



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.

The following suggestions provide a catechetical series for Advent. Each Sunday we are invited to “put on” and practise a virtue which helps us wait for and welcome the One we already know. The suggestions are an invitation to “make the connect” between our lives and the season of Advent.

December 3, 2017 – 1st Sunday of ADVENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *REMEMBER to receive God’s gift of life.*

When we are waiting, especially in a world as busy and impatient as ours, it is easy to forget who we are and what we came for. The first reading is Isaiah’s frustrated prophecy as the people returned from Exile. They had been waiting for decades to return home. When they did, they discovered their waiting was not over. They had much rebuilding to do. The early Christians (in Corinth and everywhere) were waiting for Jesus to return – imminently. They died without seeing Him return. Jesus invites the disciples to stay awake. The Master’s surprise return and invitation to stay awake is no reason to exhaust ourselves. If we wait with the urgent expectation that we will get what we want any second, we will be repeatedly disappointed and frustrated. While you wait – in life and in Advent – practise remembering. Remember who you are, “the work of God’s hands.” Your whole life is clay that God is working into something beautiful. This waiting is a time of molding, of God shaping you. So remember this waiting has purpose, and rest here in the waiting. Maybe smile too – while you remember and wait.

Prayer of the Faithful: For memory of whose we are and what God is doing in us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God, the potter, mold us and make us your people. When we become impatient, help us remember that these seasons of waiting are also shaping us. Give us the grace to breathe deeply into the wait, to anticipate the beauty you are working while we wait. Amen.

December 10, 2017 – 2nd Sunday of ADVENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *DETACH WITH LOVE to receive God's gift of life.*

We are so impatient with God's timing, so often convinced we know better than God. More than impatient, we are deeply attached to and invested in the seconds, moments and days that bring us happiness and frustration, with preferences for one and not the other. Detachment is the spiritual work of remembering what Peter tells us, "that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day." God has promised us love and constant presence. He is with us in all things. When we feel the frustrations, the joys, the disappointments, the graces, and the losses of life, we can attach ourselves deeply to Jesus, and lovingly detach or release our death grip on everything else. When we practise letting go of all the ups and downs, the valleys get filled in and the hills made smooth. This way, while we wait, we can "be found by Him at peace."

Prayer of the Faithful: For deeper attachment to God and loving detachment from everything else, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Shepherd God, you have led us into the wilderness and stayed here with us. While we wait for the coming of your Kingdom and the promise of your Infant Son to be fully realized on earth and in heaven, teach us to keep our eyes on you, no matter what. Help us let go of the things that distract and destroy us, trusting that everything we need is found in you. Amen.

December 17, 2017 – 3rd Sunday of ADVENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *TRUST to receive God's gift of life.*

Trust is a confused concept in our world. Some people think it means blind obedience. Others think of it more as a currency that is gained and lost like a stock market trading sin and grace. Trust is actually being deeply rooted in the promises of God so that unpredictable life storms have less chance at uprooting us. When we make a continual choice to trust God, all of us can pray with Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." Waiting is not a passive activity, where we sit around and numb ourselves with our phones and so be out of touch, ignoring people or passing the time. Our instructions are clear: trust the promises and do the work of bringing good news while you wait. This week, wrap gifts for someone who won't get any without you. Take Christmas lights over to a neighbour who is not well enough to hang her own. Forgive someone. Bake treats and share them with a person whom you find hard to love. Trust that God's favour is here now, even while you wait.

Prayer of the Faithful: For trust that doing God's work paves the way for His coming, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the oppressed, the broken hearted, the captives, and the prisoners, teach us to trust that we have been anointed to bring your good news. While we wait for you to heal our broken world, teach us to work in faithful trust alongside you, cherishing every ounce of goodness, healing, freedom, and release we encounter on the way. Amen.

December 24, 2017 – 4th Sunday of ADVENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *LET IT BE DONE to receive God's gift of life.*

David needs to hear the prophet Nathan to be reminded that he is resisting God's plan. "God is going to work in you, David, if you stop working against him," Nathan seems to say. Mary's response to God's message from Gabriel is ever instructive, "Let it be done to me." We could pray this every morning and then again every moment when we feel frustration, anger, resentment, struggle, and resistance. We need to practise giving God permission to have our lives and our hearts. Every time we take back the reins, God waits for us to offer them back again. He is patient. Over these next days and weeks, there will be much celebrating and many frustrations. Holidays and family, memories and loss, bring out the best and the worst in us. What if, while we wait for and then receive the gift of Jesus over these next days and weeks, we whisper with Mary, "Let it be done to me." May Jesus find us ready to receive Him in the most unlikely moments.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to let God be in us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the Angels, you spoke your word to Mary and hoped she would receive you. As you call to us, help us to hear you and welcome you into the most unlikely moments that they might be places of grace. Help us to give ourselves over to you, so this Christmas season is one where your will may be done in and through us. Amen.

December 25, 2017 – THE SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD (CHRISTMAS)

Homily Idea: *WELCOME the new life that comes to us in Jesus, over and over again.*

How often does an unexpected knock at your door spark irritation? In all the readings at each of the Mass on Christmas, we see God showing up in human lives and history, God knocking at the door of humanity. When Jesus does show up, it is inconvenient, messy, and miraculous. Jesus has come, is here, and will come again. "Let us go now to Bethlehem" – let us show up at the door, receive gifts as signs of love, eat food with gratitude, remember to share with others, be kind, change the plans, make more room, revel in the mess. Jesus will show up this Christmas, if you show up at the door to let Him in. Welcome Him in – He's not afraid of the mess, the irritable kids or broken family members. He's ready to do life with you however it looks. Practise welcoming God in....

Prayer of the Faithful: For welcome hearts, homes, and hands for Jesus and all His people this Christmas, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Infant Jesus, arriving in a manger mess of animals and straw, and strangers becoming friends, teach us to welcome you however you come this Christmas. When celebration gives way to stress, remind us to sit down with you in the middle of it, and revel in the gifts that exist even when things aren't the way we want them to be. Then, help us to carry on to the next opportunity to welcome you this Christmas. Amen.

December 31, 2017 – FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Homily Idea: *Your family (however it looks) is a school of love for life.*

There are lots of potential triggers this Sunday that can leave parishioners feeling isolated and not good enough: kids are fighting with their parents, couples are contemplating divorce, singles don't feel like they fit, widows feel

like they aren't families anymore, couples are mourning their infertility, and blended and single parent families don't have the right roles filled in. **This Sunday can be good news for all of us, if we preach good news.** The first reading highlights the virtues of a family rooted in God: joy, honour and respect for each other, prayer, assisting each other when ill or frail or aging, embracing the gifts of life for as long as life lasts, and kindness. What if this year, our resolutions focused on being a household with more of these virtues in them? The second reading has two options. If you preach about Abraham, highlight how God offered a miracle in infertility, and then how God saved Isaac from Abraham's knife. No matter how messed up your family is right now, there is hope God can make it better. If you preach about Colossians, focus less on the roles (for example, **Who** should be and do what?) and more on the virtues: compassion, kindness, meekness, patience, forgiveness, love. Mary and Joseph are the most famous teen mother and foster father in human history. Their baby will die brutally on a cross. Their family and our families (including roommates, grandparents, adopted and foster and biological children, and family friends, and neighbours) are called into the Temple to present ourselves to God as a school of love for life. The good news is we do not need to be perfect. We need to be willing to let God teach us how to love each other in our families, for the sake of the world.

Prayer of the Faithful: For all of our families to be schools of love for life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Holy Family, make us what you were and we are to be. Help us to see our frustrations and challenges as opportunities to practise love, patience, kindness, and forgiveness. Teach us to trust that our families are places for us to learn to love in this life in preparation for the next. Give us patience and mercy with ourselves and each other. Amen.

January 1, 2018 – THE SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Homily Idea: *Treasure the gift of God's plan for your life.*

The blessing in the first reading is such a marvelous gift in our Scriptures: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." Mary, Mother of Jesus and our spiritual mother, knew this blessedness, and as God revealed His plan for her life, she treasured it in her heart and whispered "yes" to a future she could not see. God is revealing a beautiful plan for your life, one that will have you carry Jesus to your family, friends, and neighbours. Listen for God, revealing His plan for your life. Treasure His plan for your life to be bigger and better than you plan, and whisper "yes" into this new year of bearing and discovering Jesus.

Celebrants during the homily might bless the parishioners with the blessing from the Book of Numbers, or invite parishioners and family members to turn to each other and repeat it to each other. Make the response, "Yes."

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage, like Mary, to say yes to God's plan for our lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Mary, Holy Mother of God, pray for us as we aim to treasure our blessedness as you did. Lay our "yes" at the feet of your Son, Jesus, that we might carry Him into the world, to be blessed by His love and to bless others with it. Amen.
