



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.

December 1, 2013 – 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Now is the time to live faithfully.*

True life, the life God intends for us, is found in living faithfully the Gospel he has given us – today, right now. All three readings talk about how easily we get lazy and put off living the way God calls us to. Not only does this have the potential to rob us of eternal life, it strips away life right now. Whether we’re waiting until after Christmas to start paying off debt, or for tomorrow to start exercising, or today hitting the snooze bar just one more time, we are assuming we will have time to get these moments right – later. We may not have later, but we do have now. When we truly live now, we really make it easier to live later too.

Prayer of the Faithful: For courage to stop putting off faithfulness for another day and start living our faith now, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of abundant life, make us ready to live now, that we are prepared for the end of our lives, and so the lives we are living are filled with your light and grace.

December 8, 2013 – 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *The Gospel of life is for everyone! Who are you sharing it with?*

Throughout salvation history, God's people have been good at deceiving themselves into thinking that God's message is just for them. The prophet Isaiah suggests the division between Jews and Gentiles is a thing of this world, not part of the reign of God. For Paul and Matthew, the division between the Jews and Gentiles has been shattered by Jesus. But that does not mean we are all fully alive. God offers us the chance to choose him, daily, by loving action and grace-filled compassion. We have to receive the gift of God's life ... but it isn't just for us. God can raise up children for Abraham from stones, so why do we worry our neighbours are too far gone? By hoarding the Gospel, it spoils in us and we start to feel entitled to eternal life, rather than letting God work it through us every day. Preach the Gospel with your life, and let it proclaim God's life to everyone God might want to touch through you today.

Prayer of the Faithful: For lives that proclaim God's life to the world, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of all people, transform our lives into prophecies of your eternal life. Show us who we have written off as not worthy of your message, and call us to repentance. Let us taste the joy of your forgiveness, and send us forth in your new life for the sake of the world. Amen.

December 15, 2013 – 3RD SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Jesus can be seen, alive and breathing, in what lies before you.*

I love the question from John the Baptist at the beginning of this Gospel: Are you the one we're waiting for? Jesus replies by saying the blind can see, the deaf can hear, and the dead are raised. All around us, miracles are being worked by Christ. When families are reconciled after long silences, when a fallen-away person returns to the Church, when a young woman makes a courageous choice for adoption, when a family accompanies a grandparent towards death: all of these are signs Jesus is among us. So what are you looking for? A billboard appearing at the corner to tell you the living God is here? John the Baptist told us he was coming. He came and he still comes. Still, the world needs prophets to announce his coming, and we are the voices crying out in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Prayer of the Faithful: For eyes to see Jesus among us, and voices to proclaim his coming again, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, Messiah, help us to see you at work in our lives, especially in the moments where we feel alone and discouraged. Help us to cry out your coming, and to hear the prophets of the good news whom you send to encourage and remind us you are already here. Amen.

December 22, 2013 – 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *The important role of fathers in the lives of embryos, babies, children and mothers.*

Last year, this Sunday was all about Mary, her courage and her faithful trust. This year, on this last Sunday of Advent, our eyes and hearts are turned to Joseph. God has a plan for him in Jesus' life. Mary and Jesus need Joseph's trust, his faithfulness, and his service. This is not about competition, about whose gift of trust is greater. It's about the way in which God's plan for new life requires the faithful and loving trust of all God's people. Today, the Josephs of our world are often ignored and deemed irrelevant. Unwed fathers often have no

say in the lives of their children. Some fathers expose their families to shame. God is calling all fathers (and mothers) to go boldly into our families and let Jesus transform them. The next time a man is struggling with fatherhood, be the voice of the angel: Do not be afraid to receive Jesus, to love his mother, to let God's saving grace come through your love.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the fathers of our world, loving and struggling to love their families, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God the Father, help us to love our fathers, to receive your love through them, to forgive them for their failures, and to pray for them. Make each of us ready to trust you as you call us to take up spiritual parenthood, to be selfless in loving your children whom you have entrusted to our care. Saint Joseph, pray for us.

December 25, 2013 — SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD, Year A

Homily Idea: *Life is offered to all those in the darkness.*

Do you remember being in the dark in your spiritual life? Have you ever felt forgotten by God, or as though you had done something that could separate you from God's infinite love? Perhaps you remember a time in your life when you did not know that you didn't know God. In the second readings for both the Midnight and Morning Christmas Mass, the letter to Titus reminds us that Jesus comes to *save us all* from the darkness. It is easy to judge those who do not know him at this time of year, to get irritated with consumer Christmas, to evaluate whether or not our neighbours know the true meaning of the celebration. Jesus did not require that anyone understood his coming 2,000 years ago, any more than he requires it now. Every year as we celebrate his birth, and every Sunday in the Eucharist, he comes among us to offer his life to those in the darkness. May we joyfully proclaim his coming, that all may know the peace his life brings to ours.

Prayer of the Faithful: For willingness to let Jesus' light shine into our darkness, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Families or Small Groups: Infant Jesus, soften our cold hearts to your tiny hands of love, your sleeping face, your peaceful invitation to be with you in life and love. Bring us joy this Christmas at the thought of your willingness to come among us - then and now. Inspire us to share your peace and joy in every dark place that remains in our world. Amen.

December 29, 2013 – FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH, Year A

Homily Idea: *Every family is called to be the Holy Family. Every family can be a witness to God at work.*

Pay attention to this week's Gospel: the Holy Family is a refugee family. Joseph flees with his wife and step-son into Egypt. This blended family is fearful for their very lives. When they are most afraid, they act in faith, based on the hunches of dreams. This is not the traditional family we imagine in statues and stained glass, too perfect and too holy to be us. This family is our family, seeking to love with courage, in the midst of brokenness, violence and fear. "He shall be called a Nazarene," -- that is, one of us. A Canadian citizen or a permanent resident. A Smith or a Gomez, a Thibault or a Patel. Your family is a witness to the God of life -- may this be so by the grace of the Infant Jesus.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to be and become holy families in our world, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Author and creator of the Holy Family, transform our families to be signs and sacraments of your healing and life. May our love of our families inspire love in other families. By sharing our successes and our failings, our faith and our fear, may we be heralds of your Family.
