



BELIEVERS EASTERN CHURCH

Office of the Metropolitan, Synod Secretariat, Thiruvalla, Kerala, India.

SHEPHERD'S LETTER

February 2019

✠Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Bible says that as long as the earth remains, there will be seasons in our life. And as a church, we are approaching the season of the Great Lent—a season where the church encourages all to increase their time of prayer, both as an individual and a community, while at the same time inviting us to refrain, abstain and fast from certain things.

The end goal of this discipline is to strengthen our spirit, so that our mind and heart think about heavenly things and not just things of the world. Increased prayer and fasting are encouraged by the church during the Great Lent as a means of purification and preparation of our soul—to renew the health of our soul.

This year, the 50 days of the season of Great Lent is from 3 March (Sunday) to 21 April. We have Ash Wednesday (6 March), Palm Sunday (14 April) and Holy Week (15 April to 21 April)—including Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday—celebrated specially during this season.

Here are some suggestions to make Great Lent meaningful to us.

1. Prayer and Reading the Bible

I am sure that most of you have listened to and heard my message on *Quiet Time and Having Family Prayer*. I have heard encouraging reports of many of you starting the habit of family prayer. I'm so glad for you. While keeping that

as a habit, let us use this time to develop and strengthen the discipline of a regular prayerful life.

- Strengthen a discipline of morning and evening prayer and Bible reading each day, besides that for regular family prayer.
- Hours of Prayer: Set apart ten minutes for prayer in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening; put a halt to everything you do during those ten minutes and spend the time reading God's Word and praying.
- Lenten Bible reading: Our church has produced a *Lent Daily Scripture Reading* booklet. It is attached with this letter. Four passages are given for each day. As a family and individually, spend time in reading and meditating those scriptures daily.
- Other than individual prayers, commit to participating in all prayer activities in your parish during this season.

2. Fasting

Fasting to an orthodox Christian is what physical and mental exercises are to a professional athlete whose goal is to win a medal or trophy. Fasting of mind and body, based on the obedience of prayer, renews the health of the soul and strengthens it.

Great Lent is not a season of sadness and gloominess, but it is a time of happiness and purification. We are called to anoint our faces and to cleanse our bodies as we cleanse our souls.

Embracing a simpler lifestyle, by giving up things which take away our time, money and energy, lets us create time to focus on things which can strengthen our spiritual life. Here are some suggestions to follow.

- Fast once a week or one meal a day or more frequently as your physical health can sustain.
- Give up certain food items like meat, tea, chocolate, soft drinks, etc.

- Restrict the use of
 - Television and mobile phone
 - Social media like Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.

Remember—the time we gain by giving up these activities should be used for other spiritual activities. The money we save by not eating meals, or not eating or drinking certain food or drink can be used for helping others in need.

3. Showing Kindness and Alms-giving

Historically, the church always used the season of Great Lent to help those in need. One practical way to find money to help is using the money we save by not eating meals or abstaining from certain food during our meals.

- Find widows, older people or homeless people in your community who need your help. Bring a cooked meal for them or buy some vegetables, rice or other food items for them.
- Go to the slums or leprosy colonies or areas in your neighbourhood where you know people who are poor stay. Bring them cooked food or food items and pray with them.
- As a local parish, collect food items or cook food together and take it to needy families or individuals.

God has called us to be His witnesses and as we go through this season of the Great Lent, let us get ready to tell His story to the world around us. We as Believers Eastern Church believe in continuing the traditions handed to us by the apostles and church fathers and what an opportunity to do just that!

May God's richest blessings be upon each one of you, your family and your parish.

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen✠

✠Moran Mor Athanasius Yohan I Metropolitan