. After the overthrow of Moorish occupation, the image was uncovered in the year 1326, subsequent to a vision of Our Lady to a humble shepherd by the name of Gil.





Our Lady's very special statue was enshrined in a nearby Franciscan Monastery next to the "Wolf River."

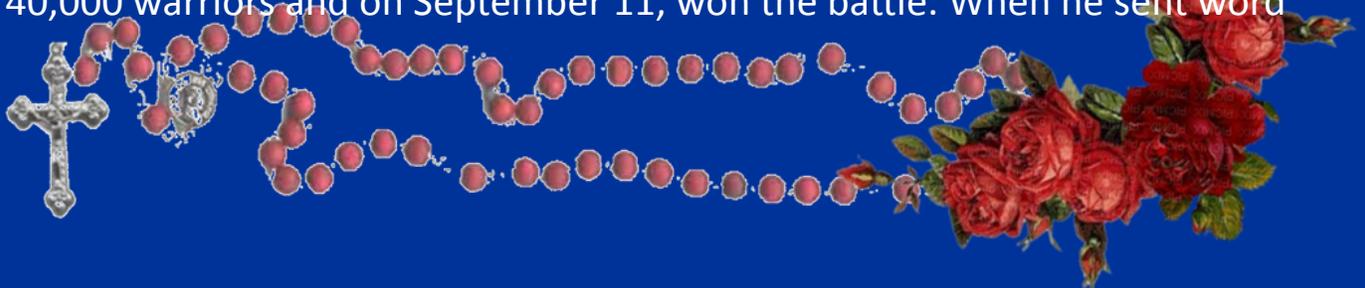
The Moslems, during their Spanish occupation, had actually named the river.

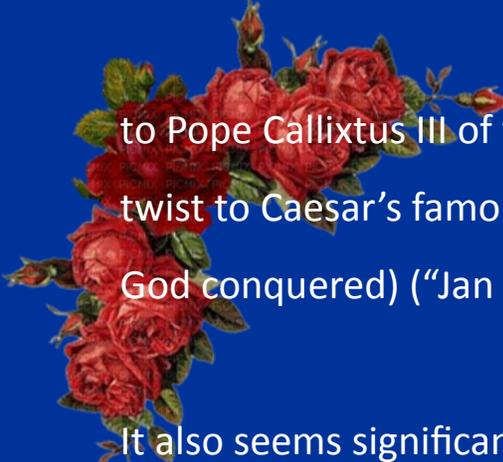
The Islamic term for Wolf River is "Guadalupe" (Guada = River; Lupe = Wolf).

Hence, the famous Catholic image in Spain has been known, since the 14th century, by the Islamic name of "Our Lady of Guadalupe." (Cizik)

This is the same statue that Christopher Columbus visited before he set off to discover a western route to India. And it would be a small image of the Mexican Guadalupe that Andre Doria would carry with him into the battle of Lepanto. Pope Pius V knowing that the Christian fleet was far outnumbered by the Turkish fleet asked all Catholics to pray the rosary so that Mary would intervene in the battle of Lepanto. When the victory was won (1571), Pius V established that date, October 7, as the feast of Our Lady of Victories or Our Lady of Rosary. Also in honor of this victory the title of "Mary, Help of Christians" was inserted into the Litany of Loreto.

On other fronts of the stemming of the second Turkish invasions, we see a similar intervention on Mary's part. Before Jan Sobieski, King of Poland, went to battle to lift the siege of Vienna in 1683, he visited the shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa. He attacked the besieging Muslim force of around 140,000 with only 40,000 warriors and on September 11, won the battle. When he sent word





to Pope Callixtus III of the victory, he gave all the credit to God as he put a little twist to Caesar's famous saying "Veni, Vidi, Deus Vincit." (I came, I saw and God conquered) ("Jan Sobieski", Catholic Encycl., 1913 ed.).

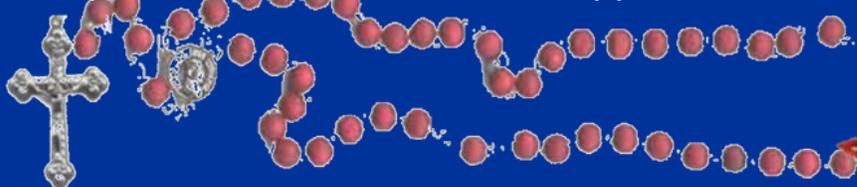
It also seems significant that both Lourdes and Fatima are named after women who converted from Mohammedanism to Catholicism. Is Mary possibly showing us that we need to pray for the conversion of our Muslim brothers and sisters to the true Jesus Christ of the Gospels?

### **Mary's interventions against atheistic attacks on the Faithful**

History also shows that Mary has intervened to call back those who have fallen from the Faith and deny God's existence altogether. We can see her interventions in the Miraculous Medal (1830), Our Lady of Victories, Paris (1833) to help France recover from the anti-Christian influence of the French Revolution. As well as in the more recent example of Our Lady at Fatima, warning that Russia would spread the errors of atheistic communism throughout the world and the amazing fall of the Soviet empire in 1989 after her request of the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart was fulfilled by Pope John Paul II and the bishops of the world on March 25, 1984.

Mary's care for her children manifested more recently

Since Fatima, there have been approximately 230 claimed apparitions of Our Lady. Only eleven of them have been approved, with some others still under



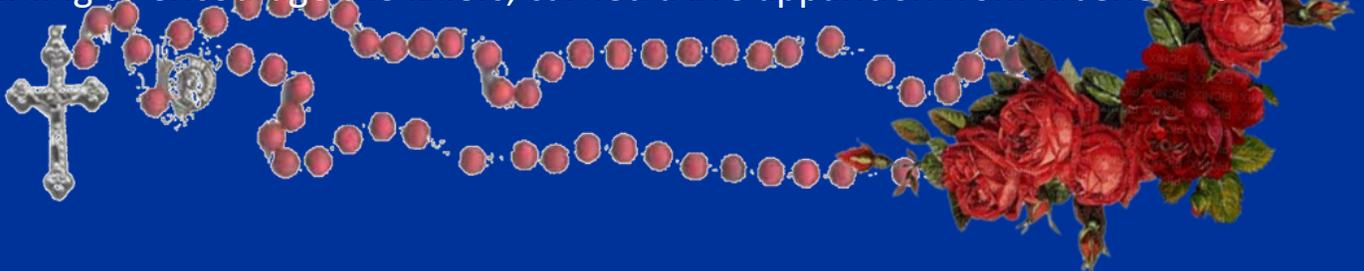


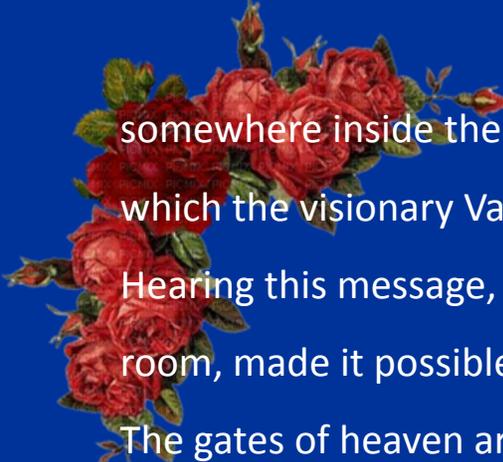
investigation and others condemned or judged as being explainable by natural causes.

One of these approved apparitions is Kibeho, Rwanda. In these apparitions, Mary appeals as at Fatima for conversion and a return to prayer. She urges us to forgive and repent of our sins. In 2001, the apparitions between 1981-1989 were given ecclesiastical approval primarily because of the clear prediction on August 15, 1982 of the Rwandan genocide of 1994. We can see Mary preparing her children to keep their faith in the face of the horror of persecutions and paving the way for the reconciliation of the persecuted with their persecutors. I will quote Immaculée Ilibagiza at length:

“I struggled with the hatred that filled my heart during this time, and I had to fight very hard to hold on to my faith in God. One day the brave pastor who was hiding us whispered to us through a crack in the bathroom door that the human carnage outside was so unthinkable that, even if we did survive the genocide, everyone we’d ever loved would surely be dead. It was my moment of deepest despair, and I was ready to run away from a seemingly uncaring God as the fate of my family gnawed at me.

But that day Radio Rwanda, which had been broadcasting weeks of hate programming to encourage the killers, carried a live apparition from Kibeho. From





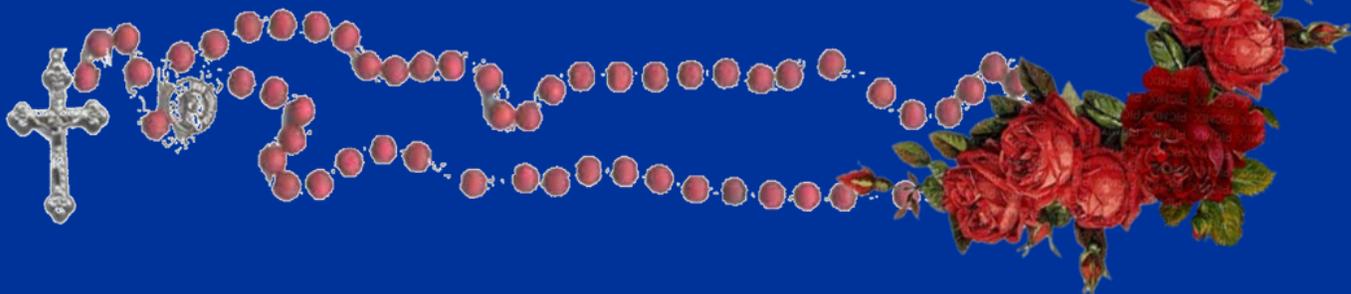
somewhere inside the house we could hear every word of that broadcast, in which the visionary Valentine was communicating with the Blessed Mother.

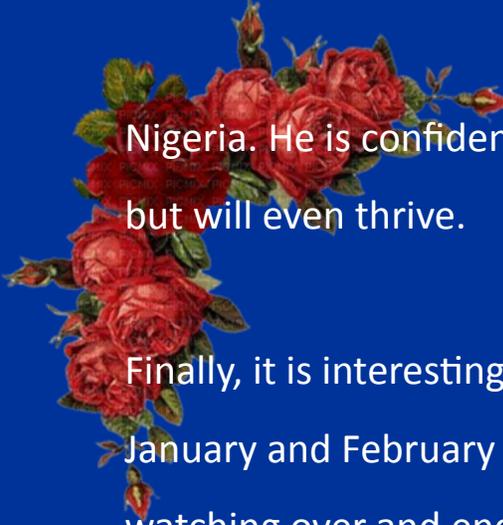
Hearing this message, which Mary delivered to me in the darkness of that room, made it possible for her to pierce the growing darkness in my soul:

The gates of heaven are open, and your brothers and sisters are with me tonight. Do not cry for the ones you have lost; cry for those who are left behind. They will carry the suffering of what they have done, while those who have perished are in paradise tonight. Keep fighting; you will win. I am with you still, children. Have faith (Our Lady of Kibeho, pp. 173-174)."

We can also see Mary sustaining the faith, hope and charity of her persecuted children in Iraq and Syria. First the witness of James Foley, the American journalist who wrote an article attesting to the recitation of the Rosary helping him to keep up his faith and hope as well as prepare him to die for Christ. He was executed by the "Islamic State" on August 20, 2014.

In April of this year, Bishop Oliver Dashe Doeme said that he had a vision of Jesus handing him a sword that turned into a rosary when the bishop took it from Jesus' hand. Jesus then said three times "Boko Haram is gone." The bishop has been promoting the Rosary as the answer to the persecutions of Catholics in





Nigeria. He is confident that with Mary's help not only will his diocese recover, but will even thrive.

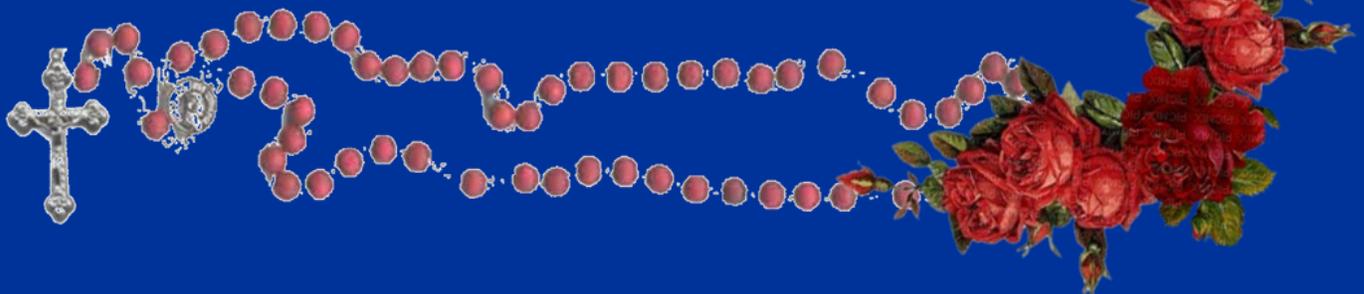
Finally, it is interesting that reports of a Marian apparition in Al Kush, Iraq in January and February of this year seem to indicate once more that Mary is watching over and encouraging her persecuted children.

**Let us conclude with a quote from Pope Francis:**

The Church is Mother and, like all mothers, is able to accompany the needy child, to lift up the fallen child, to care for the sick, to seek the lost and to shake the sleeping one and also to defend the defenceless and persecuted children. Today I would like to assure closeness to, especially these latter, namely, the defenceless and persecuted: you are in the heart of the Church; the Church is suffering with you and is proud of you, proud to have children like you; you are her strength and steadfast and authentic witness of her message of salvation, of forgiveness and of love. I embrace all of you, everyone! May the Lord bless you and protect you always! (Pope Francis General Audience, 3 September 2014)

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