



**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.

April 2, 2017 – 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *God uses death to bring new life.*

Our culture is so distanced from, afraid of, and in denial about death. During Lent, our Church asks us to practise it by our sacrifices, and to focus on the fruitful Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus. In the first reading and the Gospel, God raises His people from death, first from the death of exile, and then Lazarus from the tomb. God raises us not because death is bad, but because it is a pathway to new life – for us and for others. When Paul writes to the Romans, he is not trying to vilify the body in favour of the spirit – he is trying to say that if we see death as the world sees it, we deny God’s power to lift and transform us precisely through dying. This is why we stand against physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, why we surround and support the dying and their families, why we look with hope on suffering – because God has a part in our pain, and His is a Resurrection story.

Prayer of the Faithful: For trust that God will meet us in our suffering and dying and transform it into new life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God, who died and rose again, walk with us as we follow you to the crosses of our own lives. Help us to trust that you will raise us to new life precisely in and through our dying. Remind us that you raise us to new life not only for our own sake, but to proclaim to the world your power over death. Help us to be willing to make our lives a faithful witness to your Resurrection story. Amen.

April 9, 2017 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: This is **the** story of our life.

Palm Sunday is such an incredible liturgy. We wave palms in celebration of the ones who did it first, with Jesus riding in among them in Jerusalem. We embody all the hope Jesus brought. Then we read the Passion, the story of His suffering, and his dying, and his promises, ending with the soldiers sealing the tomb, as if to pour water on any flame of hope. This is the story of Holy Week: we enter into the most crucial moments of our lives with all the enthusiasm of the crowd, only to be disappointed, crushed, scared, and demoralized by walking through the mess of it. This is **the** story, our story, God's story of life. The ending is coming, in just one week's time. Isaiah's prophetic words challenge us to have courage while we wait for the end of the story. Even though we suffer, we "shall not be put to shame." This is the good news, the gospel of life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For faithfulness in trusting God in suffering as we await the promised Resurrection, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of palms and celebration, of passion and suffering, draw us into the mystery of your dying with hope in your Resurrection. Mold and fashion our lives around the story of Palm Sunday as we wait in joyful anticipation for the new life you have won by the Cross. Amen.

April 13, 2017 – THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (Holy Thursday)

Homily Idea: *Life is the product of what we do with its gift.*

Each of us has been offered a priceless gift in the minutes and days and years we get to live on this earth. From the moment of our conception, God gives us the gift of existence, of changing the world by simply being in it. Jesus has offered us the ultimate example of how to live a meaningful life: he kneels down and washes the feet of those who follow Him. He makes a gift of the life He receives when he says, "This is my Body that is for you." Then He tells us, "Do this in remembrance of me." If you want a fulfilling, joy-filled life, then make your life a gift of joy-filled service to others. In the meals you make, the preparations for feasts and famines, the baths you run, and the items you pick up that you didn't leave, you are making a gift of your life. This is how we wait for Jesus and how we bring Him to a hurting world.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the willingness to let our lives be gifts of service for others, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, you washed our feet and made your Body food for our life. Whisper your invitation to follow your example into our hearts when we meet opportunities to serve others with selfishness, resentment, and arrogance. Remind us our lives are a gift, and the only fitting response is to allow our lives to be a gift to others. Amen.

April 14, 2017 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD (Good Friday)

Homily Idea: *Our eternal life came at the price of Jesus' suffering and death.*

One of the great mysteries of human life is its gift comes through pain – just ask your mother. Just as our physical birth comes through great labour for both the mother and the child, so too our eternal life is borne from the suffering and dying of Jesus. On this Good Friday, as you reflect on the Passion of Jesus, on Jesus' pain, and your own pain in accompanying Him through this suffering that ultimately benefits us all, sit with the words

of the letter to the Hebrews: "Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to learn obedience through our suffering, that we might follow Jesus in offering His new life to others, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Crucified Jesus, you entered faithfully into the suffering of the Crucifixion. By your Cross you have redeemed us, along with the whole world. Teach us to face our suffering as you faced yours. Draw near to us in our pain, as we draw near to you on the Cross on this holiest of Fridays. Amen.

April 15/16 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday)

Homily Idea: *Alleluia, God has redeemed us from death and given us new life, this day!*

In Psalm 118, proclaimed at both the Vigil and the Sunday Easter Mass, we praise the God who makes this day, this day in which death has been destroyed by the Resurrection. In so many seasons of our life, we await this day -- when mourning turns to dancing, when sacrifice has its long-awaited pay-off. This is the day that God has made; the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is what gives us hope when things are not so good. Perhaps the seasons of your life are not quite so aligned with the arrival of the feast. Perhaps someone you love is still battling an addiction; maybe your grief is overwhelming; you might still be waiting for the answers to your prayers -- even while Jesus has walked out of the tomb. This story, this Resurrection, this victory over death has already happened, and is still not yet fully arrived on this side of heaven. But whether our lives are currently a proclamation of the Resurrection, we celebrate this feast of Easter today -- so that we can practise the joy of new life, and so we can maintain our hope through the more challenging seasons of life. Practise, for the next 50 days, as much as you practised the sacrifice of Lent for 40 days, the celebration that God is alive and is ever working to bring us new life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the joy and hope of Easter to fill our hearts and our lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, rejected cornerstone and risen Saviour, give us the gift of great joy, that in all things you are working Resurrection. Fill us with hope that no matter how difficult our lives feel, you will use every moment to tell the story of new life. Amen.

April 23 – 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Homily Idea: *Their lives were changed by the Resurrection – and so must ours be.*

In the first reading from Acts, the disciples go out of hiding and their lives are different. Devoted to prayer and study, service and care, their community and their lives have been fundamentally changed by Jesus' coming, dying, and rising. In the Gospel, we see the first whispers of this. Hiding away, locked in the upper room, the disciples are propelled out of their fear by Jesus coming among them. When Thomas comes back, he isn't ready for the change. His heart is still gripped with fear, and his life is still in the locked room. The Gospel says that after eight days they were back in the house and Thomas was with them (perhaps he had never left?). Thomas' doubt is not just an intellectual unwillingness to believe, but the resistance of hiding to life outside. He cannot move from the grief without an experience of Jesus' new life. Jesus reaches out to Thomas by appearing to him again, a grace that the rest of us do not get. But many of us need an experience of healing to move us from fear

and unbelief into faith and hope. May we receive the graces God gives us to move out of fear. May our witness bring grace, hope and faith to others in need of evidence that Jesus lives.

Prayer of the Faithful: For lives visibly changed by encountering Jesus and believing in Him, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Saint Thomas, carry us in prayer to the hands of Jesus. Pray for us when we are stuck in doubt and afraid to change our lives. May we receive the graces God gives us to move out of fear. May our witness bring grace, hope and faith to others in need of evidence Jesus lives. Amen.

April 30 – 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A

Homily Idea: *New life comes from telling the true story.*

Have you ever been at an event with someone else, but in the retelling you're not sure you were in the same place? Or, maybe, you've been confused going through life, not really sure what has been happening, and all of a sudden things seem to start to make sense? All the readings this week are focused on clarifying what has happened in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus. In the first reading, Peter walks out of the upper room and into ministry proclaiming the good news of what has happened. He is the most unlikely preacher because he denied Jesus so profoundly. He's got the story straight now, the picture of what really happened. Jesus did not abandon him, but rescued him, and now Peter is ready to tell everyone he was wrong. What life comes for Peter from realizing he was wrong! This was not the end, but a beautiful and life-giving new beginning! In the Gospel, the disciples on the road to Emmaus are lost and wandering home, but Jesus helps them to see Him by rereading the story and to discover what they had not seen. Peter's letter is a continuation of the sharing of the good news. We have so much life, so much joy, so much peace when we step out of confusion, denial, and despair, and let ourselves rest in the good news we had been telling untrue stories. The good news is that God is at work in reality, raising us to new life, even if the process is not finished yet.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the true story of God's work in our lives to heal our blindness and our pride, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of Emmaus, you walked with your disciples until they could see the truth of what you had done in their lives. Walk beside us and wipe away the lies and confusion that keep us from seeing the truth. Amen.
