

Pastoral Letter

Dear Priests, Religious, Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

May the grace of our Lord be with you!

In keeping with our Church's liturgical tradition, from Vibhoothi Thirunal the 50-days Lent is commencing. Season of Lent is the best occasion for Prayer, Penance, Fasting and Charity. Let us observe this Lenten season with a spiritual grace. I invite you to celebrate in a salvific way the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection: the Paschal mysteries of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us commemorate the Lenten season with a spirit of Repentance, recalling our ancestors' great example. Let us repent of our sins. Renewed in the Holy Spirit, let us live as God's children.

Through this year's Lenten message, Pope Francis reminds us: *Lent is a time of renewal for the whole Church, for each community and every believer. Above all, it is a "time of grace" (2Cor 6:2).* Holy Father is warning against the "*indifference to others*" which appears to be spreading in the world. "*Indifference to our neighbours and God*" is also a great challenge for us as Christians.

God is very much interested in us as his children, "*For God so loved us, that He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation*" (John 3:16). Lord Jesus our Saviour's incarnation, His life on this earth, His crucifixion and resurrection, opened the door between Heaven and Earth. Through proclamation of the Word of God, administering the sacraments, and by various charitable deeds, the Church still holds this door open.

"If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together". (1 Cor 12:26). Lenten season is the best occasion to experience God's love and to share it with others. The Church reminds us of this reality through the liturgy of washing of feet during the celebration of Holy Thursday. We can become servants of others only by allowing Jesus to wash our feet, like St. Peter. Only those who have communion with Jesus could achieve his attitude of serving others.

Lenten season is the best opportunity to receive the salvific ministry from Jesus. Let us actively grow as living members of the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ, through listening to the Word of God, and receiving sacraments, especially devoutly celebrating Holy Qurbana. Let us get strengthened in the communion of Saints by sharing our God given gifts with each other and partaking in various charitable works, no matter how great or small.

God is asking us even today "*Where is your brother?*" (*Genesis 4:5*), similar to the question he asked Cain. We are aught to give him an answer. Are we able to see the 'Lazarus' who is waiting in front of our doorstep? Let us reach out to the poor and underprivileged within and outside the Church. God is calling us to console those who are in need - spiritually, mentally or physically - in our neighbourhood, in our school, at our workplace or wherever they may be. We are not supposed to live our lives confined to ourselves; in the Church we all are missionaries.

We did not migrate to Australia by accident. It is God's plan. God sent us here as missionaries. In our own different life situations Jesus calls us to become His witnesses. Let us go forward by leading an exemplary family life, by responsibly fulfilling our duties in the public life, and by giving witness to Christian values and by developing genuine friendship with all.

St James advises us to "*make your hearts firm*" (5:8-check). Let us grow in faith and fellowship by personal prayer and by participating in the common prayers of the Church. Let us be spiritually strengthened by observing small or great penances, and advance along the salvific way of repentance. Let us also pray constantly to Sacred Heart of Jesus as "*Jesus most meek and humble, make my heart like unto thine*".

In response to the invitation of Pope Francis let all our communities in the Eparchy arrange on 13-14 March 24-hour adoration in communion with all our brothers and sisters in the Universal Church. We shall observe Vibhoothi Monday and Holy Friday as days of fasting. During the 50-days fast, let us abstain from meat, and as far as possible also from fish. Let us also engage in charitable activities to help others.

I would like to remind you to send the collection from Holy Thursday liturgy to the Eparchial Chancery for the formation of our future priests. In the same manner, Good Friday collections will be sent to Rome for the maintenance of the Holy Land. Please contribute generously.

Our Eparchy will complete its first year of its existence on 25th of March. In this short period, by God's grace, we were able to achieve many things. Let us thank God for this. In God's name thanks to those who offered generous support. We have a long way to go and I expect your continuing prayers and assistance.

Thanks also for your cooperation with this year's '*Bishop's Appeal*' for the development of the Eparchial Chancery, and I earnestly request you to send your contributions to the Chancery before Easter.

With the blessings and joy of the feast of our Lord's Resurrection.

Your Loving Father in Jesus,

+ Bosco Puthur

Bishop of the Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle of Melbourne of the Syro-Malabar

Given from the Eparchial Curia, Mickleham, Melbourne, on 6 February 2015.

N.B: *This pastoral letter is to be read out during the Sunday Holy*

Qurbana on