Russian cosmonaut says he has taken relics of saint to space
12 April 2017, by Nataliya Vasilyeva

A Russian cosmonaut who has returned to Earth after a mission on the International Space Station said on Wednesday he had taken a relic of a Russian Orthodox saint with him.

Astronauts and cosmonauts routinely take small items such as their children's toys or CDs with them as reminders of home.

Sergei Ryzhikov told Russian news agencies that he would give the tiny relic of St. Serafim of Sarov's body, which he received from its home monastery last year, to an Orthodox church in Star City outside Moscow, home to the cosmonaut training center.

Serafim of Sarov, one of Russia's most revered saints known for his hermitical lifestyle, died in the early 19th century.

Ryzhikov, who came back with two other crew members on Monday after six months in space, said he would celebrate the relic's return at a church service in Star City on Thursday.

"We always wait for some sort of miracle, but the fact that a piece of the relics traveled to the orbit and blesses everything onboard and outside, including our planet, is a big miracle in itself," he said.

Space exploration in atheist Soviet society was often portrayed as debunking the existence of God. A popular Soviet-era propaganda poster showed a cosmonaut floating in space and declaring: "There is no God!"

Russia has since experienced a religious revival, with the overwhelming majority of Russians now identifying themselves as Russian Orthodox.
In what would have seemed an absurdity to fiercely atheist Soviet space pioneers, Soyuz spacecraft now routinely receive pre-launch blessings from Orthodox priests and Russian cosmonauts have put up small icons at the Space Station.

Cosmonauts have taken tiny relics of at least six Orthodox saints and a piece of the Holy Cross into space with them.

Russia celebrates Space Day on April 12, exactly 56 years after Yuri Gagarin became the first human to travel into space.