



**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.

February 1, 2015 – 4TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *God offers us life when we reject false prophecy.*

Social media, constant access to technology, advertising ... we live in a noisy world, where everyone thinks we are entitled to their opinions. It can be tempting to read every article, follow every link, and look for opinions that make us feel justified in our own thinking. In the first reading, Moses promises the people that God will send a trustworthy voice after him, so that the people will not be tempted by the false prophets around them. In the Gospel, Jesus drives out an evil spirit, and the people are impressed by Jesus’ authority: that His words bring healing and life. There is a lot of noise in our culture, vying for our devotion, time, attention and money, but the life God wills for us brings freedom in the midst of noise. We need to pay attention to the still, small voice in us, and to the teachers, preachers and prophets whose messages offer us the peace, freedom and joy of Christ. Paul’s words at the end of the second reading are helpful in discerning: “I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint on you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord.” Listen to those whose words are offered to you freely without strings attached, and that you speak the same way.

Prayer of the Faithful: For ears to hear the Word of Life, and mouths to speak the truth with compassion, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, you offer us the Words of Life, and we ask you to help us to hear them, and to speak your truth with gentleness and compassion in the midst of a noisy world. Amen.

February 8, 2015 – 5TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *Life has room for lament, and for hope.*

While the Gospel message is ultimately one of hope, we often speak words of resurrection too quickly. Job has had everything he cherished taken from him, and his friends come to offer support, in a world where it is commonly held that we earn our circumstances: people who have suffered misfortune have sinned greatly, and must repent in order to find God's good favour again. By the same logic, people who are doing well physically or materially are righteous, and have earned the favour of God (or the gods) with a reward of riches, health or peace. Spelled out so obviously, we can see error in this thinking, but when suffering hits us, most of us ask at some point, "Why me!?" This is a normal human reaction. It is a part of the grieving process to be in denial, to be angry, and to try to find an explanation that avoids accepting what is. Job and the Psalms provide examples of lament: expressing our frustration and anger to God. These expressions are in fact acts of faith. Crying out to God maintains relationship with God; He can take our anger and frustration. If we shut it down too quickly, we risk stunting the grieving process and hardening ourselves with a shallow resurrection that offers us pain relief but not the true Resurrection. Hope comes from going through the difficult, and discovering God present there as well as in the Resurrection. This endurance gives Paul the capacity to say he can live the Gospel in all things. The Resurrection and the healing that Jesus gives us shows up in the midst of suffering, rather than removing it. In the midst of suffering, we need to make space for questions, for frustration, and for the "rock-bottom", so when healing is offered to us, we will be desperate enough to give up on believing we could ever earn what God offers to us freely, by grace.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to cry out to God in suffering, and to receive what He offers without trying to earn it, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of healing, find us in our dark places and help us to feel your presence, even as we slam you with our doubts and questions. In the midst of suffering, show us we cannot deserve suffering or earn relief. Teach us to seek grace in all places, especially where we are experiencing pain and confusion, that we might know your peace in all things. Amen.

February 15, 2015 – 6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year A

Homily Idea: *We long to live cleansed, inside and out.*

Cleanliness is both a physical and a spiritual reality. It is easy to trivialize the purity codes of ancient times that dealt with disease spiritually. Skin disease offered a physical threat to cultures that did not have our contemporary medicine. People then were isolated both physically (by quarantine) and spiritually (by lack of access to the temple and its ritual cleansing). We are not above isolating those who are physically or mentally ill: we leave the ill, elderly and infirm in their quarantines out of fear and/or necessity. While we do not talk about spiritual isolation so freely, most of us feel rejected and forgotten fairly quickly when we are alone. Jesus **does choose** to make us clean, to free us from guilt, blame, loneliness, isolation and rejection, but this doesn't always mean miraculous healings. It means that no matter what we go through, we will long to be cleansed. And, daily, in our thoughts and in our words, in what we do and what we fail to do, we can work towards physical, mental and spiritual freedom and healing, for ourselves and for others. Occasionally, this will feel like a miracle from outside us, but more often it will happen gradually as we do our best to cooperate with grace, day by day, living a life that is open to God's conversion and transformation.

Prayer of the Faithful: For faithful trust and active cooperation in God's healing work, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Healer of our every ill, teach us to look for, work with and expect your miraculous transformation. Show us where we have come to expect illness and suffering and closed ourselves to your freedom and peace. Give us courage to be healers and to receive the healing you are pouring out in the most unexpected of places. Amen.

February 18, 2015 – ASH WEDNESDAY

Homily Idea: *True Life comes from the dying of repentance.*

Oh how we would love to have freedom from our sin, without the death of being humbled, without admitting we are wrong, without seeking to make our wrongs right, and without apology! But freedom without humility is a mask of righteous arrogance. The freedom of God's life comes out of our dying to self, out of repenting, out of recognizing our brokenness, and by entering into the dying to ourselves that can turn us away from sin. Lent is a season of choosing life precisely by walking with open hands into little deaths. By saying no to our habitual sins for 40 days, we willingly choose to die a bit. It feels uncomfortable, maybe even painful, to hold our tongues to insults, to say no to sarcasm, to eat less sugar, or go to bed on time instead of watching another TV show. These small things open us to the life that comes from refusing to judge, from speaking gently, from getting good nutrition and enough sleep. Salvation is not a magic wand that God taps over us when He decides He's had enough of our garbage. Salvation is poured out for us in every moment, and we get to participate in it by actively working with God as He pours His life into us day by day.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to die the little deaths that bring us new life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of ashes, you entered the tomb of death to show us that we do not need to fear death. This Lent, teach us to die so that we can rise with you, day by day, and at the end of our lives on earth. Make us people of dust, whose lives are a witness to the life you raise from ashes. Amen.

February 22, 2015 – 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT, Year B

Homily Idea: *We receive God's life in God's time.*

History and time are part of the created order of things. We can only know what this time and circumstance allows. God is not limited by time, but works within it. The first reading, about Noah's ark, reminds us that revelation and spiritual knowledge also work in time. There was a time, before Christ, where we didn't know God's universal saving power. Within history, at the appointed time, God chose to reveal Himself to us in His Son, Jesus, and after which time, the same water that destroyed the earth becomes our path to new life in Baptism. In God's time, we will be freed from sin, in the moments that make up our days and lives, and eventually this freedom will be made complete in eternal life. For now, especially during Lent, we need to live within time, trusting that sin can be rooted out of us as we are open to God's work in us. When we fail (which we will), we need to remember that God will save us from ourselves in God's time. In the meantime, we wait in hope, trusting that God has more to teach us in our present weakness.

Prayer of the Faithful: For patience to wait on God's time, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of time and history, give us patience to wait on your timelessness. Ease the ache in us to have all things now. Show us the grace that is present in each moment. Fill us with trust that you are in control and that all will be well in your time. Amen.
