



**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 4, 2018 – 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B**

**Homily Idea:** *God made us for life, not for slavery.*

Throughout the Scriptures, God’s people remember that we worship the One who brought His people out of slavery. It’s not just a history lesson. God’s people keep going back – to idols, to oppression, to sin. When Jesus turns over the money tables in the Temple, He’s telling the people that God’s house is not just another (or a sanctified) structure for the same sin we live out in the world. Slavery is alive and well in our world – in human trafficking and black markets in our own communities, but also in our hearts. We are addicted to all kinds of things – alcohol and drugs, food, comfort, being right, anger and selfishness to name a few. God is calling us during this season of Lent to turn over the tables of our own enslavements, and to turn our attention to setting others free from theirs, especially where our comforts cause the slavery and suffering of others.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For freedom from slavery in our world and in our hearts, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, you turned the tables in the Temple. Help us to see and despise the ways we choose our own slavery. Make us active in choosing life instead, for ourselves and for others. Amen.

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## March 11, 2018 – 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

**Homily Idea:** We have life because of grace, not because we earn it.

Our actions have consequences, and the consequence of sin is death. It's hard to see that sometimes – we choose sin because it seems to pay off, offering us the perception of immediate relief from our fears, pain, and woundedness. But sin always does damage, even when we cannot see it. The first reading reminds us that sin led the Israelites to be exiled in Babylon. The second reading and the Gospel remind us that Jesus came to set us free from the death and exile of sin. We continue to fail to live up to God's call, yet God continues to pour mercy and grace on us through the Death and Resurrection of His Son. Are you still trying to earn love? Odds are that your Lenten practices have not gone perfectly. Maybe you're feeling guilty about that? These practices are not meant to lead you to perfection but to a person – Jesus. In your weakness, in your failure, in your practice, cast yourself into Jesus' arms. That is where your life is.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the death of any false belief that we can earn salvation, and for a growing trust in Jesus' saving work in us, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God, you loved the world – and us in it – so completely that you sent your only Son in order that we can believe in your goodness and ours. Teach us to trust in your saving work, and draw us into the dying to self that allows us to receive your new life and Resurrection. Amen.

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## March 18, 2018 – 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

**Homily Idea:** *Jesus learned obedience through suffering to be raised to new life – and so can we.*

The readings have some unpopular words this week: suffering, obedience, servant, death. Perhaps even more jarring is that these words mark the way of life – a pretty stark contradiction to what our world tells us about the best way to live. It's easy to get caught up in the lie that blessing means the absence of suffering and a freedom to do whatever we want. The second reading reminds us that Jesus came to earth and *learned* obedience that led to new life. He lived this way to show us how. When your life is difficult, when you'd rather not follow God's rules, when you are tired of serving generously, and when you face death (your own and others'), these are invitations to enter more fully into God's way. So we can pray with the Psalmist: "Create in me a clean heart!" When we enter into life's challenging moments with faith in God's way of Resurrection, we participate in God's saving work. This is the narrow way to new life...it is hard and holy.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For obedient and servant hearts in the face of suffering and death, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Suffering Jesus, draw us into your way of living. Teach us to desire a clean heart more than comfort or relief. Help us to follow you to eternal life. Amen.

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## March 25, 2018 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

**Homily Idea:** *Laying a body in a tomb is a sign of our hope in God's abundant life.*

At the end of this long reading of the Passion, Joseph and a small handful of faithful disciples lay Jesus' body in a tomb and roll a stone to close the grave. It seems so final, so despairing. Those first disciples certainly believed they were participating in an ending. We know the rest of the story, that their actions were part of the most important beginning in human history. As we lean into this holiest of weeks, we are invited to see with Resurrection eyes which transform our whole existence: death is not the end. Even our burial practices and our

darkest griefs are an invitation to trust in the promise of God's abundant and eternal life. Death is not victorious. However your Lent has gone, now is the time to recommit to Jesus, to taking up His Cross and yours. We follow Him when we are faithful to the people and journeys lying before us, even when they are difficult and painful. This is the way of hope.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For radical trust in God's promise of eternal life, even while we walk with Jesus to the Cross, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus journeying toward Jerusalem, you have shown us what it is to empty yourself even to death on the Cross. Teach us to follow you to our own crosses with overwhelming trust in your resurrection. Fill us with hope as we walk with you once again this Holy Week. Amen.

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### **March 29, 2018 – THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (HOLY THURSDAY)**

**Homily Idea:** *Receiving God's life requires us to let others wash us.*

It's a humbling thing to expose the dirty parts of you and let others wash them. Most of us do not look forward to needing others to bathe us, to help us use the washroom, or change our clothes. It is so fitting that Jesus' act of service at the Last Supper is washing feet, and it is telling that Peter resists this. Salvation is an act of humbly surrendering our weakest selves, that God might make us strong. As we gather with the living Jesus, preparing for His Death, He asks us to come exposed, ready to let Him heal us precisely where we are vulnerable. If we want to be saved, then we have to let God do the dirty work.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the humility to let God heal us, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus of water and a towel, help us to reach out to you with our brokenness, begging for healing. Strip away the pride that keeps us hiding and self-righteous. Make us willing to be washed, that we might receive the new life we long for. Amen.

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### **March 30, 2018 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD (GOOD FRIDAY)**

**Homily Idea:** *God's life is bigger than yours.*

"Woman, here is your son; Son, here is your mother." At the end of His life, Jesus entrusts His people to each other. Despite having the most significant role in redemptive history, even Jesus has to leave parts of His mission in the care of others. The work that God is doing in and through us is His work, not ours. When our lives come to an earthly end, we will need to trust God and others to pick up the parts of our work that we cannot complete ourselves. This is part of what makes this devastating Friday good: none of this mess is the end, even if our role in it is changing or done. Can you trust God enough to really believe that He will hold the things He has entrusted to you when He calls you back to Him?

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For trust in God's plan more than our own plans, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of Good Friday, Master of suffering and surrender, teach us to trust in your plans, even when we feel things are falling apart completely. As the sky grows dark and death troubles us deeply, help us place our trust in you, and to let go of the things we have mistakenly claimed as our own. Amen.

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**March 31 / April 1, 2018 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (EASTER VIGIL IN THE HOLY NIGHT / EASTER SUNDAY)**

**Homily Idea:** *Don't look for the living among the dead.*

In the Gospel for both the Vigil and the morning Mass, the disciples go to the tomb to find Jesus, and they are told "He is not here." It's completely confusing; shouldn't the dead be where we left them? But Jesus has risen. The destruction and devastation we have come to expect from death have been undone by the Resurrection. Jesus is not dead but raised, and seeking consolation at the tomb is no longer the answer. Alleluia is our song of praise. Even and especially here where we expected death, God has worked new life, beyond our wildest imaginings. Lent is over and we enter into the 50 days of Easter. We've been praying, fasting, and giving alms, entering into sacrifice as a road to new life. Don't go back to habits that brought you death...there is no life in the tomb. Move forward into the new life of Easter, forever changed by the road that brought you here, closer to the risen Jesus!

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the strength to look forward, to find life in new ways of living, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Risen Jesus, help us to keep our eyes facing forward, into the future you have promised. It is so easy to look back, to be drawn back into the familiarity of what we have known. Draw us into Resurrection and the way things can be, that we might taste and see the new life you are working again here and now. Amen. Alleluia!

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