



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.

March 2, 2014 – 8TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – Year A

Homily Idea: *Mothers can forget their babies.*

The first reading today reminds us, even though it seems unimaginable most of the time, that mothers can forget their babies, even the ones growing inside them. As human beings, we are forgetful, fallible, sinful. The Chosen People forgot God loved them. It is possible, and maybe even frequent, that expectant mothers are afraid of the babies growing inside them, and afraid of the changes motherhood brings. Even in a world where mothers forget their babies, and contemplate and carry out abortion, God has not forgotten about us. Will we admit and repent the times we have been selfish in the face of the needs of children, putting ourselves before their needs for patience, guidance, time and attention? Can we see in the scared eyes of a woman considering abortion our own forgetfulness of God’s faithfulness? Will we have the courage and faithfulness to be a sign of God’s constant present to women -- and men -- facing unplanned pregnancies?

Prayer of the Faithful: For mothers who forget their babies and Christians who forget that God does not forget us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the Covenant, help us to remember your faithful presence among us. May we be humble enough to seek forgiveness when we have forgotten you, and may we extend that forgiveness and presence to those most in need of you. When mothers and fathers forget their children, help us to remember them and show them your presence and love, so they might also remember. Amen.

March 5, 2014 – ASH WEDNESDAY, Year A

Homily Idea: *Dying brings us new life.*

How our world resists and runs from death! We idolize youthfulness, purchase anti-aging products, marginalize the elderly, and fear the end that awaits us all. Not only do we resist the death that moves us from this life to the next, but we also fear the little deaths – from selfishness, from self-righteousness, from hatred and division – that trap us in sadness and isolation even while we breathe. Jesus conquered death. It is his path and ours to the freedom of life in God. So wear your ashes today, and remember them throughout Lent. Embrace the little deaths that have the power to destroy the isolation, sadness, addiction and imprisonment you have become strangely comfortable with. Give up complaining, surrender resentment, die before you give in to gossip. Choose to help someone in need when it puts you out. Offer encouragement instead of sarcasm. Live into new habits that bring joy. Ask God to show you the life that will emerge from the ashes -- if you are willing to get a bit uncomfortable.

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

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Christ of the ashes, walk with us into the darkness, that your light and life will be brighter and more glorious when you raise us, now and forever. Amen.

March 9, 2014 – 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Shame brings death, not life.*

When Adam and Eve realized they had sinned, the first thing they did was cover themselves, attempting to hide. Hiding from our sin traps us in it. Hiding creates shame. Shame slowly destroys us and prevents us from knowing the freedom of life God created for us. The sin of the first persons created sin and death for us all; the righteousness of one man, Jesus, offers new life for us all. The choice is ours, now. Where are we drowning in shame, hiding our brokenness in the hope no one will discover the truth about us? That hiding robs us of life and chokes out our true identity. Reject shame and choose life! Go to confession. Write a letter of apology or forgiveness that has been years coming. Get help for an addiction or illness that has been plaguing you. Shame has been conquered, and we don't have to be choked by its grip if we are willing to choose life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the willingness to let go of shame and choose life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of the garden, you sought out Adam and Eve in their shame, and sent your Son to show us how to choose a life of honest humility. Free us from the bondage of shame, and show us how you love us just as we are. Amen.

March 16, 2014 – 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Jesus is the way of life.*

In the second reading, we read, "Join with me in suffering for the Gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace." Our sacrifices and suffering, during Lent and all year, are not embraced because they earn us salvation, or make our lives better than those of others. We follow Jesus because living like him teaches us what life is supposed to be. We desire to share this message with others, not primarily to save them from hell, but so they can also discover life's true meaning and purpose, by grace. Thank God this week for the way of life He has shown us in Jesus. Thank Him for the strength to do difficult things and find joy there too.

Prayer of the Faithful: In gratitude for the way of life Jesus has shown us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of purpose and grace, fill us with a longing for the life you created for us. Give us strength to endure suffering and difficulties, and joy in the midst of them. Help us to walk in your way and to seek your mercy when we stumble. Amen.

March 23, 2014 – 3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *God's life is for all...*

In the encounter with the woman at the well, Jesus speaks to a Gentile woman. Until Jesus came, salvation was understood as only being for the Chosen People of the Covenant. A time is coming, says Jesus, when the Father will call to himself all who worship in spirit and truth. The woman is offered the life and grace of Jesus. Who are the Gentile women of our day? Have we assumed that the good news is only for us, for Catholic Christians, for Christians generally? Have we assumed it is only for people who make the right moral decisions, whose marriages are perfect and unscathed, for children who listen to their parents, for citizens who haven't broken any serious laws? The Gospel is for everyone. Check yourself for discrimination about who belongs in our pews. Ask God to show you where you look down your nose at your neighbours. Examine if there are places in yourself you think aren't good enough to let God in and redeem.

Prayer of the Faithful: For forgiveness for our judgments and exclusion of others, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God at the well, teach us to come to you when we are thirsty and to welcome all who come to drink. Show us how we judge others and uproot it from our hearts so we, with Jesus, might offer water to all who are thirsty, life to all who fear death. Amen.

March 30, 2014 – 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Life lessons from the differently-abled.*

In Jesus' time, people associated sickness, disfiguration and inability with sin, and consequently such people were marginalized. We like to think that in Canada in 2014, we are much more progressive. But how often do we make the same assumptions about illness and disability? Many babies with Down's syndrome are aborted every year. Children who cannot hear or see are now educated in publicly funded, rather than private, schools, but often later have difficulty finding work. People in wheelchairs are often stared at in public or asked awkward, personal questions in public. Deep down, our society is suspicious about differences in ability and potential losses in productivity among the differently-abled. Jesus makes a powerful point among the Pharisees about blindness: it is not merely physical. The blind man sees in Jesus what the religious leaders cannot. He chooses life amidst suffering, and values the Spirit of the Law above the law itself. Spend some time this week reflecting on or nurturing your relationship with someone whose abilities are different from yours. Choose to learn, instead of comparing.

Prayer of the Faithful: For reverence for the life and truth proclaimed by every person, regardless of their and appearance, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Creator God, show us how each of your people is created in your image. Reveal the mystery of who you are though the differences in the people you have created in your image. Transform our hearts that we might see you in each person, and call forth the gifts you have given, wherever they lie. Amen.
