

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



Prot. No. MPL: 27/25/7

27 February 2025

Circular

Dear priests and brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are entering the holy season of Great Lent. Tomorrow we will begin the days of prayer, fasting and almsgiving by applying ashes to our foreheads. There is a question that our children ask: Why do we mark our foreheads with ashes?

The Holy Scriptures give three main answers:

First, ashes and dust indicate our mortality. In Genesis 3:19, God says: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”

Secondly, the Holy Scriptures present the anointing with ashes as a sign of repentance. In the Book of Job 42:6 we read: “I repent in dust and ashes.”

Thirdly, the anointing with ashes is interpreted as a sign of fervent prayer for ourselves and for others. In Daniel 9:3 we read: “I prayed earnestly to the Lord God in sackcloth and ashes.”

In short, this ash invites us to reflect on our mortal life in this world, to be more united with God and our brothers, and to ‘pray earnestly’ with repentance.

In our daily lives, we pay great attention to our physical and mental health and growth. An example of this is eating our favourite food every day. We never allow our body and mind to get tired. But in the midst of our busy lives, we often forget to pay attention to our spiritual health and growth.

The best food for spiritual growth is prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. When we talk to God through prayer we deepen our relationship with God, and through fasting we are able to control our body and mind and subdue temptations. The best example of this is the life of Jesus. Even though He was the Son of God, Satan tempted Jesus in many ways. But Jesus teaches us through the forty days

of fasting in the desert that the best weapon to face all temptations and sinful situations is fervent prayer and fasting.

The Spirit is taking us to the desert of fasting. Desert life means a disciplined and orderly way of life. Many of you have experienced and testified that miracles will happen in your life when you participate in the Holy Eucharist for fifty consecutive days, attend family prayer without fail, read the whole Bible once, and fast.

If we set aside just two hours out of 24 hours a day, we can do all these things. I think that if at least one of the parents does this from our homes without fail for these 50 days, it will be the best catechism that parents can give their children. This Lent is a time to rediscover the Christian values that our parents gave us through their example and to embrace them in our lives

We work day and night for the material well-being of our children and families. It is essential to set aside some time for the spiritual upliftment and blessing of the family. This Lent is also an opportunity to listen to the voice of conscience that we need to improve a little more

Last year, during Lent, you all sincerely cooperated and helped in the Bishops' Appeal that we conducted for the seminary students, youth, and other activities of the diocese. The total amount we collected was \$ 176660.43. I thank you in the name of God for all the help you have given as members of the diocesan family.

In this year's Bishops' Appeal, a pamphlet containing the photos and names of our seminary students and information about the courses they are studying will be delivered to all your homes. They should become members of our families. Therefore, it is our responsibility to pray for them and help them with their educational needs. I am confident that you will all sincerely cooperate and pray for this year's appeal.

Ours is the fastest growing church in Australia and New Zealand. Our worship, catechesis and related activities are viewed with great respect and admiration by other church members in these countries. We can never forget the generous cooperation and assistance of the Latin Church. Each of our communities is going through many hardships. But I sincerely congratulate you for recognizing these adverse circumstances and hardships and preserving and living our rich faith life and traditions.

Our 63 small and large communities have only 6 churches to call our own. Recognizing the needs and limitations of our growing church, the Pallottine Congregation in Australia is willing to transfer their 200 acres of land in Melbourne and a large building that can accommodate 200 people to our Eparchy for a subsidized price. Our priests and members of our community used to regularly hold retreats in this Centre. They are ready to offer this valuable institution and land for four million dollars only. The reason for

entrusting us with such a small amount is to continue the Catholic mission that the Pallottine congregation has been carrying out through this institution.

Every year we spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on retreats and seminars for priests, adults, youth and children. Therefore, this center is necessary for all the activities of our diocese, especially for our retreats and seminars for children and young people, for the residential program that we conduct several times a year, as well as for our children's vacation program, for the Marian pilgrimage that we plan to conduct annually, etc.

There is no doubt that this institution will be a great investment for our future generations. This is not my personal project but the dream and desire of our representatives throughout the diocese. This project that we dream for the diocese should be of each of us. There will be no compulsory collections for this. Rather, I cordially invite those who recognize that this is God's will to become partners in this divine project through donations, interest-free loans, or deposits. Those who are unable to help financially in any way, please pray for the success of this project.

Once again, I sincerely pray that this Lent that God has given us for the renewal of life may be fruitful. I bless you all with all my heart in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

With love in Christ,

Bishop John Panathottathil CMI
Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Melbourne