



**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.

August 2, 2015 – 18TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR B

Homily Idea: *Life comes from the Giver, rather than the gifts.*

For all of human history, we have been fickle people. We receive gifts greedily, feeling entitled to them, expecting to be satiated by them, and then are surprised to find they have not satisfied. We still want more. This was true for Israel eating manna in the desert and it was true of the disciples after the first Eucharist. The Eucharist is the Body and Blood of Jesus, present to us in a sacramental meal; even this most sacred gift is meant to point us to the only One who can satisfy our longings: God. We make idols of many gifts – health, family, ability, faith, and even the Eucharist. When we think we are entitled to these gifts, that our access to them is all we need to be holy or be saved, we replace the Giver with the gifts, and we will find ourselves ultimately empty. All of God’s gifts (life, creation, food, drink, shelter, family, relationships) are given to point us to the everlasting God of Life, who created us in His likeness. These gifts are graced, but they are not the Giver of Grace. This is why prayers of gratitude are so powerful in our spiritual life. Grace before meals, prayers of thanksgiving at bedtime, exclamations of gratitude when we are surprised during the day. These prayers remind us everything is a gift, and that the God who gives them is the One who fills our hearts.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to be grateful for the gifts we receive from the Giver of Life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Giver of graced gifts, remind us to be ever grateful for all we receive. Teach us to savour the gifts, to remember they do not last forever, and to never forget that we have not earned them. Lead us through the gifts to find You. Amen.

August 9, 2015 – 19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *God desires to bring new Life to those who desire to die.*

Suicide is a national epidemic. In recent years, the suicide rates are rising, especially among the young and marginalized populations. While we are growing in our awareness of mental health challenges and refining our responses, much work remains in adequately addressing mental health and suicide. The first reading is a powerful proclamation that God desires to reach out and heal those who have become desperate to die. Elijah has been threatened with execution and, under duress, he has murdered false prophets. He arrives in the wilderness, collapses under a tree, and begs God to end his life. He is utterly exhausted, totally spent, ashamed of his failure to live as God asks. He falls asleep, wishing for death. And then God shows us how to care for those at the end of their ropes: he sends a messenger to go, to provide food and drink, to encourage rest and perseverance. The angel does not tell Elijah to “get over it” or “cheer up” or “choose to see the positive”. The angel touches him, feeds him, and encourages him for the next part of the journey. There are no promises or platitudes. Depression requires acknowledgment that something powerful is holding us in a dark place, presence in the midst of the darkness, and gentle assistance with the basics – eating, drinking, rest, activity and relationships. God desires to bring new Life, and we have a role to play in reaching out to others and in asking for help when we need it.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to reach out to those who are contemplating suicide and to respond with compassion, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of Life, you fed Elijah in the wilderness when he wanted to die. Speak into the hearts of the lost and lonely. Give us eyes to see their need and hear their cries for help. When we ourselves are struggling, help us to reach out for and receive help from one another. Save us from our fear and despair, and raise us from darkness into light. Amen.

August 16, 2015 - 20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *Life is not a dress rehearsal. It's our only chance at love and divinity.*

The Eastern Church has held much more tightly to the idea of divinization than the West, but Pope John Paul II picked up the idea in *Theology of the Body*. Our lives are intended to form us in the image of the Divine, to draw us ever closer to God, so it is Christ who lives in and through us. The readings from Proverbs and Ephesians invite us to live with the intention of following God. Life is not a practice run, a dress rehearsal for the real thing in the next life. This is it – our lives are our school in loving, in becoming more Christ-like, in touching the Divine. The real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist which was such a scandalous idea at the time, and even now, is not about magic, cannibalism or self-righteousness; the real presence is what happens when we trust in, and live into, the mystery that this life is inherently sacred. The ordinary moments that make up our lives have profound and real spiritual significance. Now is the time for us to become more forgiving, more loving, gentler, more joyful, and more alive, now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful: For lives lived with trust in the mystery that God is meeting us and transforming us here and now, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Almighty and ever-living God, you have loved us enough to meet us in the world, through sights and sounds, tastes and smells. As we approach your presence in the Eucharist, give us reverence for your presence in the rest of our lives, that we remember to live deeply this life that leads us to You. Amen.

August 23, 2015 - 21ST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *Whom will you serve with this life?*

All three readings today ask a powerful question: “Whom will you serve?” There is only one right answer to this question if we seek true freedom. Many bad homilies have been preached about the second reading, inviting wives to serve their husbands, who serve God; fewer, but no less scandalous homilies, have been preached about serving our countries or political leaders, who are purportedly doing “God’s will”; and still more misdirected homilies have demanded that people serve the Church, who will tell the people what God’s will is. At the end of the day, each of us is asked to align our faith with reason, consult our communities, and then seek deeply the will of the Father. We were made for service, but we can only serve one Master. When we serve God first, we can serve others well – in our marriages, our communities, and our churches. If we defer our service to human beings, no matter how holy or well intentioned they may be, we will find ourselves turning back, resenting the cost of our service. Often enough, we blame God for the failings of those we have followed. And Jesus will say to us, as he did to Peter, “Do you also wish to go away?” Jesus has the words of eternal life. Each of us is asked to follow Him, the best we can, for the sake of our very lives. Whom have you been following and serving? What wounds have piled up as you have sacrificed your own integrity? Turn today and ask God to guide you, giving you the courage to serve Him first, without apology to those who would rather you followed them.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to serve the Master, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Master of the Universe, You created us for a freedom we only find in surrendering to You. Unyoke us from the servitudes we have chosen as false replacements for You. Free us from burden and obligation, and make us servants of your abundant mercy and love. Protect us from the desire to be controlled, to be told and to be less than responsible for the journey of love you created for us. Amen.

August 30, 2015 - 22ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *Life is found in walking within the Gospel.*

The first reading exhorts the early Israelites neither to add to nor take away from the Law. How many Catholics do you know who ignore this rule? Some of us are tempted to add more rules, more expectations to our faith, so no one measures up to the standard of “good Catholic”. We get so busy judging ourselves and each other that we block out any capacity for spiritual growth or love. Others of us drop the parts of faith we don’t like, suggesting the rules have become out-dated or irrelevant. We become so self-righteous that we close ourselves to the ongoing conversion God desires for us, and make mistakes God’s laws might have helped us avoid. Many times, we fit both of these categories in the same day! James reminds us simply at the end of the second reading that “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Jesus asks us to focus on the evil intentions that come from within us, and stop looking out at what everyone else is doing wrong. Who can you care for this week, and what can you do to remove the stains that stop you from loving others well?

Prayer of the Faithful: For the purity of heart to care for those in distress and to allow God to heal us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God and Father of the Church, heal our brokenness. Stop us from adding to the Law in order to keep others out. Protect us from removing the laws that help us to find and love You. Help us walk within the love and mercy of the Gospel, reaching out in service and striving to serve You, with the help of your grace. Amen.
