



OUR SAINTS INSPIRING OUR JOURNEY OF HOLINESS





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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	04
ICON OF OUR LADY OF ILIGE	06
OUR LADY IN THE MARONITE TRADITION	08
SAINT MAROUN	12
SAINT CHARBEL	16
SAINT RAFQA	22
SAINT NEHMETALLAH	28
SAINT MARY OF THE CROSS MACKILLOP	34
THE GOLDEN JUBILEE PRAYER	39



FOREWORD

As we mark and celebrate in 2023 the Golden Jubilee Year of the official establishment of the Maronite Eparchy of Australia, we look to our saints who are a continuing source of inspiration on our faith journey.

It is therefore with great joy and reverence, on the occasion of our Golden Jubilee, that we welcome in a specially designed reliquary, the relics of four Maronite saints; our spiritual father Saint Maroun, and Saints Charbel, Rafqa and Nehmetallah, along with relics of Australia's first and much loved saint, Mary of the Cross MacKillop.

Their relics will visit our Australian parishes during the year, representing our journey as a community of faithful, and our spiritual lives as individuals, as we continue to seek the kingdom of Heaven in the example of the saints. In this way we live out our chosen theme for the Jubilee Year - The Maronites in Australia: A Journey of Holiness and Openness.



Nourished and sustained by the monastic spirituality and Antiochian Syriac Liturgy which has shaped centuries of Maronite Church life and testimony, we are invited to carry that same Eastern flame in this land of the Southern Cross and across Oceania.

By following in the footsteps of saints, we are able to join in this journey of holiness. Every time we read about their lives and look to their example to learn from them, we cannot but feel moved and energised by a living spirituality. It is this holiness which brings the community together, enables participation, and nourishes our momentum as we move forward upon the mission of our Maronite Church.

We also learn from their Christian openness, to the will of God, and in responding to the many needs around us. As St Mary of the Cross MacKillop said, let us not see a need without meeting it. So let us continue our journey in the openness which comes from our Christian values, always seeking to better understand everyone around us and in our communities.

Dearly beloved, let us then come to our saints in an attitude of spiritual receptiveness, refreshed by deepened understanding of the meaning of their lives, and prayerfully seeking their intercession. They are a force for good among us, and a much needed source of spiritual energy for our families, communities, and world.

One of our greatest treasures is that we belong to a Church that is deeply rooted in the love of both Christ and His Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is a privilege for the Maronite Church to be called a Marian Church, given our long history of venerating and asking for the intercession of the Mother of God.

It is my prayer that in this Jubilee Year we will take our faith to a deeper level and re-energise our spiritual fervour. Let us pray before the Icon of Saydit Ilige, and seek her intercession, that our hearts, our parishes, and all our organisations are ignited by a stronger faith. Let us learn more about our spiritual heritage and the gospel values. These are reflected in the history of our Maronite Church. They were lived by the saints and martyrs.

This Jubilee Year also presents a unique occasion to make better known our spiritual, theological and liturgical heritage, and to make us more conscious that we have the privilege and responsibility of keeping it alive.

With my blessings,

✠ **Antoine-Charbel Tarabay**

Maronite Bishop of Australia, New Zealand and Oceania



ICON OF OUR LADY OF ILIGE

The Icon of Our Lady of Ilige (i-leej) is found in Maronite churches everywhere.

The icon is painted in a uniquely Syriac style, wherein the Mother of God supports her Son in her arms. She is clearly the Mother of God, presenting the child of her womb, Jesus Christ. She extends a blessing, and the three fingers of her right hand are joined to signify the three Persons of the One God.

There is a certain similarity to Byzantine forms, but the flowing form is one of the truly Syriac features. Likewise, at the top right and left corners are angels representing the sun and the moon. Their presence shows that we are not in ordinary time, and also witnesses to the universal Kingship of Jesus and the glory of His Mother, the woman clothed with the sun in Revelation. The two white stars on Mary's head and shoulder proclaim her enduring virginity. Maronites have always believed that it was not appropriate for any other offspring to take her flesh once she had given birth to the Lord.

This icon is believed to have been the personal icon of many patriarchs, travelling with them

from the 12th to the 15th centuries. However, it had been painted over in more contemporary styles, and its original appearance had been forgotten.

The first and most ancient form of this icon, the one we use today, was rediscovered when it was cleaned at the Church of Our Lady of Ilige near Mayfouq, in the Jbeil district, Lebanon. This very Church was also the refuge of the Maronite Patriarchs during times of persecution.

In our Divine Office, we praise the Mother of God in these words:

Mother of God, you are the Holy Mountain from which the rock was hewn without human hands. Generations of heaven and earth join to proclaim:

*Blessed are you, Ark of Mysteries
Blessed are you, Altar of the First Fruit
Blessed are you, fertile valley.
Blessed are you, bright sunrise.
Blessed are you, joy of motherhood.*

*Sedra, "Our Lady of the Seeds"
- Maronite Fenqitho*



50 YEARS



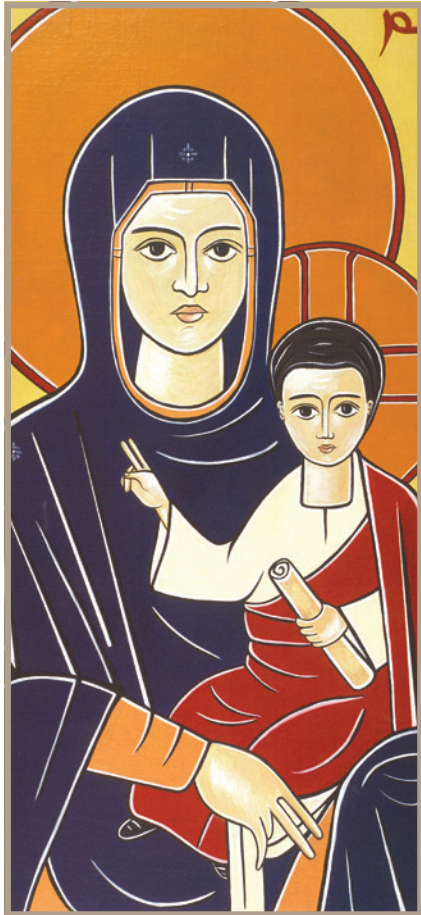
OUR LADY IN THE MARONITE TRADITION

The Mother of God is devoutly honoured in the liturgies, hymns, and culture of the Maronite Church. Traditionally, Maronites have always praised and shown her in connection with Christ her Son. This is reflected in our understanding of the Assumption, the first and greatest of her feasts, when she, a mortal creature, was taken into heaven by Our Lord. The Assumption was, in fact, not only a feast of Mary but also a feast of Christ, for the Assumption is a reunion of mother and divine Son. The Maronite treasury of hymns known as the *Bayt Ghazo*, often states that, by the Assumption, the Lord exalted His mother's name. *The Assumption is therefore a feast of rising into the heavenly and the divine.*

MOTHER OF GOD

In the Maronite Church, Mary's pre-eminent title is "Mother of God." No traditional text or hymn omits this epithet, as it points us to the Incarnation.

St Ephrem brought out the paradox that Mary was at one and the same time the Mother of God and also "His handmaid and the Work of His



Icon of Our Lady by Father Abdo Badwi

Wisdom.” By presenting us with two images which the ordinary mind cannot hold at once, it invites us to open to the miraculous rather than to attempt to explain the mystery. This is a significant fact: the Maronite tradition does not like to try and define the mysteries, but rather to present them for our contemplation and worship.

In the liturgy, the next most eminent title after “Mother of God” is “the Daughter of David,” showing the Maronite attention to Our Lord’s descent from King David. The genealogy of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew is important to the Church because it shows that there is a divinely instituted pattern in human history. Mary, as the New Eve, the (New) Burning Bush and the Daughter of David is an intrinsic part of these inter-related images. In other words, the symbolism which is used of her also relates her to the Son.

THE LITURGY FOR THE ASSUMPTION

The liturgy for the Assumption is the central liturgy of Our Lady in the Maronite Church. The opening hymn sets the tone: *we remember the Holy Mother, praise God, and join all the creation in doing so*. It is implicit that the perfection of Mary is the model or template for the perfection of all. The hymn refers to her three ancient secondary feasts: for the sowing of seeds, the harvest of wheat, and that of grapes. These are all Eucharistic feasts: just as Our Lord grew

within her womb, and we receive Him in the Eucharist, so too the grain and grape under which forms we receive Him, grow in the womb of the earth.

The Opening Prayer, like other passages in the liturgy, acclaims the role of Our Lady among the Holy Apostles. Just as our faith is apostolic, i.e. passed on from the apostles, so too it is Marian, because the union of the Apostles is shown by their gathering around Our Lady, especially at the time of her death.

Especially at her church in Harissa, Lebanon, the first Sunday of the month of May is solemnly commemorated with public celebration.

THE HOOSOYE

In remarkably poetic language, the first part of this prayer links together Our Lord and his Mother in the picture of the Sun arising at dawn: Jesus Christ is the Sun of Justice (prophesied by Malachi) and she is the “Great East,” from which Our Lord rises, resplendent in rays of light to illumine the entire world. It is said that He had His dawn from Mary, and therefore, we are right to look towards her, for if we do, we shall see Her Son. The image of the Great East is also significant because the Garden of Eden was set “in the East,” and this reminds us that Mary is the New Eve. Also, Our Lord shall return to earth from the East, so that when we remember His incarnation, we also recall

that He has promised to come again. Hence all traditional churches were set to face the East, so that our eyes were lifted over the altar towards the rising sun.

THE “YA OUM ALLAH”

Another most important Maronite devotion of the Blessed Virgin is the liturgical hymn “Ya Oum Allah,” “O Mother of God,” the singing of which is customary at baptisms, funerals and the pre-funeral incensing, so that at our entry into the Church and our departure from this world, we praise her and invoke her intercession.

Then, in the incense hymn which is chanted in paraliturgical remembrances of the death, Mary is evoked as the ship which crosses the stormy seas of life, bringing a cargo of immeasurable value safely into port. This goes back to at least St Ephrem, who said that Mary is “a ship of treasures bringing to the poor the riches of heaven.” The ship’s cargo is of course her Son, who resided in her womb, and so Ephrem concludes: “From her the dead, too, have been enriched, for it is Life that she bore.”

So too, although it is proper to speak of Mary as the Bride of Christ, her espousal is not like a human one, where two people standing on the same level are sanctified by the Sacrament of God. When Mary was mystically betrothed, her level was raised: she was made the Bride of Light. In other

words, Mary’s experience shows us how our human nature is transformed and elevated, or, to say what is said of her holy name (which stands for her); *it was exalted.*

Then, in the Maronite Church in Lebanon, the devotion to Mary takes a familiar face when it is performed in the village setting. Many towns have chosen her as their patron saint, and use one of a small number of distinctive icons or statues. These feasts of the Mother of God are usually celebrated on the Feast of the Assumption (15 August). When she is not the patron, she is, however, often represented by a church and by multiple altars throughout the village: her devotion is an official part of the faith in each part of the Maronite world. Her popularity in grottoes, statues, prayer cards, rosary beads and votive candles is a testament to how her devotion enters into and enriches all Maronite lives.

SUMMARY

As we honour the Mother of God, we must remember that all praise goes to her Son: “Do whatever He tells you” (Wedding at Cana, John 2:5).

Praise of the Mother of God is praise of her Divine Son, for His miracles were displayed in her, He was their author, and our greatest admiration must be for the Creator, whose Wisdom and Goodness show forth in His Creation. Further, the exaltation of her

virtues is a beautiful way of showing how important it is that Our Lord was incarnated among us as a human being, and consented to live and be raised like an ordinary man.

To put it another way, the highlight placed on the Blessed Virgin Mary is a delightful way of ensuring an equal emphasis on the divinity and the humanity of Our Lord, for His conception and incarnation were miraculous.



The Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon, Harissa Lebanon

50 YEARS
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SAINT MAROUN

Saint Maroun lived in the fourth century and died at the beginning of the fifth century. He lived at the top of Qurosh hills between Aleppo and Antioch and had died there by 423 at the very latest. The only surviving biography is by Theodoret of Cyrrihus, a bishop from that part of ancient Syria. It reads:

1

... I will call to mind Maroun, for he adorned the godly troop of the holy ones. Maroun embraced life under the sky, taking for himself a certain hill-top which had long ago been honoured by the impious. And having dedicated to God the sacred precincts of the demons in that place, he passed all of his time there, pitching a small tent, but making little use of it. Maroun did not only employ the customary labours, but he conceived others also, gathering together the wealth of wisdom.

2

The judge measured out grace for these labours: so richly did the munificent one grant to him the charism of healing, that Maroun's

fame ran about everywhere, and everyone from everywhere was attracted, so that experience taught them the truth of the report. It was seen that fevers were quenched by the dew of his blessing, shudderings ceased, and demons fled – many and varied sufferings were cured by the one remedy. For the race of physicians applies to each illness the corresponding medicine, but the prayer of the holy ones is the common antidote to all pathologies.

3

But Maroun healed more than bodily weaknesses alone: he also applied the bountiful cure for souls. He heals the greed of this man, and the anger of that man. For one man, Maroun proffers the teaching which leads to self-control, while for another man he bestows lessons in justice; he tempers the man of intemperance, and arouses the sluggish. Farming in this wise, Maroun cultivated many crops through his wisdom: it was he who planted the paradise which now blooms in the land of Kurros. The great Yakobos (James) was a product of this cultivation: of him and of all the others whom I shall recall individually with



50 YEARS

God's help, one could rightly apply the famous prophetic saying: "The just man will flower like the palm tree, and will be multiplied like a cedar in the Lebanon."

4

Caring in this way for the garden of God, doctoring to both souls and bodies alike, he patiently suffered but a short illness. Maroun, teaching us the frailty of our nature and strength in commitment, withdrew himself from this life. Quarrelling broke out between the neighbours over his body, a violent quarrel. A populous bordering village came out in a body, scattered all of the others, and seized this most-desired treasure. They built a great sacred enclosure, and even to this very day they reap the profit, honouring Maroun the victory-bearer with a public feast. And even we, who are at a distance, reap his blessing, for it is not Maroun's tomb which contents us, but his memory.

It is also known that St John Chrysostom (347-407) wrote a letter in the Greek language to St Maroun, which shows us that St Maroun was probably able to read Greek, and had given advice to St John Chrysostom.

The significance of St Maroun's life in the ancient world was that he was a bridge between the Syriac speaking people of the countryside and the Greek Christianity of the city of Antioch. The faith had been spreading chiefly in the cities, where they usually spoke Greek; but in the countryside where the language was Syriac, the people had not converted. By his striking example, St Maroun seems to have converted so many to the religious life that the region around him had become an oasis of spirituality and many monasteries had sprung up.

St Maroun, was in fact a founder of a spiritual school and a monastic movement in Antioch. The monks and disciples, who



St Maron - Hermel, Assi River

followed his style of life and his school of spirituality built a monastery called Beit Maroun. The spiritual environment of the monastic movement near Antioch, as found at Beit Maroun, led to the birth of the Maronite Church in the seventh century, with the election of St John Maroun, the superior of Beit Maroun to become the first Maronite Patriarch for the Church in Antioch.

Significantly, in 2018 the Maronite Eparchy in Australia welcomed the blessed relics of our father St Maroun. These relics dating back around 1,600 years, which are kept at St Maroun's Cathedral, Redfern (NSW), will reconnect us more and more to our spiritual roots and traditions, as a source of blessings for our Eparchy and for all people and ethnicities.

The lesson of St Maroun's life, in one phrase, is: the example of a holy life can convert souls and inspire many to even leave the world to seek holiness.

50 YEARS
MARONITE
EPARCHY OF
AUSTRALIA



SAINT CHARBEL

(1828-1898)

Saint Charbel Makhlouf is the first Maronite Lebanese saint of modern times to be canonised. This event, on 9 October 1977, opened a new chapter in the life of the Maronite Church in Lebanon and around the world, one of divine light and holiness.

On 8 May 1828, in the village of Bekaa-Kafra, North Lebanon, a farmer named Antoun Zaarour Makhlouf and his wife Bridgit welcomed their youngest child, Youssef, into the world. He was baptised on 16 May 1828, in Bekaa-Kafra. His father died when Youssef was three years old, as a result of forced labour on behalf of the Turks. He studied at the parish school.

Even as a child, he would seek solitude in order to meditate and pray, and sought the spiritual direction of the hermits at the monastery of St Anthony of Qozhaya. In 1851, he ran away to the monastery of Our Lady of Mayfouk where he would eventually enter the novitiate of the Lebanese Maronite Order of Monks.

In 1852, he undertook the year of the novitiate at St Maroun's Monastery in Annaya, Mount Lebanon. Upon being admitted to the novitiate,

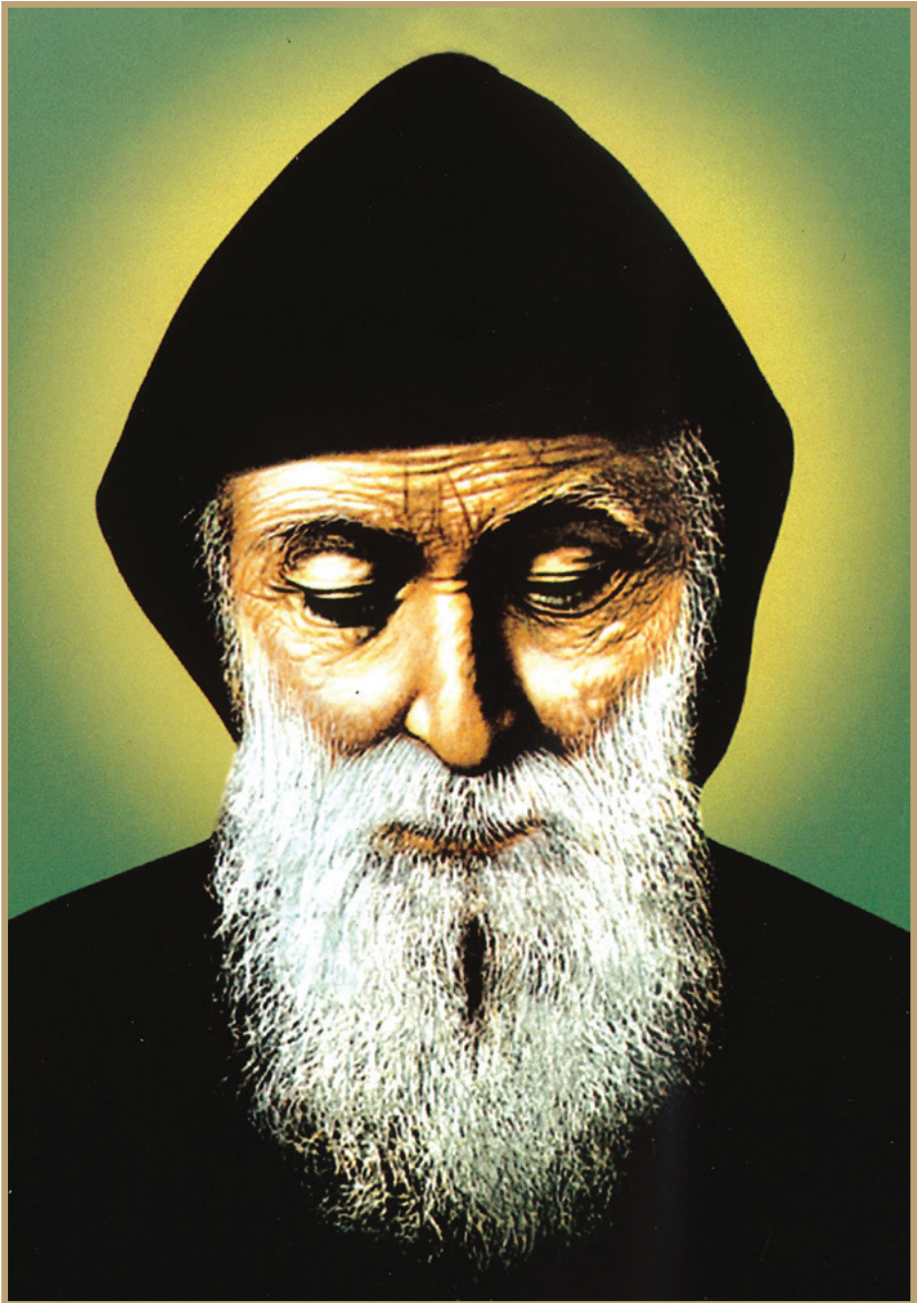
Youssef changed his name to Charbel (an early Christian martyr who had suffered martyrdom in 107 A.D.). His family hoped to persuade him to return home to them, but he remained true to his vocation.

On 1 November 1853, he took his monastic vows at St Maroun's Monastery in Annaya, Mount Lebanon. When his mother, Bridgit, came to the monastery and begged to see her son, he refused. When she asked: "How can you deprive me of the sight of you, my dear child?" He replied: "We shall see each other for all eternity in heaven, God willing."

As a monk, Brother Charbel learned and followed the rules of his Order to the letter, including:

- ✦ Celebrating the Divine Liturgy daily and visiting the chapel frequently night and day
- ✦ Praying, meditating and reading the Holy Scriptures
- ✦ Performing manual labour
- ✦ Living in strict poverty

Brother Charbel ate only one meal daily, and that generally consisted of leftovers from



50 YEARS

the meals of the other monks. He never ate meat or any delicacy. He slept on a mattress stuffed with oak leaves, and his coverlet consisted of a piece of felt. His pillow was a wooden log covered with black cloth. He wore a hair-shirt and made no concession to the harsh, cold winter weather. More than one person describes how he celebrated the Divine Liturgy, shivering with cold. He engaged in constant manual labour, often taking the most difficult tasks.

In 1853, after receiving his habit, he was assigned to the Monastery of St Cyprian at Kifan to study for the priesthood. Among his teachers was Father, now St Nehmetallah Al Hardini. These studies continued until 23 July 1859, when, at Bkerke, he was ordained to the priesthood, and then joined his brother monks in the monastery of St Maroun (which has an altitude of 3,600 feet above sea level).

He spent the next fifteen years of his life there, practising poverty, chastity and obedience, dividing his time between prayer and labour in the fields. It was customary for him to spend entire nights in prayer. On more than one occasion, his brother monks found him still deep in meditation when the first light of dawn broke. He endeavoured to attend all the Masses of the community and was the first to enter the chapel and the last one to leave it.

It is said that during his last year at the monastery, a servant played a practical joke on Father Charbel by filling the lamp

not with oil, but with water. Father Charbel, however, used his lamp, not noticing any change in the intensity of its light.

In 1875, St Charbel was given the permission to become a hermit and to live at the hermitage named after Ss Peter and Paul, built on the summit of Annaya, 5,200 feet above sea level. Here he would spend the last 23 years of his life. One of the nearby residents recounts that at age ten, he used to serve Mass for Father Charbel. One day, he accepted a handful of nuts from the hermit while the latter was kneeling in prayer. After about three hours, the little boy came back for more and found that Father Charbel was still absorbed in contemplation.

Another resident, named Maroun Boutros, tells the story of a snake who used to take food from the hands of Father Charbel. After feeding it, the hermit would send it away in peace, ordering it not to touch anyone. One day, Maroun's father went to the hermitage carrying a shotgun. Unaware of the history of the snake, he shot it. This greatly saddened Father Charbel who asked of the man: "Why did you kill this poor creature when it did not harm you?"

At one time, some people who were raising silk-worms asked Father Charbel to bless some water in order to protect the silkworms against rats that were destroying them. Father Charbel blessed the water and then sprinkled it on the silkworms. Those present testify to seeing all the rats and even some snakes immediately scurrying away from the premises.

During one particularly hot season, an army of locusts invaded Lebanon and ate the crops. As they were making their way to the monastery fields, the Superior asked Father Charbel to pray on behalf of the community. The hermit stood on the roof of the hermitage, blessed some water and sprayed it in the form of a cross. Although all the surrounding lands were destroyed, not a single locust entered the monastery fields.

Finally, during December 1898, at the solemn moment of Consecration during the Divine Liturgy, Father Charbel felt an acute pain in his chest. Father Makarius, his companion, carried him to his cell. Father Charbel rested only a short while and then returned to the altar to finish the Holy Sacrifice. When he reached the part which then said: "O Father of Truth", the pain returned. For a few moments he remained motionless, with the Host and Chalice held aloft in his hands until his fellow hermits pried open his fingers and removed the sacred species. Father Makarius once again carried him back to his cell.

For eight days, Father Charbel endured his suffering with calm patience, invoking the Holy Names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the Apostles Peter and Paul. He also kept repeating the last invocation of his last Mass, "O Father of Truth...".

The monks read spiritual books to him, and administered the last rites. He refused the nourishment that was offered him because it contained butter, contrary to the Nativity fast.

On Christmas Eve 1898, Father Charbel's soul was called up to heaven.

When the hermits removed his garments following his death, they found further proof of his love of penance - there was a prickly horse-hair shirt next to his skin, and his loins were girded with a rough cord. It was reported that several people observed a light flickering around his tomb on the night of the burial.

St Charbel's body was interred in the cemetery of St Maroun, Annaya, without embalming, and clothed only in his monastic tunic. His body was placed in the earth without the protection of a coffin. Three months after his death, following reports of mysterious happenings, his tomb was opened, and his body was found to be in perfect condition, just as it had been when he died. His remains floated on the water which now saturated his grave, and his garments were intact.

Father Charbel's body was then placed in a wooden coffin, and laid in a corner of the monastery. The body appeared to be constantly perspiring and bleeding. The monks would change its garments and wash it frequently. However, the stain of blood remained on the alb.

Some 23 years after the internment, Doctor Elias Honaisi visited Annaya and stated, "I saw the remains of the servant of God, Charbel ... Approaching the coffin where the body is laid, I detected the odour of blood - an odour common only to living bodies. Examining the body with keener attention and scrutiny, I observed

the secretion of some substance through the pores. Considering the number of years since his death, this phenomenon appears to me as completely out of the ordinary course of nature and cannot be adequately explained scientifically. I have repeated these investigations several times, and each time witnessed the same phenomena.”

On 24 July 1927, the remains of St Charbel again underwent burial. The body was garbed with Mass vestments, and his head was covered with a monastic cowl. The body was laid in a new wooden coffin and deposited into a new grave in the wall of the monastery crypt.

Then, in February 1950, the Superior, Father Younes, was asleep when he felt an invisible hand on his shoulder and a voice commanded him, “Get up and go to my tomb.” At first he dismissed it as a dream, but a little while later, he felt a tug at his elbow and heard the voice commanding, “Arise, I said to you, and go and open my tomb.” Once again, he shrugged it off as a dream, but again, he felt an insistent tug on his elbow and heard the voice saying, “You must open my tomb. I am Father Charbel.”

This time, Father Younes summoned two Brothers and relayed his experience to them. At Father Charbel’s tomb they noticed seepage from the tomb. Fr Younes ordered the tomb to be re-opened on 25 February 1950. It was discovered that the seepage consisted of a mixture of perspiration and blood. Not only

was the body intact, it was as soft, pliable and warm as a living body. Once again, the tomb was sealed. During these proceedings, an amice was used to wipe the face of St Charbel. Subsequently, his likeness was found to have been imprinted on the amice.

Pilgrims, including many Muslims, began flocking to St Charbel’s tomb. Among them was a blind Muslim who had travelled from Damascus. He scratched the marble of the tomb and whispered, “Charbel, Charbel, do not disappoint me. You appeared to me in Damascus and told me to come here. You must cure me.” His eyesight was restored.

Further and in 1950, Fr M.A. d’Assemani from the USA witnessed a miracle at St Charbel’s tomb. He saw a woman place her child, who was dying of pernicious anaemia, on the floor near the tomb. She prayed to God through the intercession of St Charbel. Then she heard a voice saying: “Fear not, mother. God has heard your prayer. Arise and take up your boy. He is cured.”

Sister Marie-Abel, aged 37, was seriously ill from an incurable ulcer which had affected her liver, gall bladder and kidneys, and left her too weak to walk without help. She prayed to St Charbel, asking him to intercede for her, and to appear in her dreams. That very night, she saw him standing near her bed with uplifted hands. On another occasion, she dreamt that she was praying before the altar when she saw St Charbel, with his hands raised in blessing. On 11 July 1950, she

travelled to St Charbel's tomb. As soon as she touched it, she felt something like "a current" running through her spine. The next morning, she was carried to the tomb. After hearing three Masses, and praying, she noticed some mysterious drops of moisture on St Charbel's tomb. She wiped herself with them, and suddenly rose to her feet, cured and able now to walk without help.

Maroun Azouri was a young Lebanese soldier whose leg had had to be amputated as a result of an injury during the Palestinian War. He prostrated himself at St Charbel's tomb for three days and nights. He was cured, and became able to walk well once more.

In 1965, on the last day of the Second Vatican Council, Charbel was beatified by Pope Paul VI. In 1977, he was canonised by the same Pope, making him the first saint of an Eastern Church to be canonised by a Roman Pontiff.

It is noteworthy that the first church to be built for St Charbel outside Lebanon, was in Sydney, Australia, where in 1973 the monks of the Lebanese Maronite Order built and dedicated a church, in Punchbowl (NSW), to Blessed Charbel Makhlouf who at that time had not yet been canonised.

There is much to learn from the life of St Charbel and his deep spirituality, but most importantly, how to love God with all our soul and heart and dedicate our life to him in daily prayer, humble service, and wise silence.

50 YEARS
MARONITE
EPARCHY OF
AUSTRALIA



SAINT RAFQA

(1832-1914)

On 29 June 1832, in the village of Hemlaya, Mount Lebanon, Mrad Saber El-Shabq (El Rayes) and his wife Rafqa El-Gemayel were blessed with their only child, a girl they named Pierrette (Boutrosiyye).

By the age of three, Pierrete had already learned to make the Sign of the Cross, and to recite the Our Father and the Hail Mary. When attending church with her parents, she would imitate her mother by kneeling straight up, beating her chest, kissing the ground and raising her arms in the form of a cross.

Sadly, her mother died in 1839. Soon after, an Egyptian invasion of the area made her father gather up the family to flee for their lives. When she was ten years old, a family friend took her into his house in Damascus, where she helped with the household chores. In 1847, her father called her back home. There, she discovered that her father had remarried a woman with two daughters of her own.

A healthy and comely young woman, Boutrosiyye was also devout, and often sought to be alone so that she could pray. Her spiritual

directors were Father Joseph El Gemayel, the founder of the Daughters of Mary (Mariamites) and also the pastor of Our Lady of Deliverance in nearby Bikfaya. He was so impressed with her spirituality that he called her 'The Lily of Hemlaya'.

Her family wanted her to marry, and one day she heard her stepmother and her aunt arguing over who the man to marry should be. Boutrosiyye decided to join the religious life. This was difficult: there were the objections of her father and stepmother to overcome, and she lacked an education.

Initially, she was accepted by the convent of our Lady of Deliverance in Bikfaya, not as a novice but as a lay student and domestic helper. On the way to the convent, she met three girls whom she invited to join her in the religious order. Two said that they would, but the third one said: "When I see that you have become nuns, then I will join." The Mother Superior immediately welcomed Boutrosiyye, and requested the other two girls to return later. She must have satisfied the sisters of her sincerity and suitability, for she was soon accepted as a candidate to become a novice.



50 YEARS

Now, the Mariamite Religious Order, which had established that convent, had been formed to teach young girls basic language skills: reading, writing, arithmetic, and the catechism. Those candidates who had not acquired an education were sent to Ghazir to learn the basics in a Jesuit school. On the Feast of St Maroun, 9 February 1855, Boutrosiyye was admitted to the novitiate and chose the name Anissa.

In 1860, she was sent with Jesuit priests and another nun to Deir El-Qamar to teach catechism. This was the time of the outbreak of the Druze massacre of Christians, which the Turks allowed or even supported. One day, she saw soldiers chasing after a young boy, whom she hid in the folds of her habit, thus saving him from death. From 19 March 1861 to 19 March 1862 she spent her novitiate year at Ghazir, taking vows of obedience, purity and poverty on the feast of Saint Joseph (19 March).

In 1862, she became a full religious sister, and began teaching young girls in three of the Mariamite Order's schools: Krantina, then in 1863, Byblos, and finally in Ma'ad where she helped to establish a new school for young girls. She had been given this task because of the excellent reputation she enjoyed. She remained in Ma'ad for seven years. In 1871, the Mariamite Order was merged with another order, and each of the sisters had to make radical choices about their future: would she return to lay life or continue her religious life in a different order?

In her own words: "One day I entered Saint George's church in the village of Ma'ad to pray. I was weeping and sighing and asking God to direct me in the right direction. I was so exhausted that I fell asleep in the church, with my head resting in my hands. I felt, during my sleep, a hand tapping me on the shoulder, and I heard a voice echoing inside me telling me, 'You will become a nun.' I awoke and looked around the inside and outside the church but could not see anyone."

At some point, while at Ma'ad, she had another dream where, as she stated: "I saw ... three men: first, a monk with a white beard and a cane in his hand; second, a man dressed in a soldier's uniform; and third, an old man. The monk approached and poked me with his cane saying, 'Join the Baladite Order' (Lebanese Maronite Order). He took a few steps and poked me again saying, 'Join the Baladite Order.' I woke up and was full of happiness." A friend told her that he believed that the monk was Saint Anthony the Great, and the soldier was Saint George, patron of the church at Ma'ad.

Soon after, the way was opened to her to join the Lebanese Maronite Order, at the Convent at Saint Simon Al-Qarn. When she entered the convent church and saw the picture of Saint Simon, she recognised him as the old man she had seen in her dream.

It was when she joined the Lebanese Maronite Order in 1871 that she took the name Rafqa (Rebecca) as her new religious name. Here she lived what was basically a monastic life,

full of prayer and manual labour: planting and harvesting vegetables and grain, cultivating silkworms, and sewing ecclesiastic vestment. She remained at Saint Simon Al-Qarn until 1885. In that year, she asked God: "Do you want me, my Lord, to love You without suffering?"

In October 1855, she felt a sharp pain spreading above her eyes like a hot flame. Eventually, after twelve years, this pain blinded her, and she could no longer read the spiritual books and lives of the saints which she had loved. As time went on, she became more and more ill.

For the next 29 years, Sister Rafqa endured her condition without complaint. When the pain became unbearable, she would repeat: "For the glory of God, with the Passion of Christ, with the Crown of Thorns that pierced Your Head, my Lord."

When she was sent to Tripoli for medical examination, the doctor inserted a long needle in her lower neck, which caused blood to gush out. Similarly, in Beirut, another surgical intervention caused another flow of blood and one eye to come out. Sister Rafqa only said: "In communion with Christ's Passion".

After sixteen years at Saint Simon Al-Qarn, Sister Rafqa was moved to a new monastery, Saint Joseph's at Jrebta. Two years after this move, Sister Rafqa became completely blind. However, she continued to participate in the daily choral prayers and to spin wood and cotton and knit stockings for the other sisters. She also experienced debilitating nosebleeds that left her completely drained of energy and reduced her to skin and bones.



St Rafqa Jrebta

Then the pain began spreading to the rest of her body and, in the end, completely paralysed her, except for her speech, hearing and brain. One day, while making her bed, one of the sisters noticed that her right hip had become dislocated and the tip of the femur had pierced her skin. Also, her left collarbone had slipped and sunk in her neck. Despite these conditions, she maintained a serene smile on her face. Despite her intense pain, she would say: "No matter how much I suffer, Christ suffered more. My head is not crowned with thorns as was my Lord's. I do not have nails in my hands and feet, as in His hands and feet. I atone for my sins where He suffered and died for me. My shoulder does not carry a heavy Cross like His. The lance did not wound my side as it wounded Jesus."

On the Feast of Corpus Christi, Sister Rafqa asked Mother Superior if she could attend Mass. The Mother Superior summoned two sisters to try to carry her to church, but they could not do so. Therefore, the Mother Superior told Sister Rafqa that the priest would bring Communion to her at the end of Mass. However, during the Mass, to the amazement of all present, Sister Rafqa crawled into the church. When Mother Superior asked her how she managed to come to church she replied, "I don't know, I asked God to help me and suddenly, I felt myself slipping from my bed with my legs hanging down. I fell on the floor and crawled to church."

On one occasion, Mother Superior asked Sister Rafqa if she would like to see. She

responded, "I would like to see for at least one hour to be able to look at you." Mother Superior noticed a smile on Sister Rafqa's face and suddenly Rafqa said, "Look, I can see now." Mother Superior tested her by asking her to identify several objects, which she did. Sister Rafqa then fell into a deep sleep. When she woke up, she explained that she had entered a large, beautifully decorated building with baths full of water and people crowding to enter them. She too, entered them. When Mother Superior asked her why she came back, she replied, "You called me and I came."

On the dawn of 23 March 1914, Sister Rafqa asked to receive Holy Communion. As long as she had breath, she kept repeating, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul." When she could no longer speak, she gave a sign to receive the final sacraments. Four minutes later, at the age of 82, Sister Rafqa died, and was buried in the monastery cemetery. The case for her beatification was introduced on 23 December 1925, and the canonical investigation of her life began on 16 May 1926. On 10 July 1927, her body was transferred to a shrine in the corner of the monastery chapel. She was canonised by St Pope John Paul II on 10 June 2001.

In March 1938, Elizabeth Naghli Al-Bethawy from Tourza, North Lebanon, was diagnosed as being in the advanced stages of uterine cancer. On the way home, believing that she would soon die, she went to the tomb of

Saint Rafqa, and sought her intercession. As she approached the convent, she began to improve. She spent one night there, falling into a deep sleep in front of the statue of Saint Rafqa. The next morning, she woke up cured and strong.

In October 1984, 17-month-old Saleen Sami Rbayer of Beirut had slept for 24 continuous hours without food or drink. The next day she was rushed to the hospital and for the next six months suffered internal bleeding. Tests revealed that she suffered from a disease in her left kidney. In danger of dying, she underwent an operation on 17 September 1985. When the doctors removed her left kidney, they discovered that it was cancerous. The cancer spread to her pancreas and her health deteriorated rapidly to the point that the doctors did not give her more than 24 hours to live. In November 1985, Saleen's grandmother, Yvette Daaw, read an article about Blessed Rafqa and asked her neighbour, Bernadette Kababy Ibrahim, to bring her back some dirt from Blessed Rafqa's tomb. On 23 November 1985, Saleen's mother, Raymonda Daaw, and her grandmother, Yvette, added the dirt to some pudding and fed it to Saleen. An hour later, Saleen regained complete health.

From St Rafqa, "the suffering nun," we learn how to transform our sufferings and sickness into an opportunity to move forward in the journey of holiness, dedicating our pain and challenges for our salvation and that of the world.

50 YEARS
MARONITE
EPARCHY OF
AUSTRALIA



SAINT NEHMETALLAH

(1808-1858)

Youssef (Joseph) Kassab was born in 1808 in the village of Hardine, North Lebanon, one of seven children to George Kassab and Mariam Raad.

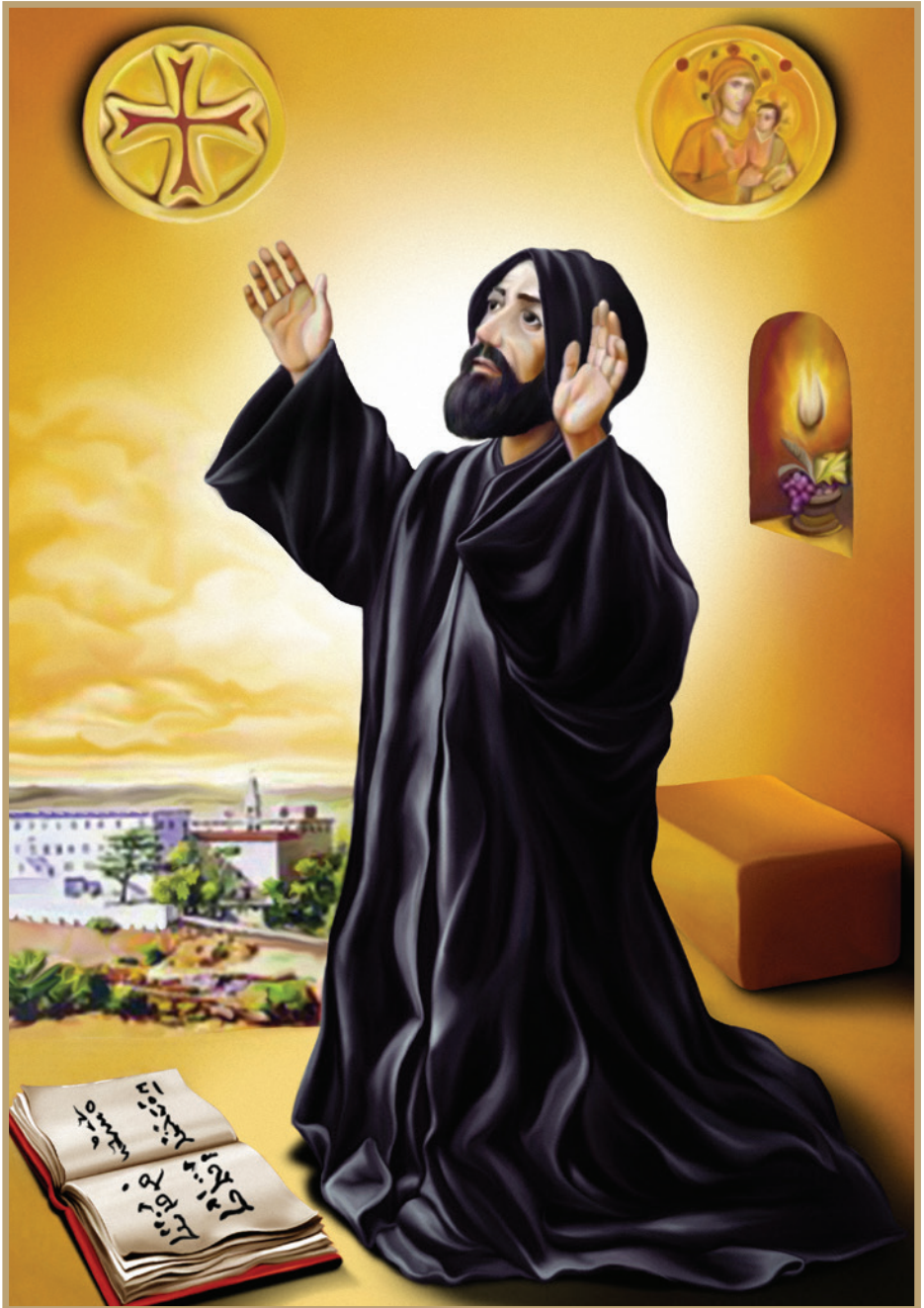
At the age of ten, Joseph was sent to Tannourine (a village near Hardine) to live with his grandfather Father Joseph Ra'ad, who was a pious parish priest, and to attend the school of Saint Anthony Houb, where he learned Arabic, mathematics and Syriac at an advanced level. Above all, he learned how to serve the Divine Liturgy, and assist by chanting the hymns and prayers for the dead. Every morning, he would accompany his grandfather to church and serve Mass. He would receive Holy Communion, recite the rosary and listen to his grandfather's sermon. The lives of saints and stories of the courage exhibited by martyrs held a special interest for him.

In 1823, at the age of 13, Joseph returned home to Hardine where he continued his religious devotion and spiritual activities. He also assisted with the housework and helped his father with manual labour. In Hardine, Father Mikhayel Tabet, the pastor of the

village parish, became his spiritual guide. After serving the Divine Liturgy for him and receiving Communion, Joseph would remain and join in all the religious celebrations.

The desire for solitude continued to grow stronger in Joseph. At the age of 18, encouraged by the example of his brother Elisha, he became a novice at Saint Anthony Kozhaya and took the name of 'Nehmetallah' (Grace of God). From the beginning, he spent long hours, day and night, before the Blessed Sacrament. At times, he would spend the entire night in the church. When he was required to leave out of obedience, he would stay in the hall, meditating and adoring God.

Once his two-year novitiate was completed, Brother Nehmetallah took his monastic vows, and was moved to the Monastery of Saints Cyprian and Justin, at Kfifan, to learn theology, and to prepare for the priesthood. Taking note of his intense prayer life and strict adherence to the religious rules, his Superiors feared that he might begin to hallucinate. They ordered him to take a break from his theological studies, and sent him to the Monastery of Saint



50 YEARS

Moussa Al-Habashi, in order to rest. When he was better, he was allowed to return to Kfifan. Upon resuming his studies, he reached such a level that he would explain the lessons to his classmates. He was also asked to undertake sewing work.

Nehmetallah had long believed himself to be unworthy of accepting the Sacrament of Holy Orders. However as he progressed, he realised that although neither he nor any other man was absolutely worthy of the priesthood, through the service of the priesthood he could aspire to the highest peaks of sanctity. Accordingly, in 1835, Father Nehmetallah Al-Hardini was ordained a priest. His perception of the priesthood shows in his statement: "The monk in his monastery is like a king in his castle. His kingdom is his religious life, his soldiers are his brother monks, his armour is his obedience and poverty, his crown is his purity and chastity."

Saint Nehmetallah is most famous for his saying: "The clever person is the one who knows how to save his soul." He strove to perfect his daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy, seeing the ceremony as a lighthouse that was an essential centre of spirituality. Immediately after sunset, he would begin preparation for the next day's rite. Father Nehmetallah was known to pray day and night, continuously, through meditation or prayers. Even during his last illness, he did not cease praying until he was finally unable to stand.

He had a special devotion to the Blessed Mother and to her Immaculate Conception. He would always repeat the prayer, "Blessed be the Immaculate Conception of Mary." During his illness, he would often become unconscious. However, immediately upon gaining consciousness, he would look at her medal and repeat, "O, Mary, help me." He spent his life urging everyone to honour her and to



St Nehmetallah Kfifane

join the Society of the Heart of Mary and the Society of the Heart of Jesus. He took it upon himself to distribute membership forms. On Saturdays, which were dedicated to Mary, he would, in addition to fasting until noon, abstain from eating meat. He also fasted during the triduum (three days) of her feasts and the entire month of May.

A corollary of his love for God was Father Nehmetallah's love for his neighbour. He believed that love for one's neighbour was the other side of love of God. He cared for the young and handicapped. He would give to the poor, sometimes giving away whatever food and clothing was allotted to him. In order to facilitate the return of sinners to God, he would double his mortification and deprive himself of many things. In his prayers, he remembered those souls in Purgatory who had no one else to pray for them.

Obedience was the cornerstone of Father Nehmetallah's life. He saw in his Superiors the person of Christ and carried out their orders with complete joy and submission. He never complained about a Superior, and he never did anything without the Superior's permission. Father Nehmetallah avoided talking to women, not because he despised them, but because he wished to avoid any temptation. He did not allow anyone to kiss his hand, through humility.

During his life, Father Nehmetallah was known to have the gift of prophecy. On one occasion, he ordered his students to move

away from a large wall. As soon as they had cleared away, the wall collapsed. On another occasion, Father Nehmetallah asked the monk in charge of the barn to move the cows. At first the monk hesitated, but Father Nehmetallah insisted. When the cows had been removed, the roof of the barn collapsed. On another occasion, the altar boy who assisted him in his daily Mass failed to come to church. Father Nehmetallah went to the boy's home, where he found him with a high fever. He then ordered the sickness: "Leave him!" Immediately, the boy was cured.

Father Nehmetallah's desire to practise poverty led him to give what he earned from binding books to his Superior. He never sought office in the order, but through obedience, he did, on three occasions, accept the Office of Assistant General. On several occasions he remarked: "I would rather die than become Superior General." Some of the other monks tried to change his mind by telling him that it was the will of God that he become Superior General. To this he would reply, "God does not want me to become Superior General." When questioned as to how he knew that, he stated, "The Virgin Mother told me." He prayed to God not to take him while he was in higher office.

Years of fasting, self-deprivation and the practice of mortification had left his body weak and frail. In late 1858, he contracted pleurisy, and a high fever from the cold winter wind. On 14 December 1858, he passed away. He was only 48 years of age.

He died holding a picture of the Virgin Mary, his last words being: "O Virgin Mary, into your hands I commend my soul."

People who were nearby at his death witnessed a heavenly light illuminating his room and an aromatic smell which remained in his room for a number of days afterwards. When the then Patriarch, Boulos Massad, heard of Father Nehmetallah's death he commented: "Congratulations to this monk who knew how to benefit from his monastic life."

When, some little time later, the monks opened his tomb, they found to their surprise that his body had remained incorrupt. He was then removed and placed in a coffin near the church. Between 1864 and 1927, visitors were allowed to view the intact body. In 1927, the Committee of Inquiry set up to investigate the cause of Father Nehmetallah's canonisation finalised its investigation. His body was reburied in the wall of his monastic cell, before being transferred to a little chapel where the Divine Liturgy was celebrated for visitors.

After the death of St Nehmetallah, God healed Moussa Saliba, an Orthodox man from the town of Btegrin (El-Maten), who was blind. Moussa visited St Nehmetallah's tomb, and a deep sleep overcame him. St Nehmetallah appeared to him and healed his eyes.

A Melkite Catholic man, Mickael Kfoury, from the town of Watta El-Mrouge, suffered

from an incurable illness and both his legs had shrivelled. He visited St Nehmetallah's tomb and prayed for his intercession. During his night's sleep at the monastery, an old monk appeared to him saying: "Stand up and go and help the monks carry in the grapes from the vineyard." Kfoury replied: "Don't you see me paralysed. How can I walk and carry the grapes?" The monk answered: "Take this pair of shoes, put them on and walk." The sick man then took the shoes and tried to stretch out his right leg. To his surprise he was able to do so. He woke up, able to feel both of his legs. He then stood up – completely healed.

In June 1986, Andre Najm began experiencing incurable fatigue and nervous breakdowns. He became unable to walk even short distances. He was diagnosed with blood cancer. On 26 September 1987, he prayed at the grave of St Nehmetallah, saying: "I beg you, Father Al-Hardini, give me a drop of blood for I am so tired ..." He also asked to wear the monastic habit. Moments later he was cured, and cried out: "I wore the monastic habit. I am cured. I don't need blood anymore!" He did not require any blood transfusions from that day. In 1991 he married and had two children, a son named Charbel and a daughter named Rafqa.

Nehmetallah Al-Hardini's beatification by St Pope John Paul II was held at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome on Sunday 10 May 1998. The Maronite Church celebrates his feast day on 14 December. At his beatification, the Pope

said: "In beatifying Father Hardini, I would first like to give thanks for my journey to the land of the cedars exactly one year ago. Today there is a new celebration for the Lebanese all over the world, for one of their brothers is held up to them as a model of holiness. Throughout his monastic life, the new blessed willingly incarnated the words of Christ's disciples which we have heard in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles: 'We must undergo many trials if we are to enter the kingdom of God'. From now on the new Blessed is a sign of hope for all Lebanese, especially families and young people. As a man of prayer, he calls his brothers and sisters to trust in God and to commit all their efforts to following Christ, in order to build a better future. May Lebanon continue to be a land of witnesses and saints, and a land of ever greater peace and brotherhood!"

On 16 May 2004, St Nehmetallah was canonised by Pope John Paul II.

The spirituality of St Nehmetallah, based on prayer life and centred on the Eucharist, is an inspiration for many faithful these days, especially when we meditate on his famous quote, "the clever person is the one who knows how to save his soul."

50 YEARS
MARONITE
EPARCHY OF
AUSTRALIA



SAINT MARY MACKILLOP

(1842-1909)

On 15 January, 1842, in Fitzroy, Melbourne (VIC), Mary was born to Flora and Alexander MacKillop, who were immigrants from Scotland. She was baptised "Maria Ellen," although she was always known as Mary. She was the eldest of eight children and was raised in the working-class in Victoria.

Mary later said that her childhood had been unhappy, yet she had always felt the Holy Spirit with her: "From early childhood, as far back as I can remember, He gave me such a sense of His watchful presence that I would feel myself reproved for my smallest faults."

At age 14, Mary took up the position of a clerk for Sands and Kenny stationers in Melbourne. She once wrote that: "Until I was twenty-five, I had the principle care of a large family." Reflecting upon her early life, Mary said of her father, "From my father I learnt so much. He had studied for seven years in Rome alone, and under the Jesuit Fathers."

At the age of 18, she moved to Penola in South Australia, to work as a governess to the children of her aunt and uncle. She carried

this out with extraordinary maturity and selflessness and extended her care to other children from the surrounding country farms. Here she met Father Julian Edmund Tenison Woods, who was concerned about the lack of Catholic education in South Australia. He became her spiritual director. They agreed to collaborate on educating the children.

In 1866, Mary's brother, John, converted a stable into a school. Not long after this, when her family was financially secure, Mary began to seriously consider her vocation to the religious life. She accepted an invitation from Father Woods to be part of a new Australian female religious order. She thus became co-foundress of the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart.

On 19 March 1866, on the Feast of St Joseph, Mary donned a black dress and signed her name as a sister of St Joseph, becoming the first religious sister of this first Australian Congregation. On 15 August 1867 in a tiny chapel in Grote Street, Adelaide, Mary officially took her first vows and became known as "Mary of the Cross."



50 YEARS

Other women joined the congregation, teaching the poorest children, and living in absolute poverty, totally dependent on alms and the generosity of benefactors. Mary always stipulated that “we must be very poor ... but have everything neat and clean.” Father Woods drew up the rules, and the congregation moved to Adelaide, and other parts of South Australia.

Life for the Sisters was hard and demanding yet Mary would personally write regularly to each of them, to provide encouragement and support. She was generous with her praise and gentle with her reprimands, demanding no less of herself than she did of others. She encouraged her sisters to find solace and inner peace from a life devoted to God.

Despite encountering numerous difficulties and opposition, the Congregation continued to expand and grow. By the end of 1869 more than seventy Sisters were educating children in twenty-one schools in Adelaide and the country.

Mary and several of her Sisters travelled to Brisbane in December 1869, and established several communities there. In 1871 she departed Brisbane and returned to Adelaide via Melbourne, Geelong and Portland. By August 1871, 120 young women had taken vows in the Order.

Unlike many other Congregations in Australia, the work of the Sisters extended beyond the school gates, to offer charitable works to the most remote and inhospitable areas: establishing hospitals, shelters for homeless, homes for the terminally ill and the elderly

sick. They visited prisoners, cared for neglected children and young people, vulnerable migrant women, and Aboriginal people. At this time, welfare agencies and government funding were virtually non-existent.

The presence of the young Sisters drew attention. The Sisters were often clad in very poor religious habits, were seen begging for alms along the streets of Adelaide or in outback towns, and often were seen teaching ragged children in poorly furnished places. This was a cause of scandal to many Catholics. Further, many opposed the Sisters’ service to questionable members of local communities. Within the Congregation and among the clergy there were also tensions. By 1871 disagreements and conflicts had reached a high point in regards to Father Woods. He was disliked by a number of the clergy as well as members of the Congregation.

Bishop Sheil ordered an investigation into the life of the Sisters, which recommended that changes be implemented immediately including placing the Congregational communities under the authority of local priests. Mary MacKillop and the Sisters were disappointed, and insisted on their right to autonomy and the necessity of their service to the poor and underprivileged.

It was felt that the Bishop was forcefully intruding in their affairs. In a final act of opposition, Bishop Sheil excommunicated Mary on 22 September 1871 on the grounds that “she had incited the Sisters to disobedience and defiance.” Sister Mary refused to defend herself against the public attacks on her character.

Five months later, and shortly before his death in 1872, he lifted the censure and Mary was completely exonerated by an Episcopal Commission. However, during this period many of the schools had closed down and the Congregation had been entirely disbanded. Sister Mary wrote: "The cross is my portion; it is also my sweet rest and support. I could not be happy without my cross; I would not lay it down for all the world. With the cross I am happy but without it I would be lost."

In March 1872, Sister Mary travelled, headed to Rome, to request the Pope's approval of the Congregation's mission. On the Feast of Pentecost, Mary had the joy of an encounter with Pope Pius IX and obtained a warm blessing for herself and her Sisters. Hence, in 1873 the Congregation of the Sisters of Saint Joseph received Papal approval. This done, she travelled extensively throughout Europe to observe new methods of teaching. After nearly two years in Europe, Mary arrived in Australia in December 1874, with new materials for the schools, books for the convent library, several priests, and fifteen new "Josephite Sisters" from Ireland, as they came to be called.

Because of the terms of the Papal approval, the Rule of Life written by Father Woods had to be replaced with a new set. He took offence at this, and it created a permanent rift between him and Mary. However, she would always consider Father Woods as the Father Founder of the Congregation and upon his death she dedicated the new St Joseph chapel in North Sydney to his memory.

In March 1875, in Adelaide, Mary was officially elected by her Sisters as Mother General of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph. As a result of certain complaints about the Congregation and Sister Mary herself, in 1883 Bishop Reynolds ordered Mary to leave his Diocese, and she accordingly departed for Sydney. There, Archbishop Vaughan welcomed Mary and the Sisters. Rome investigated the issues which had arisen under Bishop Reynolds, and found in favour of Mary. In 1888 Pope Leo XIII declared the Congregation canonical, and officially appointed Sister Bernard Walsh as Mother General until the next Chapter.

After giving up her office as Mother General in 1885, Mary continued to travel, founding new schools and bringing comfort and assistance to her Sisters. In New Zealand, she visited Sisters who were able to survive thanks to the generosity of the Maoris. It was here that the first of a series of strokes afflicted her. During her long and painful illness over the last eight years of her life, she never ceased to show the liveliest interest in all matters concerning the welfare of the Congregation.

While preserving her mental faculties, Mary gradually became paralysed and was surrounded by the affection and care of her Sisters. A few days before her death, the first Australian Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran, visited her to bless and encourage her. On leaving her bedside he said, "I consider I have this day assisted at the deathbed of a saint."

On 8 August 1909, she died at the age of 67. She

was buried at the church in North Sydney. Here is a selection of some of her sayings:

- ✦ “Seek first the poorest most neglected parts of God’s vineyard” (1900)
- ✦ “May the spirit of unity and love reign amongst us” (1884)
- ✦ “Let no obstacle deter us from proceeding with courage” (1893)
- ✦ “Believe in the whisperings of God in your own heart” (1868)

Some of her principles can be found in these five precepts:

- ✦ **Awareness of the presence of God:** *God gave me such a sense of His watchful presence” (1873)*
- ✦ **Trust in His divine providence:** *When I could not see my way, God kept my heart full of trust” (1874)*
- ✦ **Love for the Cross that becomes the Tree of Life:** *“My name in religion is Mary of the Cross” (1867)*
- ✦ **Docility to the will of God and reverence for the dignity of all:** *“The will of God is a very dear book which I never tire of reading” (1873)*
- ✦ **Reverence for the dignity of all:** *“Let us love and praise God in all” (1873)*

Her spiritual life was revealed in the quality of her prayer, in her retreats, meditations and devotions. Mary had special devotions, one of which was the three J’s: Jesus, Joseph and John the Baptist. The three initials, set within the Ave

Maria symbol, formed the Monogram of her Congregation. It was sewn onto the Sisters’ habits in blue braid and was the identifying symbol of the Josephites. Her devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus consoled her when life was difficult. She often spoke of the humility of St Joseph, entrusting the Congregation to his fatherly care.

She once wrote: ‘Mother, sweet Mother, oh let us not ask in vain. We are thy children; we are in danger, weak and ready to fall. We hold out our hands to thee O Mother, sweet Mother, forgiving, gentle Mother, thanks. We are in thine arms. Bless us, keep us there.’

Her striving after holiness is shown by such prayers as: ‘I shall not give thee desires only, my Jesus; neither shall I give myself conditionally to Thee. With all my heart I give myself entirely and without any reserve unto Thee and to thy sweet service.’

The first miracle in the cause of her canonisation was the cure of Veronica Hopson, who had been dying of leukaemia in 1961. The second miracle was the complete and permanent cure of Kathleen Evans of inoperable lung and secondary brain cancer. Pope Benedict XVI officially canonised Mary on 17 October 2010. She was the first Australian to be canonised.

It is inspiring to meditate upon the life and achievements of St Mary of the Cross MacKillop. She had a strong sense of God’s love for her and she was wonderful in showing love and compassion for people in need. One of her most famous sayings was, “Never see a need without doing something about it.”



GOLDEN JUBILEE

prayer

*We praise and thank you, O Lord Our God
for the 50 years of the Maronite Eparchy
and for all those who have served your flock
and helped build up your Church in faith and communion.*

*In this Jubilee Year, we are called as a Maronite community
to meditate on the love of God the Father,
to open our hearts ever more to the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ
and to listen to and be enlightened by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.*

*Lead us Lord, on the path of holiness, nourished by Your Holy Word and Sacraments
to bear witness to You from generation to generation.*

*We seek forgiveness for the times when we should have been
more holy, more loving and more charitable as individuals and as a community.
We pray for all people in this vast nation to be open to do Your will, O Lord,
so that Your peace may reign in our hearts, in our families, and in our world.*

*May we continue to journey with You, and with Mary, Our Lady of Ilige,
Saint Maroun, Saint Charbel, Saint Rafqa, Saint Nehmetallah,
and Saint Mary of the Cross MacKillop, so that the Maronites and all the faithful
may grow in holiness and openness.*

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to you be glory, now and for ever.

Amen



The printing of this book was made possible by the Maronite Catholic Society of Australia

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