



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 2, 2015 – THURSDAY OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

Homily Idea: *Life requires that we wash and be washed.*

When Jesus presents the plan for the Last Supper, the disciples are mortified. How could this Messiah, their leader and their guide, stoop to the level of a servant? Jesus makes it clear that they (and we) need to receive what He offers us – to allow ourselves to be known, cleansed and healed by our Creator. This is hard to do in a world where we glorify service but look down, even if only subconsciously, on those who receive. Examine your assumptions about the recipients of social assistance, food banks, or foster care. Fairly often we feel pity, gratitude it is not us, or even righteous indignation. If we want salvation, we need to be willing to receive God’s merciful service, symbolized tonight in baring our feet. And then, He commands us to do as He has done, to become the joyful and generous servants of those in need – with love. Tonight, as we prepare for the Passion and Death tomorrow, ask God where you need to be washed and cleansed, and whom you need to ask for help to do it. Then, make a commitment to offer help to someone in your life who needs you.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the humility to be washed, and the confidence to know our weakness makes us able servants, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, washer of feet, cleanse our hearts. Pry into the cracks of our hardened hearts, and help us to allow you to heal us. In the midst of our brokenness, show us where we can imitate you, offering the humble service you modeled to those most in need. Amen.

April 3, 2015 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *Life is honoured when we walk with the dying.*

At Gethsemane, as He prepares for the Cross, Jesus asks His disciples to stay awake. Tonight, we are invited to make a vigil, accompanying Jesus in His darkest hour. Most of the disciples run away, and sometimes we will too. But in a world where we are afraid of death, where our government is playing with assisted suicide, and the elderly often cast aside, we need to respond to Jesus' invitation to accompany those who suffer and walk with the dying. Preparing for death is our final chance to give ourselves over to the Father's will, to let go into what will be, and to let go of our grip on controlling our lives. All of life's moments are created for living, for finding God and loving Him and others more deeply. At the foot of the Cross, we say, even here, we want to live with Him.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the perseverance to stay and hold vigil at the foot of the crosses in our lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Dying Jesus, hold us close to you. May our tears offer you strength. May our grief express our gratitude for the gift of your life. May our faithful presence with you teach us how to be faithfully present to each other in the crosses we bear in our lives. Amen.

April 4 / 5, 2015 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday)

Homily Idea: *Looking for life in all places.*

On Easter morning, just outside the tomb, Jesus asks a grieving Mary Magdalene, "Whom are you looking for?" She cannot see Him because she is looking for a dead man, laid in a tomb. How often are we guilty of looking for the dead among the dead? The heart of Christianity is this rising to new life. We are to be the prophets of Resurrection. Everywhere death is looming, in every corner where dysfunction festers, Christians are the ones who should be combing through the wreckage, looking for life. For the next 50 days, a season longer than Lent, ask yourself, "Am I looking for the Risen Jesus? Where have I seen Him today?" Write it down; share it at the dinner table; practise looking for God who every day is raising new life out of death.

Prayer of the Faithful: For eyes to see new life rising in all places, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Risen Jesus, shed the scales from our eyes, grown weary at the Cross and impatient in suffering. When we have become resigned to dying, shake us awake to your victory over the grave. Transform us so we can come to the tomb, looking for the Resurrection. Amen.

April 12, 2015 – 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER (Divine Mercy Sunday), Year B

Homily Idea: *Life dies if it isn't shared.*

The first reading might seem like communism, but it isn't. It is the heart cry of the first disciples telling us what they have learned in the days following the Resurrection. The life God offers us in the Resurrection cannot be hoarded, saved up for tomorrow out of fear there won't be enough. It grows when we give it away. Like Thomas, we doubt. We are afraid to trust what we cannot see. But detachment, the virtue of letting go in order to find peace, is at the heart of God's very life. We cannot possess life, save life, or control life. We can only live it and invite others to do the same. This is the heart of the spiritual life God offers us – the freedom to receive it, moment by moment, day by day, as gift for us and for all. What are you clinging to? What are you afraid of? What doubts are you holding on to because they seem safer than letting go to God who has more for you than

you can ask for or imagine? Take a step this week into radical sharing. Give away something you think you must have, just in case. Offer forgiveness to someone you've been begrudging. Choose trust.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to give away that which we are clinging to – to the point of death, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God who conquered death, show us where we are clinging to that which is killing us. Help us give away the things we are clinging to out of fear, hoarding out of fearful self-protection. May our lives model yours, poured out and broken for the lives of all. Amen.

April 19, 2015 – 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year B

Homily Idea: *We are afraid of God's life.*

Just three weeks into Easter, we can feel a bit like the disciples, hiding in the closets and once again afraid. Our deepest fear is not that we are sinful and broken, but rather that God has raised a sinful and broken people to love the world. We are His people, His hands and feet in this world, called and commissioned to go out. Repent, now, again, for the millionth time, and go out from here and be a witness to His life. If we do not, no one will. Do not be afraid!

Prayer of the Faithful: For the willingness to be His broken witnesses to the world and each other, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Risen Jesus, find us in the places we are hiding. Meet us in our closets, in our comfortable shoes, in our worn-out habits and well-exercised excuses. Show us our fear is not justified, that you want us as we are, that you need us to be your Body. In our fleeting moment of courage, push us out into a world that needs us, that we might need you and find you in doing your work. Amen.

April 26, 2015 – 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year B

Homily Idea: *Our lives are known and understood by the Father.*

Living this life of faith and freedom is hard. It's hard to receive it, hard to practise it, hard to share it. Then, when we do, we risk being misunderstood, accused of foolishness, or rejected. Few of us in Canada are persecuted for faith, but many of us shy away from living the Gospel the way we are called to because our friends, families or neighbours do not understand us. At the beginning of the day and at its close, we must remember that we are "children of God", deeply known, deeply loved, deeply appreciated by our Father - a tender shepherd, a fierce mother bear, a tiny infant, who does not need us to please everyone, but who is deeply satisfied by our existence, our effort, our life. Like Jesus, we simply lay down this life, that we can take it up again tomorrow.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to seek acceptance and belonging first from God, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Faithful Shepherd, help us to hear your voice in a world crying for our attention. Teach us to be rooted in your call, attentive to your voice, and pleased by your approval. When we feel misunderstood or rejected for our commitment to you, help us to love your people and continue to seek you above all else. Amen.
