

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



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CIRCULAR

We are once again entering the holy season of Lent. The 40-day fast of Jesus is the basis of this period known as Great Lent. However, we usually call this period 50 days of Lent. The reason for saying 50 days of Lent is the tradition of Marthoma Christians who fasted from ‘**Pethurtha**’ Sunday to Easter Sunday. The Syriac word ‘Pethurtha’ means ending, looking back. This word signifies ending material celebrations and returning to spirituality.

We enter Lent with the Holy Qurbana, and the penitential service held on Ash Monday. The cross drawn on the forehead with ashes fosters the thought of suffering and death. When we say ash, it means dust. This indicates that one day I too will become dust.

God himself speaks to us about how to make this short life on earth that God gives us only once meaningful. Prayer is defined as a conversation with God. Speaking and listening are equally important in conversation. We spend most of our time talking to God. Consciously listening to God is also part of prayer. This Lent is an opportunity to listen God more.

We spend most of our time for the material well-being and achievements of our lives. But a few days that we desire the most for God's blessing and experience of God are essential for our spiritual life. Fasting, prayer, and acts of penance are the best ways to connect with God. Lent is a sign of the journey to God. These are holy days when we strive for spiritual purification in harmony with the suffering life of the Messiah. Fasting and prayer are putting on the armor of God (Eph. 10:12 -13).

Just as good food brings joy and celebration to the body, so prayer and fasting bring joy and enthusiasm to the soul. ‘This is the truth that Jesus revealed during his 40 days of fasting and prayer in the desert: “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from God.”’(Matthew 4:4)

A beautiful Lenten prayer of Saint Ephrem is as follows: 'Give me, your servant, purity, humility, patience, and love, O Lord, open my eyes to see my faults, and grant me the ability not to judge my neighbor.'

During this Lent, we should make a sincere effort to participate in Holy Communion every day and to involve our children in it. I also remind you to make a conscious effort not to neglect family prayer and to read the Holy Scriptures with greater zeal. Children should be taught the meaning of fasting, prayer, and abstinence and trained in it. These are the best catechism classes that parents can give to their children.

Even if you have taken two or three days off, you should participate in the fasting meditation that is held at the parish level. Holy Confession, which is held in connection with fasting, is the sacrament that helps us the most in our spiritual renewal and growth. The fast that we begin with the penitential service, is completed through the sacrament of Holy Confession. Jesus turned to Peter and looked at him (Luke 22:61). One look from Jesus changed Peter's life. He went out and wept bitterly (Luke 22:62). This is the thought of repentance that we should have during Lent. Let us wait for the gaze of Jesus. These days are an opportunity for prayer when He holds our hands and raises them.

The fasting and prayer of this Lent should naturally lead us to almsgiving. Your generous donations during the natural calamities in *Chooralmala* and *Vilangad* in Wayanad are a testament to your generosity. Seven houses are being completed in these two places. Last month I was able to visit those places and visit the houses that are being completed. I would like to express my special gratitude to all of you.

Last year, the Bishops 'Appeal for the formation of our seminary students raised \$1,30400. This Lent, as usual, the Bishops 'Appeal will be held for the education of our seminary students. As you know, our seminary is currently operating in a rented house. This year at least, we need to complete our own seminary building. The first phase of the seminary building is expected to be completed with two crores Indian Rupees. I kindly remind you to sincerely cooperate in the formation of priests who will lead the work of our diocese in the future. I remember with gratitude the help you have done and appreciate you on this occasion.

It has been decided to convene the **Eparchial Assembly** on 20, 21 November 2026 to evaluate the activities of our diocese over the past 11 years and to formulate pastoral plans for the coming years. The guideline will be circulated for discussion in all the missions and parishes of the diocese to get your suggestions and opinions. Further details will be shared shortly. I look forward to your valuable cooperation and participation.

In this Lent, I pray that prayer, fasting and almsgiving may help us to become more spiritual, while remembering the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus. 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 Panamthottathil CMI
Bishop of Syro Malabar Eparchy, Melbourne