

Homily of Bishop Antoine-Charbel Tarabay
Mass for the Arrival of the Replica of the Tomb of Saint Charbel and relics
Punchbowl, 8 May 2024

The Right Reverend Abbot Tannous Nehme,
Very Reverend Monsignor Marcelino Youssef, our Vicar General,
Reverend Father Superior Assaad Lahood and Reverend Father Superior and Fathers,
Maronite Sisters of the Holy Family,
The Honourable Ministers and distinguished guests,
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have been a priest for 31 years, and Bishop for 11 years, and tonight I feel speechless. I have no words to explain what happened tonight. And the only three words that I will use at the beginning of my homily are thank you Lord, thank you Saint Charbel, thank you to the Lebanese Maronite Order of Monks.

This evening, we offer our deepest gratitude to the Lord for this sacred opportunity to commemorate the birthday of the patron saint of this church and community, Saint Charbel. And as Father Anthony said, there is no better way to celebrate the birthday of Saint Charbel rather than this way.

The 8th of May 1828 is a date to remember in the life of our church and it is now a day to remember in the life of our parish and community here in Australia. It is an occasion to bear witness to our faith, and we did that, we gathered in prayerful procession, behind and in front of the relics of our beloved Saint Charbel. This is unheard of: the thousands of people, the prayerful procession, and all of that because of the holiness of Saint Charbel.

Our procession tonight through the streets serves as a public testament to the faith of the Church, to your faith, and to the faith of Saint Charbel in God.

Thank you for this wonderful and unique initiative, especially to all those who were involved in organising, and especially the volunteers and the young people, thank you very much.

This year marks an important and major milestone in the history of the Lebanese Maronite Order, in our Eparchy and in this monastery and parish. It is the culmination of 50 years for the consecration of this church, the church of Saint Charbel. It is a combination of 50 years of prayer, pastoral work and here we can see that Saint Charbel has blessed our community and all of us with many spiritual fruits.

We come together to celebrate many firsts in this parish Church and monastic community. It was the first church and monastery outside of Lebanon to take the name of Saint Charbel. The Church was built and consecrated in 1974 and was dedicated to the Blessed Charbel Makhlof, the son of Bekaakafra. It was the first Maronite monastic presence in Australia, with the Lebanese Maronite Order of Monks. It holds the first official icon of Saint Charbel sent to a Church outside of Lebanon. And this year marks the 50th Jubilee of the first mass celebrated in this blessed Church. And this Monastery today becomes the first shrine outside

of Annaya to house a replica of the tomb of Saint Charbel filled with his relics – bones, his monastic habit and vestment. And this tomb is here to stay.

As we gather tonight, we embrace the rich spirituality of Qannoubine and Kozhaya, rooted in the traditions of the Maronite hermits and monks. Now, with the presence of Annaya's spirituality here in Saint Charbel's Punchbowl, we are reminded of the strong ties we hold to our heritage and our homeland. Through the prayers and intercession of our beloved Saint Charbel, may these ties continue to be strong and uplift our community for generations to come.

Fifty years ago, a humble vision took root in a small house on the very land where we now stand. Today, that vision stands as a testimony to the abundant graces and blessings bestowed upon us through the intercession of the great, Saint Charbel. The monks who arrived from Lebanon, armed with nothing but a vision and a devotion to spread the monastic charism and love for Saint Charbel in this distant land, have become pillars of our Eparchy. Their dedication has helped shape and build the spiritual foundation for future generations. It would be no exaggeration to say that we stand on the shoulders of giants—those who arrived with nothing, yet left us with an enduring and very rich legacy. I congratulate the Lebanese Maronite Order and Saint Charbel's Church on their Golden Jubilee.

We are grateful for the physical and material growth of this mission but let us not overlook the greatest treasure bestowed upon us – a profound and unwavering devotion to Saint Charbel. Despite living a life of simplicity and poverty, Saint Charbel left to us a wealth of spiritual blessings and grace. In his silence, he spoke volumes. In his humility, he gave witness to the immensity of the union between humanity and the divine.

Saint Charbel stands as a paradox—a man of humble means, yet possessing extraordinary greatness. His miraculous interventions, spanning continents and cultures, have touched the lives of countless individuals. More than 40,000 miracles happened by the grace of God and the intercession of Saint Charbel. Saint Charbel brings healing to both body and soul. From South America where locals believe him to be a native South American, to North America, across all Africa and from the coasts of Europe to the farthest reaches of China, this great saint, buried on a small mountain in Annaya has become a wonder worker. He is an image of faith, a man of faith, a man of prayer, a man for all faiths, and for people of no faith, granting the graces of the Lord through the prayers and petitions of the thousands that visit him daily.

Indeed, Saint Charbel is not merely a saint for a particular people or creed; he is a beacon of faith for all humanity. His miraculous deeds serve as a testament to the power of faith and the boundless love of our Creator. Let us, therefore, continue to invoke his intercession with fervent hearts.

Tonight, we have been gifted a great grace, no longer needing to travel across the world to visit him, Saint Charbel has come, not to visit, yet to remain with us. This shrine here today is to become a beacon of spirituality, one that instills hope in the hearts of all pilgrims who come here seeking the assistance, guidance and the healing touch of Saint Charbel.

Dearly beloved,

Blessings granted by the Lord cannot and should not remain hidden or in the possession of one person. Blessings should be shared and like that they multiply. As such, tonight we will participate in the ancient tradition of pilgrims receiving a blessing from the relics of Saint Charbel. It is a great spiritual treasure enriching our Church and our nation Australia with blessings of hope and holiness by having the replica tomb of Saint Charbel here in this place. However, let us always recall the profound words of our Lord recorded in the Gospel: "Your faith has made you well." (Matt 9:22) It is through our faith and trust in the Lord that we truly receive His blessings directly or through the intercessions of saints and experience the Lord's transformative power in our lives. Amen.