



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 1, 2017 – ASH WEDNESDAY

Homily Idea: *Abundant life requires honesty, repentance, and humility.*

“Even now,” the first reading reminds us, God is calling, “Return to me with all your heart.” We have messed it up, failed to deliver on our promises, turned away. And our temptation in shame is to turn away from God. But turning away will destroy our life, rather than help us to find it. So in the midst of your sin, your brokenness, your mess, return to Him, to the One who gives life and promises the healing, hope, and new life we need. Today, when we mark ourselves with ashes, we are marked with a sign of our smallness, our inevitable death. True life comes from living honestly with both the miracle of our lives and our failings. We are always invited to start again, to let God heal us, and to remember we are nothing without Him. The Gospel reminds us that living Ash Wednesday is not a once-a-year thing: we need to practise praying, giving generously, and self-sacrifice in the secret and silence of ordinary life. Let us make this Lent a season of practising the small way of faith that keeps us returning to God, who loves us even when we fall short.

Prayer of the Faithful: For honesty, repentance, and humility, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God, as you call us to return to you, help us see our shortcomings clearly. Give us the courage to return to you, to ask your forgiveness, and to receive it with humility and gratitude. May we never forget you made us from dust to return to dust. May we know your unfailing love precisely in the midst of our failures. Amen.

March 5, 2017 – 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: Hiding destroys our life; living faith redeems it.

The first reading from Genesis reveals hiding as a human response to temptation and sin. The Gospel reveals Jesus' response to the same temptation: showing up with trust in the ways of faith. Jesus does not rely on his own strength but on the strength of the Father who sustains Him. The second reading ties the two together, connecting the personal consequences of our choices to the salvation of the whole world. Sin enters the world through the sin of one person, and redemption comes through the victory of the One Son of God. In the face of sin, we have choices, and those choices have real impact not only for me, but also for my family, friends and neighbours. Hiding our sin, denying it, refusing to deal with it leaves us isolated from God, from each other, and from the ways of faith that can heal us and our broken world. Facing our temptations, standing firm in the ways of faith, and letting God use us will redeem us and heal the world. So, stop hiding. Start looking at your life. Whether it is too much shopping or too much drinking, tearing others down or holding onto anger, drowning in debt, or refusing to give out of fear you'll never have enough -- lay yourself bare. Go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Call a counsellor. Tell your spouse what you have been hiding. Ask for help. Show up in the face of the temptation and sin, and speak God's promises. Let Him be strong where you have failed.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the courage to stop hiding our failures from God who can heal us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of healing and wholeness, teach us to stop hiding our failures from you. Turn our hearts and our lives toward you, to speak your name in our temptations. May our lives be a path for others to find life rather than death. Amen.

March 12, 2017 – 2ND SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Life in the valleys and on the mountain tops is a gift.*

In the first reading, God sends Abram out of his homeland, into the wild. In the Gospel, Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain where they experience the Transfiguration, an intimate connecting place with God. All of God's people struggle to follow Him faithfully. Abram (with Sarah) leaves his homeland, struggles with infertility, tries to kill his son out of faithfulness. Peter asks Jesus if he should set up camp on top of the mountain, and eventually denies Jesus. We resist the movement of change and become easily entitled to the blessings we have received. Our culture reinforces the idea that those with stable housing and jobs have earned them (and those without have received what they deserve); that our citizens deserve more than non-citizens; that we are entitled to stability. We are not. Those who are refugees, living unemployed or underemployed, facing chronic illness or imprisonment are not less loved by God. Those of us graced with jobs, financial wealth, relative good health, or freedom, have not earned more of God's favour. We are called to see God's blessings in all circumstances and to use whatever gifts we have been given to assist all God's people. We do not get to set up camp in the most comfortable places and then assume nothing will ever change. We are called to follow God into the scariest parts of our lives with faith, the same way we are to follow Him in stability and wealth with generosity and detachment.

Prayer of the Faithful: For willingness to follow God wherever He leads us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Oh God, who calls us in the midst of all of life's circumstances, teach us to trust you, no matter what life brings. Help our hearts cry to you when we find ourselves afraid and led out into the wilderness, and our spirits to share your gifts when we have much. Amen.

March 19, 2017 – 3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *Doubt is a normal part of our faith life, one that calls forth deeper faith.*

The Psalmist this week encourages us not to harden our hearts. Moses leads his people through the desert, where thirst makes them doubt God. Jesus meets the woman at the well, and asks her for a drink. Her position outside the Jewish community of faith makes her an unlikely source of water for Jesus – and makes Jesus an unlikely source of healing for her. In the midst of our doubts and trials, Jesus calls to us as He does to her: “The time is coming and is now here” when we can worship God in Spirit and Truth. This is our hope, that right in the midst of our doubts and uncertainties God is with us. We have been promised that “hope does not disappoint us.” Our invitation, right in the midst of life’s worst, is not to harden our hearts, but to root ourselves in hope. God is where our life comes from. When we live this way, we can become a gift to others facing the same losses, grief, or suffering we have walked through.

Prayer of the Faithful: For hearts that remain open to God in the face of doubts and uncertainties, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of life, you softened your heart to us in choosing a life like ours. Even in the face of crucifixion, you opened your arms to save our lives. Help us keep our hearts and arms open when we have doubts and when life’s challenges tempt us to withdraw and protect ourselves. Draw us into trust in you. Amen.

March 26, 2017 – 4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, Year A

Homily Idea: *God gives us new life with healing.*

How many of us are too proud to ask for help? For many of us, our attitudes about getting help are pretty similar to our attitudes about healing. We get stuck in denial (“I don’t need help/healing.”) We believe we aren’t worthy (“They won’t help *me*, anyway.”) Or simply we do not want to be indebted or in need (“I got myself into the mess, so I have to get myself out.”) God wants to heal us, to redeem us, to give us joy – often in ways we aren’t expecting or aren’t open to receiving. When Jesus heals the blind man, those who have known him his whole life see nothing more than a blind sinner. But it is the blind man’s willingness to ask Jesus for healing that makes him different from the onlookers, and allows Jesus to make him well. While faith will not guarantee us lives without suffering or illness, it should make us willing to receive healing, help, and new life – on God’s terms. When was the last time you asked Him for help and then got willing to receive it and do your part? Where do you need God’s help? What do you need to change in order to allow Him to give you help?

Prayer of the Faithful: For willingness to call on God for help and to receive it in whatever form it comes, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God, who healed the blind man, heal us too. Open our hearts to ask for your help. Give us the courage to ask you for the healing we need, and the humility and trust to receive it this Lenten season and always. Amen.
