



**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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**February 7, 2016 – 5<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *We are called to – not worthy of – life.*

When presented with the awesomeness of God, Isaiah, Paul and Peter all experience their great unworthiness, and God calls them anyway. It is *only* when we recognize our weakness, inability and calling that we are able to respond with willingness to allow God to use us. This is profoundly countercultural. In the face of error, Christians are called to forgive because we also need forgiveness. When we are confronted with the needs of the poor, we are called to give because we are also in need. Where suffering pulls us toward despair, we are called to proclaim the Resurrection because again and again we have witnessed Jesus dying and rising. Self-righteousness, selfishness, expectation of a life without suffering – these are not the marks of Christian life. Instead, by discovering our own unworthiness, we find a way to follow Him into a life marked by forgiveness and infinite chances, generosity and empathy, with hope beyond hope.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For lives marked by forgiveness and infinite chances, generosity and empathy, with hope beyond hope, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God, you have called us into life, a gift we do not earn. In our brokenness, sin and unworthiness, surround us with the love and mercy we need to hear your call to life in spite of ourselves. Help us live lives marked by forgiveness and infinite chances, generosity and empathy, with hope beyond hope. Amen.

## February 10, 2016 – ASH WEDNESDAY

**Homily Idea:** *Life includes time for (re)turning to God, weeping.*

In our hurry to preach the Resurrection, too often we forget to allow time for weeping and crying out to God, for declaring ourselves and our circumstances as painful, or even dying with such a visible sign as ashes. We have lost the practice of wearing black for seasons of grief, or staying out of public after birthing – and some of these practices we were happy to lose. At the same time, being marked with ashes is supposed to be a sign of our interior returning to God with our tears of sorrow. “Rend your hearts and not your clothing,” says the Prophet Joel. To rend is to tear one’s clothing or hair in grief. To rend our hearts is to allow them to be broken and then to allow God to heal them. Ashes are the sign of our broken hearts, offered to our loving Healer.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For all the broken-hearted, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of ashes, through our blackened foreheads and broken hearts proclaim to the world that we are not alone. Make us witnesses of grieving well. Open our hands and hearts to hold one another’s brokenness until we are ready to turn it over to you, for healing and new life. Amen.

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## February 14, 2016 – 1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *Life – and love – will have seasons of discomfort and ease, and these are the road to salvation.*

In the first reading, Moses reminds the people not to forget the small beginnings, the hardship, the slavery and the freedom that have been their history. Life might be good now, but it hasn’t always been. The implication is it might not stay this way, and God is Lord over it all – in order that, as Paul says to the Romans and to us, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Even Jesus, filled with the Spirit, finds Satan in the wilderness. On Valentine’s Day, the world proclaims the romance, ease and hope of falling in love. Celebrate it well, by being especially kind, generous and hopeful with those you love. And do not forget to celebrate it well when it is dreary, boring or difficult. Lent challenges us to have the hope of Valentine’s Day in the middle of the desert. Cling to whatever weeds or bare branches are still visible in our barren desert of snow! Love is still the answer -- when the honeymoon is a distant memory, when love needs to be remembered in order to be lived.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For love in the deserts of busyness, woundedness and fear, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, you walked through the wilderness with Satan, and you walk though our deserts with us. In the difficult and barren seasons of our lives, help us lean on you, to keep choosing love. During Lent, help us to practise the disciplines that will comfort and guide us in the future when life takes turns when we will require those practices for our survival. Amen.

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## February 21, 2016 – 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *This disciplined life is hard to live!*

To hold out hope after years of infertility with Abram and Sarah, to avoid some of the pleasures or seeming pleasures of the world with Paul, to witness miracles no one will believe with Peter, John and James: this faithful life is hard to live! In following God, Moses and Peter, John and James were “terrified.” Paul admits to being humiliated. We are in good company as we resist giving up, fight for discipline, and witness miracles. Keep going – the difficulty will not necessarily be rewarded in kind, but faithfulness draws us to Jesus, who loves us, exactly as we are.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the courage to live faithfully when we would rather give up, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Holy Spirit, draw near to us and fire us with your love as we seek to follow Jesus when it is difficult. Help us to remember that the things we want, after we have let them go, will not be as important as we think they are now. Give us courage to choose what is right even if it is unpopular or costly. Help us to be witnesses to the miracles that others do not want to see. Amen.

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**February 28, 2016 – 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *In life, there is always hope and now is the time.*

Often we shy away from talking about sin for fear of offending people with judgement. These readings hold both the mercy and urgency of God for us. God longs for us to know Him, to know and experience the abundant joy of life. At the same time, God knows how much sin damages us (both our own sin and that of others). Even though people throughout history have been touched by the grace of Jesus (often without knowing it), they also knew the suffering of sin, according to Paul's letter. Moses notices the miracle of the flame before he hears the voice of God, and he is afraid to do what God asks. How many bushes had Moses walked by and missed God? How many times did Paul walk by Jesus while He was still alive? We worship God who will never tire of giving us chances, and also who does not stop the consequences of human evil from wounding us. There is always hope, and never a better time than now to turn and do something different. If what you want to do is not the best choice, God is hoping for better. Doing better now means less suffering and brokenness in tomorrow's world. There is no better time than now to begin living the life God dreams for you. Our God is the gardener in Jesus' parable who will hold the space in the garden one more year while already watching for fruit.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For hope when we fail, and humility to start over again now, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Hopeful Gardener, plant your seeds of hope in our brokenness. Water our dissatisfaction with the consequences of our fearful choices, and make our sorrow the soil for starting over again right now. Amen.

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