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Religious Life




More than 20,000 faithful gather for the Nov. 8, 2025, beatification Mass of Mother Eliswa Vakayil, founder of the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom at Vallarpadam in the city of Kochi, India, which is in the Archdiocese of Verapoly. (OSV News/Anto Akkara)

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Kochi, India — November 20, 2025

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Pope Leo XIV's words Nov. 12 brought cheer to the Catholic community in the southern Christian heartland of India, the state of Kerala, over the beatification of Mother Eliswa Vakayil.

The founder of a Carmelite congregation was beatified on Nov. 8 at the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom at Vallarpadam, which is part of the city of Kochi, in the Verapoly Archdiocese.

Describing Blessed Eliswa as "a source of inspiration for all those who work, in the Church and in society, for the dignity of women," the pope lauded "her courageous commitment to the emancipation of the poorest girls" at the end of his general audience.

Born in 1831 and widowed at age 20, after four years or marriage, Eliswa — under the guidance of Italian priests of the Order of the Discalced Carmelites — became Kerala's first Indigenous nun in 1866 by founding the first Indigenous Third Order of the Discalced Carmelites for women in India, along with her youngest sister, Thresia, and daughter Anna in 1866.

"When Vatharu [her husband] fell ill and died, Eliswa refused to remarry and chose a life of prayer, detachment and solitude, and spent long years in silent preparation for a life inspired by the Holy Spirit," the website of the Kerala Catholic Bishops' Council said.

What is now called the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites has more than 1,500 members with more than 200 convents mostly in India, but also in the United States, Africa and across Europe.

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"We have been praying earnestly for this [beatification] day, and we are now rejoicing over it," Sr. Shahila Cosman, the congregation's superior general, told OSV

News Nov. 14.

More than 20,000 faithful gathered for the Nov. 8 beatification Mass celebrated by papal delegate Cardinal Sebastian Francis of Penang in Malaysia. Close to 50 bishops joined him, including Cardinal Oswald Gracias of Mumbai and Cardinal George Alencherry, major archbishop emeritus of Ernakulam-Angamalhy for Syro Malabars, along with hundreds of priests and nuns.

"Today, with immense joy and gratitude, we rejoice to witness this historic moment for the global Carmelite family, for the Archdiocese of Verapoly, for the church of Kerala, for India, for Asia, and for the universal church," said Cardinal Francis, who read the papal bull of beatification.

"We rejoice with all the consecrated women, all mothers, and all those who suffer in silence and still choose to love. ... Now, she intercedes for us from heaven as Blessed Eliswa, a beacon of hope, a spiritual mother and a saint for our times," said Francis.

The tomb of Eliswa, who died on July 18, 1913, is located in St. Joseph's and Mount Carmel Church at Varapuzha — a popular pilgrimage center.



Bishops attend the Nov. 8, 2025, beatification Mass of Mother Eliswa Vakayil at the Basilica of Our Lady of Ransom at Vallarpadam in Kochi, India. (OSV News/Anto Akkara)

Verapoly Archbishop Joseph Kalathiparambil hailed Eliswa as "an icon of pride for women in the Catholic Church."

"Mother Eliswa has shown to the world how deep the heart of a woman could lead us to spirituality," the archbishop said in an article in a special supplement of the archdiocesan magazine Jeevanadam ("Sound of Life") issued for the beatification.

"Despite being a widow, she displayed extraordinary courage and leadership in laying out a new path when even the church was dominated by patriarchal mindset, and women were confined to mere silent service," Kalathiparambil pointed out.

Cosman said, "Mother had immense love and concern for the girls and women and set up a boarding school for girls in 1868. Education is the foremost concern of our congregation." Teresian Carmelite congregation leads 176 educational institutions, including six colleges.

"Mother Eliswa was encouraged and supported solidly by the European missionaries who were in Kerala at the time, especially the Carmelite priests, to chart her mission for women's empowerment," Ignatius Gonsalves, a retired senior journalist of the Veraploy Archdiocese, told OSV News.

"Given the deep-rooted gender-based restrictions in Kerala at the time, nobody could even think of a widow becoming a nun" — let alone "founding Kerala's first female congregation," pointed out Gonsalves, who stepped down recently as the president of the Indian Catholic Press Association.

Sr. Sucy Kinattingal, vice postulator for Eliswa's canonization cause since 2012, told OSV News that with the beatification process over, the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites is "now eagerly praying for her canonization."

"We pray that a second miracle will come soon to pave the way for the canonization of our founder," Kinattingal said.