



**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.

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**December 4, 2016 – 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A**

**Homily Idea:** *From the brokenness, God has promised new life.*

Isaiah writes this week’s first reading to the Israelites in exile. Things are beyond bleak. They have lost everything – their kingdom, their homes, and some of them their faith in God. Isaiah’s image is that God will bring forth a shoot out of a dead stump. This message is central to our faith: God will bring new life precisely out of this messy brokenness we are living in right now. John the Baptist says the time is coming. Repent, so you can see this work God is about to do. Perhaps it’s been a while since you approached the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The time is now. Perhaps you’re holding a grudge, refusing to believe God could do anything with a messy part of your life, and wishing for a magic solution? God will work the miracle of Resurrection out of the mess. Let’s invite God who sent a baby to come into our messes this Advent and make all things new.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For Jesus to come into the messiness of our lives and make all things new, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of new life, give us the hope that will allow us to look at stumps, and to struggle with eager expectation of the new life that will grow from what is dead. Teach us to trust you in the messy and broken places of our lives and our world. Amen.

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## December 11, 2016 – 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

**Homily Idea:** God's plan for life includes healing all that is broken.

The images in this week's readings are so rich. We worship God who wants to give sight to the blind, bring hearing to the deaf, and make sorrow and suffering flee away. This message is proclaimed to the exiles. Then Jesus is presented as the fulfillment to John's prophecy that the time has come for all to be restored. We are living in this difficult but beautiful time in history where Jesus has come and we have tasted heaven, but it is not yet complete. Whatever you are suffering, God longs to see it healed. We do not get a promise of when or how, but we can trust in that promise and do our part in letting God heal us. If your marriage is hurting, might it be time for Retrouvaille or counselling? Are you struggling with parenting, addiction, grief, loneliness? Perhaps our church community can be a part of connecting you with healing help. He does not desire for us to suffer needlessly. God's plan for abundant life includes healing, and we can be a part of it. When we choose healing, we let Jesus in – what could be more fitting for Advent?

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For God's healing in our lives and world, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Healing God, soften our hearts to make room for you. Detach us from our brokenness. Give us the courage to participate in your healing work wherever we are hurting. Having been set free from even the smallest of our sins, turn our hearts outward to be agents of your healing and new life in our homes and communities. Amen.

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## December 18, 2016 – 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year A

**Homily Idea:** *A baby is a gift of life that offers us hope and invites our care.*

While we often interpret Isaiah's prophecy about Emmanuel as an anticipation of the Christ Child, the text had meaning too for the people who first heard it. God was still sending babies to the exiled chosen people. God was not giving up on them. That reading is transformed for us by the birth of Jesus, because while any baby is a sign of hope, the Infant Jesus is our hope made flesh. The Gospel makes clear that Joseph did not believe Mary's account of her pregnancy. It takes an angel to convince him that this baby is *the* baby, a gift of life offering Joseph hope that all is not lost in his engagement, and that God has a plan for him to be a father. Babies are always a gift of life, even when that new life is unexpected and scary. Life is always a gift of interdependency and vulnerability. Jesus comes to us as gift, as all babies do -- a gift that invites our participation and care.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For every baby to be received as a sign of hope and an invitation to care, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Infant Jesus, you came to us as a sign of God's faithfulness and a person in need of our love. May we respond to every baby as Mary and Joseph came to embrace you. May babies and their parents always find support and help in our families and communities of faith. Amen.

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## December 25, 2016 – SOLEMNITY OF THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

**Homily Idea:** *Life comes from discovering the mystery of Jesus in front of us right now.*

In each of the Gospel readings for the Christmas Masses, we get a different perspective on the mystery of the Nativity. Each character encounters Jesus deeply but also personally, each in a way that is different from the others in the story. First Mary, at the Annunciation. Then Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and angels at Bethlehem. Then the whole Church via the opening of the Gospel of John. We, too, need to encounter the Infant Jesus personally, in a way that changes our lives, over and over again each Christmas. In what ways is Jesus, small and vulnerable, making an appearance in your life right now? Is He softening your impatience? Is He whispering to you in the needs of a friend or family member? Is He challenging you to make a change? He has come, again, to Bethlehem. You get to decide if you will go to the manglers of your own life and welcome Him, or if you will pack up the Christmas decorations and wait till next year to let Him grow in you again.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For more room for Jesus in our lives after Christmas, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus in the manger, show us where you are being born in our hearts and lives. Show up in our impatience and invite us to love. Help us hear your cries in the needs of our people. Teach us how to make space for you to come into our lives more deeply every day. Amen.

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## January 1, 2017 – SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

**Homily Idea:** *Mary teaches how to live.*

From the beginning, God revealed his plan to bless the world by using people. On this feast of Mary, Mother of God, we see how God's plan comes together with one's willingness to let God work in each life. Mary did not understand everything that was happening to her, but she knew those words to Moses and Aaron, and she had followed the way of her people, trusting God could use her. Her faith is instructive for us. When we begin to discover what God asks of us, we do not need to hide, to question, to know. We simply need to ponder what God is doing, and carry Jesus with us into every moment of our particular lives. Our call is not the same as Mary's (none of us are asked to be Jesus' mother), but our response can be the same.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For willingness to carry Jesus into all the corners of our lives as Mary did, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Mary, Mother of God, pray for us called here and now to carry Jesus into a hurting world. Remind us by your example that we do not need to understand what will come from following your Son, but that we can trust Him to use our lives to bless the world. Amen.

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