



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.

May 4, 2014 – 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

Homily Idea: *We all want the life God has for us, and it is revealed by Jesus.*

So many people are wandering around in our world and our churches, longing for true life. We’re tired of the monotony, exhausted by work, frustrated by the effort and challenges of living in relationships, being eaten away by our compulsions and addictions. We follow Jesus because we have seen Him rise from death to new life. The Psalmist proclaims the trust of faith: “Lord, you will show me the path of life.” We all need this faith because, left to ourselves, we pursue the life we want on paths that lead us to death. Even the disciples on the road to Emmaus do not recognize Jesus. “Were not our hearts burning within us as he opened the Scriptures to us?” It is not our job to force life on people, or try to force the circumstances of our own lives to be truly life-giving. It is our job to surrender our lives to God who gives us the life we long for, and to share our joy with others, in the hope their hearts will also burn with life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the willingness to surrender to God’s plan for our lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Risen Jesus, walk with us on the roads we walk each day, and help us to recognize you there. Light our hearts on fire with desire for the life you offer us. Help us release our grip on the things we have chosen which rob us of new and risen life. Amen.

May 11, 2014 – 4TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

Homily Idea: *Life for sheep comes by following the Shepherd.*

Both the Psalm and the Gospel this week point us to Christ the Shepherd, who guides and protects his flock. For a sheep in the pasture, the shepherd's presence and care is life itself. To be lost is to risk injury, death, or starvation. To be found is to have freedom, care and protection. We are all sheep, not stupid or witless, but created for loving care in community. Our life depends on knowing the voice of our Shepherd. This week is the National Week for Life and the Family, an initiative by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. How is your family attentive to the voice of the Shepherd? In what ways do you get to know His voice, cry out to Him when you are lost, point others to Him when they ask how you have been found?

Prayer of the Faithful: For ears that hear and hearts that love the voice of the Shepherd, we pray to the Lord.

Prayers for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families:

Jesus, our Shepherd, help us hear your voice and trust your care. Amen.

Jesus, our Brother, you have made us sons and daughters of your Father in heaven. Teach our family to love as you love, and to extend our love beyond our household to all of God's children on earth. Amen.

Jesus, Mary and Joseph, pray for our family. Teach us to honour our parents, to trust in you when your plan is not clear to us, and to have courage when life is hard. Amen.

Mary, Mother of God, you know the surprise and fear of a pregnancy that is unexpected. Be with the mothers and fathers entrusted with new life, and help them to give life and birth to the children you give to the world as a gift. Amen.

Spirit of God, be present to us in times of illness and death. When we are afraid, help us seek and bring your peace. When we are in pain, help us to journey through it -- and teach us to look for resurrection. When we face our own hour of death, help us listen for the voice of the Shepherd, leading us to new life. Amen.

God who seeks the lost, heal us when we ourselves are lost and in pain. Make us ever ready to go out in search of those who are lost, and to practise forgiveness, hope and love. Amen.

May 18, 2014 – 5TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

Homily Idea: *Jesus is life.*

Often when we think about the dying and the rising, we think about Jesus the Saviour, the One who earns salvation for us. This is a beautiful image and role of Jesus. In this week's Gospel, we get another image to hold alongside that of Saviour. We get Jesus the Way. When Thomas asks how we will find Jesus if we do not know the way, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." In addition to being the Saviour for us, Jesus models life in us. If we want to have life now and life eternal, we need to live like Him. Life comes from living like Him. Do you find it hard to believe in all this? Do you struggle to understand why you have to forgive? Stop worrying so much about the thinking and try doing. Serve as Jesus served. Practice forgiveness. Attend to the sick. Feed the hungry. The wisdom of the Gospel often seems like foolishness when we think about it, but becomes evident when we practise it. In this week dedicated to life and the family, try living like Jesus together as a household, and see if the practice bears more grace than the thinking....

Prayer of the Faithful: For the strength and faith to live as Jesus lived, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, Way of Life, give us courage to live as you lived, to walk in your way, and to trust that following you will indeed lead to life, now and forever. Amen.

May 25, 2014 – 6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER – YEAR A

Homily Idea: *Adoption is God's way.*

In the Gospel, Jesus consoles and encourages the disciples before he ascends into heaven, promising them the Holy Spirit to guide and help them. Do not worry, He says, "I will not leave you orphaned." Many children in our world are orphans, separated from their biological parents by death, illness, poverty, addiction and circumstance. Many more live with biological parents who cannot or will not give them the unconditional love God hopes for them to experience in a family. Each of us, by Christ's Death and Resurrection, has been offered adoption by God the Father, showered with unconditional love. Each of us as adopted sons and daughters of God are invited to extend that adoption to others. There are so many ways for us to be active participants in the grace of adoption: by actually adopting children in need of families (especially those who are not infants, who have physical and intellectual disabilities), by foster parenting, or supporting families who do, by sponsoring children through Chalice, by giving time and money to organizations that help keep struggling families together and on a path of healing. Our own biological families are graced places but, as Christians, we have no right to place bloodlines above the many children of God in need of love, kindness, healing and family.

Prayer of the Faithful: For an increase in our participation in God's adoptive love, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God, our adoptive Father, we are grateful you have adopted us into your family, where we can find the unconditional love we need. Extend your love to our families, that we may image your abundant generosity. Teach us to extend that love to all who need it in our world. Amen.
