



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.

April 6, 2014 – 5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Waiting on Christ for life to rise out of death.*

The miracle of the Resurrection is something we each long for all the time. It becomes hardest to believe in when we face the suffering, grief and loss of death. But it is precisely in our experiences of death that we most need faith in the Resurrection: When we are caught in bitterness and resentment. When we think it cannot get any worse. When someone we love is in horrible pain. When death seems to have won. All three readings point us to God who brings new life from graves. The miracle of Christianity is not that we will be spared from suffering and death, but that in the midst of it God will transform this into new life. Our job is to keep crying out to Jesus, as Martha did, “Where are you, Lord?” At the same time, to resist becoming blind to the grace that is being poured out in the midst of our difficulty. Take an area of your life that seems to be dying this week, and make an effort to be grateful for 10 things in the midst of it ... See what life God brings out of your gratitude!

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to be grateful and hopeful in the midst of death, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the Resurrection, raise us to new life even as we face the suffering and death around us. Fill us with courage to embrace the dying that brings us to new life in you. Amen.

April 13, 2014 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *Life's purpose is found in living our passion, even if it ends with a sealed tomb.*

How we long for our lives to be happy and easy, and how God longs to deliver us both! The paradox of Christian living is that by following God where He leads us, we will find deep happiness and there will be an ease about doing it. Jesus does not replace our suffering with His, as though his Passion and Death would erase the suffering of his followers. He shows us, by his Passion, that true life comes from following God even into the darkest places in freedom. As we follow Jesus' way, we learn that the Resurrection comes by the Cross. There will be moments where we find ourselves staring at what seems to be death's victory: a sealed up tomb. We, as Christians, know the end of the story, and our life finds a happy ease when we wait faithfully with Jesus for Easter's glorious new life to rise from the mess. But that is easier said than done!

Prayer of the Faithful: For faith, hope and love in the face of a sealed tomb, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of passion and death, help us walk the way of Jesus, with faithful trust in the way you have designed life -- to bring us through death to resurrection. Give us courage when we are afraid; peace when we are fearful; trust when we doubt, and the grace to call on you when we have nothing left in ourselves to rely on. May we remember to praise you when life emerges again. Amen.

April 17, 2014 – THURSDAY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Homily Idea: *If we want to live like Jesus lived, we will find joy in washing dirty feet, and allow others to wash the dirt off us.*

Holy Thursday challenges us to get real with our faith, bending ourselves low to offer our service to those most in need. As you leave this liturgy, you will undoubtedly be preparing for an Easter weekend. Who needs your presence most this weekend? How will you be of service? Who might protest, and how will you remind them you too need to serve? What resentments are you carrying into the weekend, and how will you let them be washed from you? Who needs to serve you, and will you let them? Will you resist, as Peter tries to? Perhaps you need to invite another guest or two to join your celebration? Perhaps you need to let others know you need help? Time with family and friends can be trying as well as happy. Over the next few days, as you contemplate the dying and rising of Jesus, let the ordinary events of your life be a place for washing feet and being washed by others.

Prayer of the Faithful: For a willingness to serve others and to be served, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, washer of feet, save us by our washing of others, in the bathing of children and elders, in our forgiveness and compassion. Save us by sending others to wash the parts of us we cannot see need washing, our righteousness and resentment, our feelings of martyrdom and brokenness. Help us to be open to your flood of grace.

April 18, 2014 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *Our life depends on His.*

"He has borne our iniquities and carried our diseases." The Prophet's words are as relevant for us as they were for the ancient Israelites. We have heard the Good News, been welcomed into the Covenant, watched Him suffer, known He would rise again -- still we have forgotten our need for His grace and mercy. Jesus does not die to satisfy a blood-thirsty Father who needed human blood to forgive our sins. He suffers and dies as a faithful living out of the loving mercy God desires to give every generation, if only we will accept it. Jesus shows

us, by his Passion and Death, that this way of living leads us to the life God intended for us in the first place. If we want to live, we will inevitably face our own crosses, which Christ will carry with us through to new life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to carry our crosses with Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus of the Cross, draw us close to you in your suffering. Draw strength from our presence and our remembrance of your Passion and Death. Make us part of your saving mystery that, by your Death and Resurrection, we and all the world might know the joy that is won by your blood and tears – mixed with ours. Amen.

April 20, 2014 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (EASTER SUNDAY OF THE MASS OF EASTER DAY, Year A)

Homily Idea: *How does your life proclaim you have seen the risen Jesus?*

On this Easter Sunday, we have two options for the Gospel: Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb, and the disciples on the road to Emmaus. At the end of both readings, those who have seen him exclaim to others: “We have seen Jesus!” This exclamation gives them hope and courage in the midst of grief. It changes the course of their lives. Instead of returning to their old lives in grief, they turn around, remember his words and his example, and head into a future marked by the joy and the mission of the Resurrection. This Easter, and every year, we have the chance to ask: “How is my life marked by Easter joy?” How will others know Christ is risen? Will we shout it from rooftops? Will we let our lives be changed? Will we live differently because Jesus has risen? There are 50 days in the Easter season – make a resolution now to let your life look differently, more joy-filled, and invite others to join you!

Prayer of the Faithful: For Easter joy to overflow out of us into our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and communities, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Risen Jesus, show us the Resurrection you are working out in us. Open our eyes to see you, our hearts to receive your healing and miracles. Free us from indifference and entitlement, that we might celebrate with abandon the gifts you have poured out on us. May we be overwhelmed by the joy of new life in you. Amen.

April 27, 2014 – SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER (or of Divine Mercy), Year A

Homily Idea: *Doubt robs us of life but can also lead us to Jesus.*

Doubt escapes no one. No matter how strong our faith, how young or old we are, how much we love God and others, at times we doubt. But when we doubt, we find ourselves trapped like Thomas in our fear that what we desire is too good to be real. The good news is that doubt and fear eventually make us doubt our doubts and fears. By their nature they create a prison that we long to leave. Whether Jesus appears to us as a sign we can trust him, or whether we are willing to follow him without proof, faith is not scientific evidence or infallible proof. Faith is our willingness to continue to be in relationship, even when we're afraid. Faith is the anecdote for doubt, and the way out of it.

Prayer of the Faithful: For faithfulness in the midst of our doubt, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Thomas, you were consumed by doubt in the wake of the Resurrection, and yet you had enough faithfulness to keep showing up in the upper room, waiting for a sign of the Risen Jesus. Pray for us in our times of doubt, that we will keep crying out for a sign, waiting in hope for the God who gave one to you. Amen.
