



## 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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#### **March 3, 2013 – THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *Life requires nurturing, in nature and in our hearts.*

It is fascinating that God speaks to Moses from a burning bush -- which is not consumed. It is in a miracle of nature that Moses is able to hear God speak. In the Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a tree that is not bearing fruit. The gardener pleads with the master of the vineyard to give him another year to help the tree along, unable to bear the thought of its being cut down. Our Catholic faith reverences life in nature, albeit in a different way than in human persons. Natural life in creation bears witness to how we nurture growth in our own lives. Pruning, watering, sunlight, food, rest and patience are all ingredients for life as well as gardening. As winter enters its final stages and Lent continues, it might be a good week to pick up a package of seeds, while promising to nurture the seeds of faith in your heart with the same diligence a gardener gives to tender shoots.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the grace to nurture life in the gardens of our hearts, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of the vineyard, give us reverence for life in Creation. Show us your beauty in the promise of eternal Spring. Form us in your likeness, and give us a heart for the grace and patience of gardening, that we might nurture the life you entrust to us. Amen.

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## March 10, 2013 – FOURTH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *Reconciliation and abundant life.*

Our world is full of hatred, injustice and grudges that rob us of the life God intends for us. This week's readings are all about the life that follows reconciliation. The first reading brings the Israelites out of the desert and into God's favour. The reading is not an affirmation that God withheld forgiveness from his people, but rather that at a certain point the Israelites could finally accept the forgiveness God offered all along. In the same way, the parable of the Prodigal Son shows us that reconciliation depends on our humility and willingness to receive forgiveness. The second reading makes our mission abundantly clear: God has offered himself to us in Christ that we might be reconciled to him, and so offer reconciliation to others. Where have we resisted reconciliation, fostered hatred, nurtured unforgiveness or held on to a grudge? Failure to forgive leaves us wandering in the desert or eating from the troughs of swine. Choose reconciliation and life!

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the humility and grace to pursue reconciliation in our own lives, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** God of abundant mercy, give us the courage to ask humbly for forgiveness where we have failed, and to grant it where we have been wronged. Heal our wounds and make us whole, that we might find the joy of life lived fully. Amen.

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## March 17, 2013 – FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *Life lies in letting go of judgment*

Making our way through the world, and faith, constantly requires us to evaluate, choose what is best, make judgments and take decisions. But while judgment is necessary for many things in the world, judging people is not our job. When we take it on, it stunts our spiritual growth and our capacity for life and love. The first reading and the Psalm remind us that God will pour out life from the most unexpected sources. When God shows up in places we don't want, we often either fail to recognize him or refuse to accept him. When we try to judge others as though we were God, we end up like the bystanders in the Gospel, walking away from a moment of condemnation as we again come face to face with our own sin. Judgment leaves sinners in condemnation. If we want God's abundant life, we have no other choice than to let God be God, and trust his love of us will hold the key to his judgment.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the grace to let God be God and to trust in his judgment, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Father of mercy, bring us face to face with our own weakness when we are tempted to judge others. May we find peace and life in simply stepping back and allowing you to be the merciful Judge of us all. Amen.

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## March 24, 2013 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD, Year C

**Homily Idea:** *Jesus' death is a consequence of the way he lives.*

When we talk about the Paschal Mystery, Jesus' life gets quickly passed over as we move to the more intense moments of his passion, death and Resurrection. These final stages of Jesus' saving actions are important, but they are the culmination of his *life*. Throughout his life, Jesus walks with a faithful authenticity to himself and his Father. This way of living is glimpsed throughout the Old Testament and highlighted in Isaiah (eyes set on God, resisting insult and rejection, trusting in God). The second reading from Philippians suggests that Jesus lives by

emptying himself “even to death”, but that death is lived out into glory. As we read the Passion, notice how much living Jesus does: eating with his friends, teaching them, calling them to peaceful acceptance, trusting in God while he resists the answers which would free him from condemnation, consoling those who mourn what is happening to him, and finally casting himself into the hands of his Father. Our meaning and purpose are found in the way we live – and this will make all the difference in the meaning of our own dying.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For the courage to live as Jesus lived, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Jesus, Lord of Life, show us how to live. When we are afraid, angry, sad or rejected, teach us to live deeply into difficult experiences, that we might find meaning and purpose even in the moments which require dying. May our deaths be just another step in our living. Amen.

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### **March 31, 2013 – EASTER SUNDAY, Year C**

**Homily Idea:** *Resurrected life is made for sharing.*

At the end of all three Easter Gospel readings (at the Vigil, the early morning Mass and the Mass in afternoon or evening), those who have witnessed the Resurrection are compelled to go and tell others. In Jesus, life has conquered death and suffering, and the disciples are inspired to share the power of life with others in great joy. The joy of Life is all around us -- when someone survives an illness, when the sun comes up after a job is lost, when feuding families make tentative peace. As Easter people, we are compelled to witness the ways Christ is victorious in our world today, again and again. In this Easter season, make a point of sharing and celebrating with your neighbours and communities the good news of Jesus' rising again to Life.

**Prayer of the Faithful:** For a deeper desire to share Jesus' resurrected life with the world, we pray to the Lord.

**Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:** Risen Jesus, compel us to share the good news of your life wherever we go. May our hearts overflow with joy at your Resurrection. May our faces shine with the light of Easter. May our joy be an infectious invitation for others to come and see the tomb lying empty. Amen.

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