



## 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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**February 4, 2018 – 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B**

**Homily Idea:** *God comes to bring new life to the broken hearted.*

The heartache of Job can be so moving if we will let his lament speak to people. Unemployment, grief, illness, infertility, mental illness, bullying, injustice, trauma...the people in our pews face struggles they often carry silently, feeling alone. Jesus comes to meet us precisely in our sufferings, to face our demons and drive them out, to offer us divine healing. We often misinterpret this to mean that following Jesus will give us what we want – and quickly we discover we are often wrong. Jesus does not remove all suffering or promise us prosperity and pain-free living. He gives us what we need – accompaniment through the valleys, strength to face our challenges, and healing in various forms designed to give us more freedom and love. This is the blessing of following Him that Paul shares with the Corinthians. What is lying in the pit of your broken heart? Will you lay it at Jesus’ feet and trade with Him your burden for the peace He can offer you?

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the trust to give our broken hearts to Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, healer and lover of the broken hearted, help us to lay our broken hearts at your feet. Teach us to trust you, to face our suffering with courage, and to trust you can meet us there and give us what we need. Amen.

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## February 11, 2018 – 6<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

**Homily Idea:** Abundant Christian life is a spiritual AND physical reality.

This week's readings illustrate the development of teaching on the unity of the body and soul. In Leviticus, the ancient Israelites develop a quarantine policy that prevents physical spread of disease, but also spiritualizes the ailment, resulting in exclusion from the community as well. This remains a temptation in our own time – to keep the homeless out of our clean churches, for example. But the second reading and the Gospel challenge us to remember that our categories often fail to recognize the humanity of the "other". Jesus touches the leper, an act that would have rendered Him unclean, and He heals him. He restores the man's body to health and the person to community. Of course we think the physically sick should be included in our communities today! Yet we need to be challenged on including and welcoming those on the margins of our communities – persons struggling with addiction, mental illness, childhood trauma, victims of abuse, the imprisoned, residential school survivors, refugees, and so many others. The struggles of body and soul should never become a reason for us to give up on people.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the desire to welcome those who struggle in body and soul, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, lover of sinners and healer of body and soul, open our eyes to see you in those who make us uncomfortable. When we are tempted to draw lines between ourselves and others, make yourself visible despite those lines of separation we imagine, that we might cross them in faith, finding you in your beautiful and broken people. Amen.

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## February 14, 2018 – ASH WEDNESDAY

**Homily Idea:** *Let God make your life bigger by getting small.*

Pride, defensiveness, excuses, avoidance, blame. There are so many tactics we use to avoid facing our mistakes, sins, and hurts. Each of these tactics makes us feel big while actually making us small, ineffective, and prone to more pain. Repentance is not a word we use often and, when we do, it often makes us feel shame and guilt. But what if repentance is actually just about getting real, laying down the stuff that doesn't work, and being small enough to recognize that God can do more with our weakness than with our denial. "At an acceptable time, I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." We have all sinned alongside the Psalmist. The ashes are a reminder that our sin gives us access to Jesus who dies and rises for us. So, "return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." Repentance sets us free. Who among us doesn't want more freedom, more life?

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For joy in turning back to God, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of gracious mercy and steadfast love, fill us with joy at the thought of turning back to you. Help us to set down our sin with eagerness, to walk away from shame, and to trust you will hold us in mercy and love. Make this Lent a time of joy, where we can grow in freedom. Amen.

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## February 18, 2018 – 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

**Homily Idea:** *Sacrifice, rather than destruction, is the way of life.*

The covenant God makes with Noah is not at all the rainbows and cute animations of children's storybook Bibles. It is a powerful reconciliation after one of the most destructive disasters in our Scriptures. God promises

us destruction will not be a solution to the problem of our sin. So often in our lives, when we face conflict, when we are stuck in problems at work or at home, or traffic gets us frustrated, we are tempted by destructive solutions. We use insults or shut down conversation, get rid of the person who seems to be the problem, or blame other drivers and pollute the emotional environment in our own car with no effect on the other driver! Jesus' Death and Resurrection is a new way – the way of sacrifice. When Jesus goes out into the desert and is tempted by Satan, he doesn't destroy the temptation or Satan himself. Jesus accepts that He will be hungry, feel suffering, and wait on God's way. Lent is a great time to focus on where new life comes out of what I give up or go without. Destruction removes problems for a time, but sin has a way of sneaking back in. Sacrifice is an invitation for Jesus to join us as we face challenges, to let go of the illusion that sin and brokenness are the problems. Sacrifice allows us to face challenges and to grow, instead of using our power to try to fix things we often cannot fix on our own.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For grace to practise sacrifice rather than destruction, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, tempted in the desert, you lived a witness to God's promise that destruction is not the answer to the world's sin. You modeled a way of sacrifice for our salvation. This Lent, teach us to walk in the way of sacrifice. Help us to desire the growth that comes from going without some of our usual comforts, that we might follow in how you resisted destruction as the way to respond to sin. Amen.

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## February 25, 2018 – 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

**Homily Idea:** *What we learn on the mountain is meant to be a lesson for the rest of our ordinary life.*

In the first reading and the Gospel, we have incredible stories from mountain tops: the attempted sacrifice of Isaac and the Transfiguration of Jesus. In both cases, people misunderstand what God is doing on the mountain. Abraham thinks he's been asked to kill his Son, and Peter, James and John are ready to move permanently into a reality where heaven descends to earth. In both cases, God uses the mountaintop to teach a lesson about life. Abraham learns God does not desire the death of his son, even while He honours Abraham's obedience to what he thought God wanted. In the Gospel, the disciples learn God touches our lives in powerful ways to affirm us, or to clarify things, but that those moments of affirmation and clarity are not permanent. They are food for the rest of the day. Many of us would love to spend the day eating. We struggle to view food and mealtimes as nourishment for the work, play and relationships that are our vocation for the rest of the day. Whether we receive correction or affirmation in the mountaintop moments of our faith lives, we need to remember those moments are not places to get stuck, but to carry back out into the rest of our lives.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For courage to take God's lessons on the mountains into the rest of our lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of the mountaintops, you meet us in unexpected and extraordinary ways. Help us to receive the lessons you teach us and to carry them back into our ordinary lives without clinging to the extraordinary moments. Amen.

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