



**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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**January 1, 2016– SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD**

**Homily Idea:** *Treasure the words of life in your heart.*

What words we have from God for a new year! In the first reading, we share in the blessing that God gives to the people through Moses: to be blessed and kept, to have God’s face shining on us and his grace, to be given his peace and called his people. In the second reading, we are heirs, adopted sons and daughters of the living God. Then Jesus. Mary and Joseph hear the prophecies and the stories that all add up to the miracle of God becoming one of us. *We are His.* Our lives are a miracle of the highest order. Stop thinking, resolving and scheming about the new year, Take a moment to treasure up the miracle that is your life, right now. No matter what you are facing, what opportunities and challenges surround you, you are held and loved by the living God, and that is all we need.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For hearts that treasure the miracle of our lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Pray for us, Mary, Mother of God, that we might see and hear the miracles of your Son, Jesus, and treasure them in our hearts so as to be poured out for the sake of the world. Amen.

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## January 3, 2016 – SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY OF THE LORD

**Homily Idea:** *The holiest miracles of life are marked by special stuff.*

Because God created us as spiritual and physical beings, significant human events will always have a physical dimension. Sure, we could just talk about how amazing a new baby is, but showing up with a meal, a sleeper or picture Bible puts action behind an idea. When God does something amazing, three Kings follow a star to a manger, bearing royal gifts for a heavenly King. What are the miracles in your world right now? Someone is recovering from surgery? Show up and clean a bathroom, bringing gifts of rest. A child surviving in a prison? Visit, with clean socks and hope. We do not need to be wealthy or royal to mark and celebrate miracles. Our creative, but real, celebration points the way for others to see God at work in the ordinary.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the thoughtfulness and generosity to mark miracles with the stuff of celebration, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God, who led the Wise Men, you are constantly working miracles in the world and then guiding our lives that we might see them. Help us to fix our eyes on your stars and to follow wherever you lead. May we be joyfully surprised to see you along the way and wherever we arrive. Amen.

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## January 10, 2016 - FEAST OF THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

**Homily Idea:** *Our light for life is Jesus.*

The first and second readings this week point to Jesus, Light in the darkness, fulfilled Son of the promises of the covenant. It's curious, maybe, that His Baptism is the Gospel, when the readings seem so much like Advent. But the words God speaks from heaven are the key: "This is my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased." Jesus, in a Baptism like ours, gives witness to the way that we are called to live. When we follow him, our lives become a light and hope for others. By our Baptism, we are joined to Jesus, Priest, Prophet and King, so serve, proclaim and liberate others in this Year of Mercy. Who is hungry that God is asking you to feed? Who is alone that you can visit? Who is afraid that you can sit with? If we are too busy, too stressed, too overwhelmed to do what you know Jesus would do, then we are probably doing the wrong things. The extent to which we do whatever Jesus tells us, moment by moment, is the extent that we can hear God saying to us, "You are my son/daughter, with you I am well pleased."

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the courage to choose the things that give life to the world, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, in your Baptism you draw us to yourself through our Baptism. Show us the ways that our lives can bring life to others, and give us the courage to choose what is pleasing to you. Amen.

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## January 17, 2016 - 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *God desires to give life through marriage and relationships.*

Throughout the Old Testament, God compares His relationship with the Israelites to a marriage. It is no small thing that Jesus performs his first miracle at a wedding, and that it is an act of lavish and unnecessary generosity for a party. God gives life through human relationships, and He wants marriages and all human relationships to be places of deep love, healing and growth. This means they will also be hard work. If you are

not married, work at the relationships you do have, the ones that demand your commitment and growth. If your marriage is hurting right now, there is no greater work of love that you could do than to recommit to it, to work with your partner at receiving the healing God has for you, together. If your marriage has failed, reflect on the life that God did give you through that relationship, and work at receiving the healing that God has for you now, so your life is not consumed by the brokenness. If you are happily married, work to strengthen your marriage and allow your relationship to be a source of love, compassion and service for others. We need each other, and God's faithfulness reveals itself when we seek to be an image and source of that faithfulness. The second reading provides a powerful call to each of us in our own uniqueness. No one of us, no marriage or family, no single set of relationships, has all the gifts God has for us. So go, and "do whatever he tells you," in the hope of building up people, families, and communities who can be signs of love for the world.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For healthy marriages and families, and the grace to let God build them with our own humility and hard work, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God, Author of families, help us to remember that no relationship or family is too broken for your love. Soften our hearts to each other, to forgive, to be peacemakers, to set boundaries, and to build homes and communities capable of forgiveness and growth. Lead us to new life in and through our families, by birth and by circumstance. Amen.

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### January 24, 2016 - 3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *The Scriptures are being fulfilled in our lives and through our bodies.*

The first reading and the Gospel are about how God makes and keeps his promises to us in history. First, the Prophets proclaim release to the Israelites in exile; they weep for the brokenness that led to the fall of the kingdom, and they celebrate the relief of being set free, here and now. Then Jesus boldly reads prophetic words about the promised Messiah and declares himself the fulfillment. Today, too, God continues to fulfill his promises: to bring good news to the poor, to restore sight to the blind, to free the oppressed. He does it by sending the body of Christ, always first in Jesus, and then in us. In this Year of Mercy, what is my role in being a part of the body of Jesus? Where do I need to receive the mercy he has promised?

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the Scriptures to be fulfilled in our hearing, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Lord of the Body, draw us into you, that we might be the hands and feet of your mission on earth. Fulfill your promises in us and through us. Give us eyes to see you at work, hearts responsive to your nudging, and whole bodies boldly building your Kingdom in our world. Amen.

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### January 31, 2016 - 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *Then the hard stuff of life shows up ... and love is still the answer.*

Oh, the romance of the Incarnation: serene Mary, sleeping Baby in a manger, silent night, promise of the Resurrection. After weeks of hope, the readings get real this week. No sooner than we are created in the secret stillness of a mother's womb, we are engaged in all the battles of life. Right after Jesus declares He is the fulfillment of the promised Messiah, He's driven out of town. If you are clinging to any hope that being a Christian means your life will be filled with ease, affirmation and wealth, it's time to lay that down again, and a little bit more. Your Christmas tree is likely down, and the shiny newness of your resolution and optimism may be wearing off ... real life is here. Love is still the answer. Paul says it this way, "I will show you a still more excellent way ... faith, hope and love abide, these three, and the greatest of these is love." Whatever problems,

challenges, excuses, or frustrations you are carrying, love is still the answer, and more. It is the only answer that will ever change the world. So, set up camp in Ordinary Time for a few more weeks before Lent. You are exactly where you need to be, and love is the answer. Practise it more, trust it with more surrender, show up armed for life with love.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For more love in life's hard and real moments, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Loving Lord, you have walked the way of love, at the cost of your life and for the benefit and blessing of us all. When we face violence, give us love. When we are angry and frustrated, give us love. When we bring all our best games and defenses for the fight, give us the courage to set it all down and choose love. Our world is starving for love; with your grace let that love begin in us. Amen.

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