



**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.

January 1, 2015 – SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD – Year B

Homily Idea: *People of life reflect on and wonder at grace.*

Too often, we take God’s grace and presence for granted. The irony is that when we feel entitled to grace, we cannot recognize it for what it is – a gift. Moses was asked to remind the people of God’s care and blessing in the first reading. The prayer would have been well known to the Holy Family as they faithfully worshiped in the synagogue. The second reading is Paul’s explanation of how the Incarnation makes us God’s adoptive children. Wonder depends on a basic understanding of this mystery of how we become sons and daughters of the Creator of the Universe. When Mary is faced with the mystery, she treasures the words and ponders them in her heart. None of this is owed to us. In order for us to receive life, live it well and share it with others, we have to take the time to pray, to grow in understanding, and to ponder the mystery that is life in Christ.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to treasure the mystery of life and ponder it in our hearts, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Mary, Mother of God, first disciple of your Son, and spiritual Mother of us all, pray for us that we will say yes to life with the same readiness you did. Lay us at the feet of Jesus, and inspire us to treasure and ponder your Son with you. Amen.

January 4, 2015 – SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD, Year B

Homily Idea: *Cherishing life, even in the midst of darkness.*

It can be tempting to see only the darkness and brokenness in the world where we live. The Gospel does not promise us the absence of darkness. It promises Resurrection in the midst of darkness, which will attract those who need it. On Epiphany, when the wise men come from far off civilizations to worship, they make a pilgrimage of following the light. All around us, people are suffering ... violence, illness, pain, loneliness, war, poverty and even death. In some cases, our society justifies or even glorifies the atrocities that cause this suffering. If we demonize the culture, give in to despair in the face of the darkness, we reject the miracle of the Epiphany. Precisely in the midst of our brokenness, Christ has come. Light is shining and life is victorious. We need to be people who proclaim Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection. He's still coming, and we still need him.

Prayer of the Faithful: For light in the midst of darkness, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, receiver of the wise men and their gifts, help us to follow the light in the midst of our dark world. Fix our eyes and hearts on your light, that we might be bearers of that light to all those who walk in the dark. Amen.

January 11, 2015 – FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD, Year B

Homily Idea: *Life is offered to all – and we need to choose it.*

This week's readings map the trajectory of the chosen people: from the tribes of Israel, to the Incarnate Son, to all people, Jews and Gentiles. The miracle here is that God is showing "no partiality", that the same gift of life is offered to us all. For those of us who receive life to the full, the promise of salvation, the Giver invites us into the giving. God has set freedom before us, and our job is continually to choose life. Jesus has the same choice, and when He chooses baptism, for His sake and for ours, the Father pours out the Spirit and we hear His affirmation of his Son: "With you I am well pleased." How often our world needs to hear God calling through our lives. And how often we all need to celebrate when we please God by choosing life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to choose to share life, and the courage to receive God's affirmation when we choose life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Spirit of God, pour yourself into our hearts and minds and bodies, that we might point the way to you. When we have chosen you, help us to hear your affirmation. When we witness lives turned to you, speak through us your words of encouragement and affirmation. Amen.

January 18, 2015 – 2ND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *God is revered when we revere the human body.*

The second reading is worthy of its own homily this week, particularly in light of the present debates on euthanasia. In every state of life, the human person is an image of God, in its earliest stages of growth, in vibrancy and health, in decline, and even in death. Our lives have been elevated by the dying and rising of Jesus; our bodies bear witness to God's presence. Fornication is not merely sexual misconduct; it is the sin of using our bodies as instruments, instead of recognizing them as sacramental vessels. In the case of our own

deaths, we are invited to allow grace to find us, even as we let go of our lives into Life Himself. In the case of the deaths of others, we are asked to accompany those who are letting go, to bear witness to God present. Many in our world have twisted the rejection of suffering (for ourselves and others) into a misnamed mercy that tries to make us masters of life and death. Euthanasia, assisted suicide and so-called mercy killing reject the presence and power of God in the human body, and deny the gifts God offers us in death and dying, even if those gifts are painful to receive.

Prayer of the Faithful: For reverence for the gifts God offers through our bodies, up to and including natural death, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Embodied God, teach us reverence for our flesh and bones! Help us be attentive to our hunger and thirst, our weariness and our energy, that we might find you dwelling in us, and witness to you by the way we care for the gift of our human bodies on earth. Amen.

January 25, 2015 – 3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year B

Homily Idea: *God's life arrives when we let go of our conceptions of it.*

In all three readings, we are challenged to put down our agendas and pick up God's. His burden is light, we are promised, but we are often more hesitant than Jonah's Ninevites and the sons of Zebedee. We are convinced that our plans ought to be God's plans, and we often try to get our own way. Spiritual life is about surrender, to allow God to find us in what is, and to reorient us to His way. This week, at the beginning of a new year, and in a new season of Ordinary Time, we have the chance to be reminded that this world is always and ever passing away. We would do well to make peace with that, and to cling to God's plan instead of our own.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to surrender our lives to God's plan, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God who calls us, help us hear you and follow the sound of your voice. Give us the grace to let go of what we are doing when we hear you, to set down our nets and our phones and our chores, and pick up your plan for our days. Help us trust you without fear. Amen.
