



**NATIONAL PASTORAL INITIATIVE  
FOR LIFE AND THE FAMILY**

**Suggestions for Homilies and Prayers of the Faithful**

**“I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly.”  
~John 10:10b**

When Jesus reminds us that he came that we might have life, he does so in the context of laying down his own life for our sake. Defending life in our country and even in our faith communities can cause division, fear of judgment and limit our relations with others. Yet Jesus continues to offer abundant life to all, and invites us to be one with him in receiving, protecting and nurturing life.

Proclaiming the “Gospel of Life” is unavoidable if the Good News is to be incarnated in the lives of his disciples. Why not take up the challenge to include some element of the culture of life each Sunday in your parish, and whenever possible in your daily life? To be consistent with “the Gospel of Life”, we need to do it in a way that inspires unity, and dissipates fear and judgment. All of us, ordained and lay, are called to open others to the kind of relationships that make discipleship truly life-giving.

Each week, you will find here suggestions for a homily, a prayer of the faithful or an insight which can be used to foster the abundant life that Jesus came to bring us. These suggestions can also be easily adapted for family and personal prayer, or for presentations when participating with other groups or organizations. Every parish and each of us individually, are invited to make Christ’s life abundant, relevant and approachable for all.

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**March 6, 2016 – 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *Judgment robs us of true sight and life.*

The first reading and the Gospel today warn us about relying on external markers of a person’s worth. How often are we injured by the judgment of others, paralyzed by what someone else thinks, regardless of its truth? Perhaps, more importantly, how often do we categorize, evaluate and dismiss others by our own judgments? It happens so quickly, we often aren’t aware of it. Someone’s irritating driving “makes sense” because of their age, sex or ethnicity; another’s “bad” behaviour is due to the neighbourhood they were raised in; or an emotional “reaction” can be discounted because of illness, (dis)ability, or “lack of objectivity”. When we make judgments about people, we are blinded by our own perceptions and robbed of the life flowing through God’s people. God created us in His image, not so we could judge, but in order that we might truly see. The second reading reminds us that all which is covered in darkness will be revealed by the light. We do not need to judge because God is taking care of that. We can watch for light with great expectation, receiving others and ourselves with gentleness, curiosity and hope.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For resistance to the habit of judgment, and for eyes to see as God sees, we pray to the Lord.

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**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, healer of blindness, cover our eyes with mud and restore our sight. Help us to see in one another what you see and love. Teach us to refrain from judgment, and to remain open to the possibility of conversion and change, in ourselves and in each other. Amen.

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### **March 13, 2016 – 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *Our words of mercy can give new life.*

These readings convey a tangible energy for conversion. Proclaimed effectively, the people who hear them should walk away feeling hopeful, about their own conversion, and about offering conversion to others. No pressure. In all three cases, we hear about God who is doing something new, who still proclaims what is right and true, but without slavery to a law we cannot measure up to. Instead, it is God who says, “I love you. You were made for more than this.” It is so tempting for us to categorize sins as better and worse, and then to cast the adulterers, the pedophiles, and the abusers at the feet of others for condemnation. We do so with self-righteous indignation. But what would we do if Jesus asked us to cast the stone? Whatever you have done, and whatever has been done to you, you were made for more freedom, more gentleness, more love. So go, loved in your brokenness, and try not to repeat your mistakes. Knowing that we have fallen short, when we are loved anyway, we are given a hope-filled energy to move forward. So, this week, speak words of mercy – to yourself, and to others. What a beautiful reason we will have to sing with the Psalmist: “The Lord has done great things for us; we are filled with joy.”

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the grace to speak words of mercy that offer new life and second chances, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, merciful Judge, help us to feel your tenderness when we have failed, and to find ourselves at your feet. Allow us to see ourselves with your compassion, that we might stand up and resolve not to sin again. Having been freed from condemnation for our sins, give us the grace to extend that same tender mercy to one another, that more people may find freedom in your life-giving mercy. Amen.

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### **March 20, 2016 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *When we empty ourselves, we are filled with life.*

After a long reading, a simple homily with a different angle can have a powerful impact. Consider using the *kenosis* of the second reading as the lens for the Passion: “Being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him....” Briefly list examples of the ways Jesus humbles and empties Himself in the readings: eats with someone He knows will betray Him, settles a fight about who is the greatest, prays for His friends who will fail Him, faces fear so complete that His sweat is like blood, receives comfort from an angel, chastises His disciples for resorting to violence, allows Himself to be arrested and denied, is misunderstood and seen as more dangerous than a murderer, hears crowds of people demand His crucifixion, offers forgiveness to His captors, endures taunting, extends mercy to the man next to Him, and gives Himself into the hands of His Father. In all of this, Jesus is not a victim, but embraces the path before Him so His suffering can be freely transformed into our salvation. During this Holy Week, how can you humbly empty yourself, not as a victim, but as a free follower of Jesus, to give new life? Can you listen with patience to petty arguments? Can you forgive a friend who is not there for you the way you want them to be? Can you receive comfort or assistance from others with gratitude? Can you resist being violent or yelling, even if it seems fitting? In the midst of life’s challenges, we have choices – and the counter-

intuitive way of the Gospel is that when we stop clinging to our entitlement, we actually receive the new life for which we were made.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the willingness to empty ourselves as our road to new life, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Emptied Jesus, you let go of everything that we might be filled with the hope of new life. Help us to let go of what prevents us from finding life in you, that we may become the people you created us to be. Show us the small ways by which we can also choose emptying and humility, and draw life from finding you in the smallest sacrifices of love. Amen.

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### **March 24, 2016 – THURSDAY OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

**Homily Idea:** *Remember that your life depends on dying.*

The Eucharist, like the Passover, is a ritual meal instituted to help us remember that our sustenance depends on others. More specifically, our lives depend on death. This is literally true in the sense that plants and animals die to become our food, but it is also figuratively true in the washing of the feet. Jesus models service because we all have to do both parts – the living and the dying, the giving and receiving. We want to live and give, but we resist the dying and receiving, but both are required for all of us. The disciples resist Jesus’ service because they think He should be above service. They resist His death because they are afraid it means they have wasted their time on a false promise. They are wrong. Our living will always include dying until, eventually, fully living will include letting go of our very life to receive the next life. For the next three days, pay special attention to each meal you eat and each act of service you perform. Pay attention to what has been given up for you, and to what you give up for others. Thank God for each opportunity to be caught up in His living and dying.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For every living thing that has died to itself that we might live, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Creator of all things, you have written the laws of living into the whole world, allowing death to give new life. From the labour pains and birth of mothers to the flowering of plants giving way to dormancy, Creation proclaims the dying and rising of life. Teach us to be servants of your vision, to embrace every season and service. Amen.

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### **March 25, 2016 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD**

**Homily Idea:** *To live by burying the dead.*

As the disciples flee from the violence and despair of His Crucifixion, Joseph and Nicodemus ask for Jesus’ body. They anoint Him, wrap Him, and place Him in the tomb. In his ultimate brokenness and vulnerability, after it is all finished, they bless their Friend by burying Him with their sorrow. Our presence in the midst of others’ suffering and death is a healing ointment, a miniscule mercy when mercies seem sparse. Let us join Joseph and Nicodemus in attentive vigil to the broken body of Jesus, and the brokenness of our own families and communities.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the mercy to stay with the suffering and dying, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Dying Jesus, draw us close to you. Remove our fear of death, and help us to stay close to each other when life is ending. As death comes, help us to bury the dead, to let go of the things that can wait and to attend to the anointing, the story-telling, the healing and the grieving that lead us through to life after death. Amen.

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## March 26/27, 2016 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

**Homily Idea:** *We will be surprised by new life.*

In the Gospel for both the Vigil and for Easter Sunday morning, the disciples go to the tomb to carry on the vigil and care for the dead. Expecting to grieve and mourn some more, they are surprised and startled to find things out of sorts. In the Vigil reading, it is the angels who ask, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" On Sunday morning, it is Jesus, who simply says Mary's name. By showing up for the grieving, we will eventually discover there, perhaps when we least expect it, the new life that rises from the ashes. So go into your life, attending to the discomfort and the difficulty, in joyful expectation that the cracks will eventually give way to light.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For openness to be surprised by Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Risen Jesus, shed the scales from our eyes, grown weary at the Cross and impatient in suffering. When we have become resigned to dying, shake us awake to your victory over the grave. Transform us so we can come to the tomb, expecting the Resurrection. Amen.

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