News



Sr. Nadir Santos da Silva, 45, a member of the Carmelite Sisters Messengers of the Holy Spirit, is seen in an undated photo posted on her social media. She died May 11, 2026, as she was swept into deeper water near Sicily's Catania coast while helping another nun who could not swim. (OSV /Courtesy of the Carmelite Sisters Messengers of the Holy Spirit)



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Catania, Italy — May 14, 2026

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A Brazilian nun has died after trying to save a fellow sister from strong waves off the coast of Sicily.

Sr. Nadir Santos da Silva, 45, a member of the Carmelite Sisters Messengers of the Holy Spirit, was swept into deeper water May 11 near Catania while helping another nun who could not swim.

According to Sr. Erica Souza, another member of the congregation, Sr. Nadir lost her strength during the rescue attempt and was later pulled unconscious from the sea.

"She went after the other sister, who couldn't swim, and tried to pull her back. But she lost her strength while doing so," Sr. Erica told OSV News.

"They performed resuscitation to try to revive her, but it was not possible," Sr. Erica lamented. One of the sisters remains hospitalized in Sicily, she added.

According to Italian police reports, the sisters were walking in the water, not far from the shore, when a sudden depression in the sand caused the sisters to fall into the water. Sr. Nadir attempted to help them, the Italian Sir news agency reported.

The news shocked Catholics in the Sicilian community where Sr. Nadir had worked for several years.

"The death of Sr. Nadir saddens us deeply. In this moment of great sadness, the Church of Catania gathers around the community of the Carmelite Messengers of the Holy Spirit, her family, and all who loved her," Archbishop Luigi Renna of Catania said in a statement published by the Sir agency.

"Sr. Nadir's gesture," in an attempt to help her fellow nuns in difficulty, "speaks for itself and recounts a life lived in giving and service. We entrust this sister of ours to the mercy of the Lord, with gratitude for the testimony of faith and charity she leaves our community," the archbishop added.

Sr. Nadir was born in 1980 in Jussiape, in the state of Bahia, the eighth of nine children. Her family was very poor, and at age 5 she was sent to live with her aunt and cousins in the city of São Paulo.

After a relatively happy childhood, Sister Nadir went through a difficult period in her youth.

"When she spoke about her younger days, she would say that between the ages of 12 and 15 she was very 'rebellious' — a punk and an anarchist, that's how she described herself," Sr. Erica recalled.

In an interview about her vocation posted on the congregation's YouTube channel in 2023, Sr. Nadir said that during that period she was distant from God and questioned his existence because of an existential void and traumas connected to her family history.

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One day, shortly before turning 16, when she was seriously considering taking her own life, she heard a voice telling her to take the first step and enter a church. She did — and ended up recovering her faith.

Two years later, in 1999, after an intense religious experience with the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, she joined the Carmelite Sisters Messengers of the Holy Spirit.

The congregation was founded in 1984 in the city of Nova Almeida, in the state of Espírito Santo, with the charism of "contemplating in order to evangelize."

The group, which uses music and the media to spread God's message, currently has 181 sisters and maintains houses in Brazil, France, Italy and Spain.

In 2004, she was sent to Italy, where she spent 15 years, including 10 in Sicily. There, she worked in the congregation's missions — which has six houses in the country — and helped numerous families.

In 2019, Sr. Nadir returned to Brazil, where she dedicated much of her time to the formation of novices, exerting great influence on different generations of sisters.

"We frequently hear sisters say that her presence was fundamental to their formation. She was a happy, intelligent person who would explain things in detail until people understood them," Sr. Erica said, adding that Sr. Nadir "wanted everybody to have a solid faith."

Sr. Nadir left Brazil again in 2024 and lived in France — where the congregation maintains three houses — for one year. There, she spared no effort to help the neediest, bringing Communion to elderly people in their homes and visiting the sick.

At the end of 2025, she returned to her beloved Sicily.

"She loved the people and the work in Sicily. That's why, with the family's consent, she was (being) buried there," Sr. Erica explained.

Her funeral Mass was celebrated on May 14 in a Catholic community in the municipality of San Giovanni la Punta, in the metropolitan area of Catania. In Brazil, Masses were also celebrated in different cities.