



**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.

March 1, 2015 – 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *We shall not kill.*

Taken out of the context of the larger story, the first reading today almost seems to suggest that God desired Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and that Abraham and Isaac were okay with this. But Isaac is the only son of a patriarch in the Old Testament who does not receive the blessing of his father before he dies. In fact, the Scriptures never show the father and son speaking again. It tells us something important about this story. Abraham would have been accustomed to the neighbouring traditions which practised human sacrifice. What is novel about this story is that God stops Abraham from killing his son. God honors Abraham’s faithfulness but does not honor the killing of people. Ever. Isaac goes on to worship God, but never forgives his father. When Christians are being murdered by ISIS, when babies are systematically and legally aborted day after day, and when the Supreme Court has struck down our laws against euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, we need more than ever to be reminded that God has asked us not to kill people, for any reason. God never intended for Abraham to kill his son, and he will never ask us to participate in, legitimize or justify the death of a human being. Life is God’s gift to us, and we are called to protect, honor and receive it until it dies a natural death.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the strength and perseverance to avoid participating in killing human beings, and the courage to stand up to those who do, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of Abraham and Isaac, help us fully mourn the loss of your children by violence, murder, war and killing. May we grieve with you the losses of your sons and daughters. Make us defenders of human life at all costs to ourselves, that we might be witnesses to the peace, receptivity, faithfulness and relationship for which you made us. Amen.

March 8, 2015 – 3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *True life is always both spiritual and embodied.*

Lent is often a season focused on two things: personal disciplines (or sacrifices) and generosity to those in need. For most of us, one or the other of these is our own personal preference. We believe, however, that people are always both bodies and souls: this means God desires our physical and spiritual health and growth. All three readings point out the ways that God nourishes us, body and soul. We need to believe the commandments and live them. We need to worship in the temple and stop make idols out of money. It's not enough that we give up dessert if our sacrifice does not help us appreciate and participate in Jesus' sacrificial giving. All the piety and right theology in the world are wasted if our lives are not a reflection of God's incarnate compassion – to the point of death itself being redeemed. For ourselves and for others, we cannot choose between feeding the hungry or saving souls. Always and everywhere, God is doing both.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to see ourselves as God sees us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of flesh and blood, you took on a human body to do your redeeming work. In our hands and feet, our hair and wrinkles, reveal to us the lessons of your Spirit. Help us to trust that the moments which make up our days provide us with the physical and spiritual growth we need. Amen.

March 15, 2015 – 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *No one deserves life. And God gives it anyway.*

The God we worship knows our unworthiness, is familiar with our weakness, and He loves us anyway. As the second reading so beautifully declares, "we are what He has made us." This life, this faith, this grace that we have been given has always been pure gift to the undeserving. And so, we are called to live and to allow others the freedom to live. Go ahead, give yourself permission to forgive, celebrate, share, love, play. God made you good enough to enjoy this gift that is your life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the faith truly to believe God loves us as we are, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of hope, you know our weakness and our failings, and you delight in us anyway. When we look in the mirror and see flaws, cleanse our eyes. When we remember only our failures and cling to shame, free us from the prisons we have created for ourselves. Jesus died that we might live. Give us the courage and conviction to receive His tremendous gift of life. Amen.

March 22, 2015 – 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *What we learn in suffering brings life.*

Our culture teaches us to avoid suffering and fear death. Jesus shows us a different way. In the second reading, the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus "learned obedience through what he suffered and ... he became the source of eternal salvation for all." It is not the suffering that God desires for us, but the learning that comes

through it. Lent is a time to glorify learning, not suffering, because by that learning we can give life to others who need it. The Gospel reminds us that our prayers to be removed from our present circumstances are a distraction from God's presence in them. Here and now is where God is at work, offering us the grace, perspective and lessons we need for living.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to receive the lessons of our present challenges, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the suffering, meet us in the dark that we might cling to the light. Make us humble enough to receive the grace you offer where we are, instead of waiting for where we want to be. Amen.

March 29, 2015 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD, Year B

Homily Idea: *Bearing witness to life in the vigil of the dying.*

We live in a culture obsessed with youthfulness, vitality and the absence of suffering. One of the most profound gifts our faith tradition gives to us is a practice of a living vigil with the dying. Death too is holy, a part of this journey of life that God gives to us. To lie in wait with the dying is a gift – often inconvenient and painful, full of uncertainty and fear – but a gift nonetheless. This Palm Sunday, we begin a vigil of Jesus' passion and death. It is here that we practise this skill, in the hope we will not need to use it this year. But some of us will walk the vigil of dying with a spouse, a child, a friend or neighbour, or even with ourselves. This is heavy work, the work of letting go one finger at a time, the work of making peace, and the work of letting death be a gift. And it offers fruit no other living offers. The Palm Sunday liturgy is practice for living dying well – so that when we are called to walk it, we can trust in the Resurrection that God has promised will come, even while we sit in the tomb.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to walk with the dying, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus in your dying, hold us close to you. Let our arms carry you as you carry your cross. Let our tears join with yours. May our hands ache with the weight of your nails. As you breathe your final breath, may we have the courage to wrap your wounds and place you in a tomb, waiting for and hoping in the Resurrection we do not fully understand. Amen.
