



# MARONITE EPARCHY OF AUSTRALIA NEW ZEALAND AND OCEANIA

## MEDIA RELEASE

**Maronite Eparchy of Australia celebrates 50 Years since official establishment,  
welcomes the relics of Lebanese and Australian Saints**

**Sydney Australia 15 February 2023** - It was with great joy that the Maronite Eparchy of Australia celebrated the feast of its spiritual father St Maroun on 9 February 2023, at St Maroun's Cathedral in Redfern.

The feast was marked by the welcoming of the relics of Saint Maroun, with the relics of Saints Charbel, Rafqa and Nehmetallah and Australia's first and beloved Saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop, as the Eparchy also launched its Golden Jubilee Year.

Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay said, "At the beginning of this Jubilee Year, we can look back with gratitude for so much that has been achieved in the past 50 years of the Eparchy noting that the history of the Maronites in Australia is much older: it goes back more than 150 years. For more than one hundred years, pioneer priests and religious sisters embedded the seeds also planted over one thousand six hundred years by St Maroun and his disciples.

"We can say these have come to fruition in this land enabling the establishment of an Eparchy led by a Bishop, and making it possible for the Maronites of Australia to accomplish all that they have."

In 1973 and with the arrival of the first Bishop, Abdo Khalife in July of that year, the newly formed Diocese had four priests, and three religious sisters. In 2023, the Eparchy has 58 priests and 20 religious sisters. In 1973, there were only four Maronite parishes, two of which were parish communities without a parish Church, and one school. In 2023, the Eparchy has 21 churches and chapels, eight schools, five aged care centres; and a future vision reflected in its pastoral priorities (2021-2027) plan.

What better way to celebrate a Golden Jubilee than with the spiritual experience that comes with a visit

of the relics of our beloved saints. The relics, in a reliquary designed specifically on the occasion of the Eparchy's Golden Jubilee by sculptor Toufic Mourad, will visit all Maronite Catholic parishes and organisations in the coming year.

The reliquary which is carved in one piece, is in the shape of a ship, with a phoenix at the head symbolising immortality, resurrection and life after death; Christ's Resurrection.

The ship's sail features the map of Australia and incorporated within it, the map and a cedar tree of Lebanon – representing holiness, eternity and peace - the roots of which are spread across Australia, and reaching the Southern Cross and therefore all of Oceania.

The relics of the five saints are contained in small holds where the oars – propelling the ship forward - would typically be, representing the Saints whose holiness is a force of good among us, and a source of energy that is driving us forward on our journey to heaven.

Bishop Tarabay added, “The relics of our saints are for us a concrete reminder of the fact that although they seem to belong to a higher world than this earth, they really did exist. They were ordinary men and women of flesh and blood, just as we are. By the mere fact of their presence, that holiness and supernatural virtue can and does exist in our midst.

“The fact that we do revere their relics today reminds us of their sanctity, a sanctity which can be reached by any and all with sincere and simple hearts, burning with an ardent desire to serve and worship God.

“We have certainly been blessed in this country Australia. Our growth is a sign of hope and strength for the Church in our homeland, the source of our spirituality and religious heritage and traditions. And so we continue to build up our Eparchy and our communities here in new areas, for our beloved and faithful brothers and sisters and for future generations.

“We must always remind ourselves that the journey of holiness and openness, the theme of our Golden Jubilee Year, begins right here and right now with us. And that it does not end with us. It is for our children, their children, and our brethren all over the world, that all the world may hear the Gospel.

“We Maronites in Australia have been given by God the responsibility and privilege of maintaining, developing, and passing on the wonderful rich heritage of the saints. We have the honour of being entrusted with passing it on to the new generation of Maronites, here and everywhere.”

The tour of the relics is a unique opportunity for all Australians to revere the saints and pray asking for the blessings of the Lord through their intercession. More information on the journey of the relics in the coming year can be found at [Maronite.org.au](http://Maronite.org.au) or [@MaroniteEparchyofAustralia](https://www.instagram.com/MaroniteEparchyofAustralia).

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