



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.

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.

January 7, 2018 – SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *Arise and shine! You are a beacon of God's light and life, who has come again!*

"Arise, shine, for your light has come!" The opening words of the first reading give us a command we are often hesitant to follow: what if people think we are arrogant? But we are "sharers in the promise" of Jesus, and we have so much good news to share. Like the Magi, who make an extraordinary trip to pay homage to the newborn Christ, we are invited to be the heralds of the Good News, to proclaim that Jesus is born and there is freedom in Him who lived and loved, died and rose for us. Let yourselves be overwhelmed with joy – from time to time, if you can't manage it constantly – and dare to invite others in. Our light has come. Let it shine!

Prayer of the Faithful: For overwhelming joy, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, source of overwhelming joy, captivate our hearts, our lives, our imaginations. Lift us up and give us grace to shine humbly and honestly with the radiance of loving you. Amen.

January 14, 2018 – 2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *The way we live (our whole lives) is a witness to the gift of life God gives to us.*

When John identifies Jesus, His and the disciples' lives take a radical turn. Those first disciples left their life's work, received new names: they took a big turn to follow Him. For contemporary Christians, many brought up in faith from infancy, the "turns" can seem less dramatic. But the first and second readings demonstrate just how all-encompassing our identity as Jesus' followers is intended to be. First, Samuel rises over and over again in the night to respond to Eli – and it is Eli who identifies for Samuel that it is actually God speaking. Do we get up and lie down as a loving response to God's call? Or do we hit the snooze button, explain His voice away, or simply ignore the instructions we would rather not hear? The second reading takes us to sexuality, where many of us feel discomfort. Just like getting up in the morning, and the daily work we do, our sexuality is an area of our life that God wants to be full of blessing and gift. Are we living and expressing our sexuality in a way that brings life – not only to us but to others, whether we are married or single? Beyond sex itself, do we treat our bodies and the bodies of others as temples of the Holy Spirit? Are we attentive to hunger and thirst, the need for rest and work, adequate shelter and care for ourselves and all God's people? It's not enough that we show up for Sunday Mass – Jesus asks us to follow Him in living a life worthy of His call, in every part of our lives.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to follow Jesus in every area of our lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God who walked the earth, you know the gift it is to live in time, to feel and hear, see and smell our way through life. As we follow you, leave no corner of our lives unexamined. Help us to invite you into the most intimate and ordinary corners of our lives, that in all places and ways our lives be a witness to your goodness. Amen.

January 21, 2018 – 3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *The time for letting God change your life is now.*

Three weeks into January, I'm guessing there are already some failed New Year's resolutions? It doesn't matter if you messed it up already, or again. Now is the time. It wasn't too late for Nineveh, and it's not too late for you.

When Paul wrote that the present world is passing away, he believed Jesus would return within his lifetime. Two thousand years later, we know Paul was wrong but not his approach. We do not know how many hours or days we will be given in this life. Every day we get closer to our meeting Jesus. The Kingdom of God is near, and when you feel that twinge of God's invitation to change (to go to bed on time, to speak kindly, to apologize, to nourish your body, or to quit telling lies of omission, for example), stop putting it off till tomorrow. Start now. When you fail, start again. Our own strength can fail us, but God is doing the heavy lifting. Our culture tells us that once we've messed it up, it's probably not worth fixing. Jesus tells us to come and follow Him – again and again.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to let God continue the work of change in us – even after we fail, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of mercy, your Kingdom is near to us. Let us not put off until tomorrow what we can begin again today. Protect us from becoming discouraged by our failings. Help us to let you in to help us over and over again. May we, like those who listened to Jonah, be inspired to repent, to turn away from the things that bind us, so you can set us free. Amen.

January 28, 2018 – 4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *God is speaking into you the words of new life you need right now. Are you listening?*

Sometimes it feels like only other people (maybe even only those in Bible stories) get messages from God. But Moses promises that God will speak through people, while Paul reminds us that anxiety is not God's plan for any of us. Jesus casts out a demon, and the people don't recognize who Jesus is until the demon names Him and is cast out. God is speaking in your life – perhaps through the voices of friends, family members, colleagues or strangers? Perhaps in your own frustration and irritation? Maybe even through the demons who attack your confidence, fill you with worry, tempt you to the same old sins? Whatever you need right now, God is speaking in a still small voice. If you are having trouble hearing, ask Him to help you listen, that you might hear the words He is whispering to give you new life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For ears to hear what God is speaking to us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of prophets, who longs for people with no anxiety, whose Son casts out demons, speak to us. Clean out our ears and open our hearts, that we might hear you speaking, especially when your words are hard for us to hear. Give us the gift of letting go of what we want to hear, that we might truly listen to you. Amen.
