



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.

September 4, 2016 – 23RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

Homily Idea: *Life in Christ is all-encompassing, and for all people.*

We do not have enough kindness to be kind in every situation. We do not have enough strength to face life’s challenges. Our resources are inadequate for building the Kingdom. In the Gospel, we are invited to put Jesus before everything else in our lives, not to deny the gifts and people around us, but so God can make more with everything we have. It can feel like loss to give everything we have to God – as though we won’t have any money left if we let God spend it. But Jesus asks us for everything, and promises us this is the only way to new life. While it will never be enough, when we trade what we have for Him, we receive peaceful and purposeful life. This life of surrender is not only for us, but for all. When we make Jesus the centre, we get the freedom, and the possibility, to see God in everyone and everything, as Paul does in the second reading. He sends Onesimus (a slave and new Christian) back to the community, trusting they will see and honour Christ in him. This how we are “saved by wisdom”. Inasmuch as we give our lives away for the benefit of all, God helps us live our life with love.

Prayer of the Faithful: For lives centred on Jesus first, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of abundance, you've given us everything we have so we might give it back. Pry our fingers off the gifts you've given to us, that we might give as generously as you do. Help us give our lives away, inspiring others to do the same. Amen.

September 11, 2016 – 24TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

Homily Idea: *We get new life when we give and receive forgiveness.*

Each of these readings highlights the dynamism of forgiveness. I love the image of Moses begging God for mercy for his people. We don't actually pray because it changes God's mind, but Moses and the early Israelites learned that God was a God of forgiveness, inviting them to become a people of forgiveness by their failings. God called Paul, a persecutor and violent offender, to become the most prolific missionary in all of Christian history. The prodigal son goes back for pity: his father chooses forgiveness and the son chooses to receive it. Unforgiveness, self-righteousness, bitterness, resentment and grudges are bitter poisons that kill us. Our choosing forgiveness – both offering to others and receiving it when others offer it to us – turns that poisoned death into new life. We get to start over, begin again, have new life. Because we are all broken by sin, there is no life without forgiveness....

Prayer of the Faithful: For forgiveness for ourselves and each other, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Merciful God, you have forgiven us from every brokenness, and you still love us. Help us to believe it is possible to forgive and to love the wounded, especially ourselves. Transform that belief into participation in your ongoing forgiveness, in a world desperately afraid to be broken and loved at the same time. Amen.

September 18, 2016 – 25TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

Homily Idea: *The way we use our resources gives life or deals death. God asks us to choose life.*

If you preach about anything other than how we use money, power and possessions this week, you might be more popular than neighbouring pastors, but you will be missing an opportunity to invite conversion where most of us need it desperately. Our culture says money, power and possessions are private matters. It is rude to talk about money; inappropriate or unsafe to challenge authority; and a situation of circumstance or personal work ethic that dictates the distribution of possessions. These readings say otherwise. The prophet Amos makes it clear that religious generosity in "church" settings followed by greed and injustice the rest of the week is unacceptable. Maybe our people don't relate to tampering scales, but do they buy nice things for themselves and give their leftovers to the poor? Do we consider the working conditions of the people who make our clothes? God cares. So should we. Paul invites us to use our power well and to pray for, rather than mock or criticize, those in power, for the sake of the life and benefit of all people. Politics and leadership are difficult and important. Cynicism, abuse of power and apathy are tempting, but not life-giving ways for us to build the Kingdom. Finally, the Gospel is clear that it is precisely in the way we use our possessions and material life that we demonstrate what our values are. Jesus commends the manager not for his dishonesty, but for his ability to see what really matters, and to prepare as best he can for what awaits him, given the circumstances. "Those to whom much has been given" is a proverb not to justify the unequal distribution of wealth, but an invitation to all to use whatever we have to bring more life – not just for ourselves, but for all. Discipleship and abundant life will change the way we think about and interact with money and stuff. Life depends on preaching about it.

Prayer of the Faithful: For God to transform the way we think about and use money, power, and stuff, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God who became flesh, you walked in our world, spent our money, spoke our language. You know that our spiritual life is worked out in the world. You designed it so our growth in you is intimately related to how we use the material gifts you give us for the benefit and blessing of all. Show us how to use our money, power and possessions in a way that brings life to the world. Amen.

September 25, 2016 – 26TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Year C

Homily Idea: *Faithfulness brings life, even if it doesn't always feel like it.*

There is a lot of complaining these days about “adulting” -- adults recognizing how good they had it as kids and complaining about or even rejecting the responsibilities of growing up. This is happening in all age groups in our culture. Who wouldn't want to eat great food every day but not cook or do dishes? Given the choice, lots of us would prefer to live in houses we don't have to clean, or to get money by winning the lottery rather than going to work every day. But God created us in His image, and invited our participation in building His Kingdom because we come to value life and faith by living it, rather than by having it handed to us. This is why Jesus says the rich man won't be convinced by someone sent back from the dead when he wasn't convinced by the living. God invites us to live a life of faith – including the often difficult or dreary tasks of prayer, generosity, kindness, selflessness, hard work, and mercy – because we become the way we act. The way we live is forming us. We will not enjoy all the things we do to become like God, but it will be worth it. The first reading is clear that being guided only by what we like and when it suits us leads to an inability to empathize with the suffering of others: when our luck runs out and we do not get what we want, we will be miserable. God invites us, precisely through the freedom we gain with increased independence, to allow responsibilities to refine us into the people He created us to be. When we faithfully respond to the people and circumstances around us with joy instead of resentment or rejection, and with gratitude instead of shirking or minimal effort, we “fight the good fight of faith.”

Prayer of the Faithful: For the strength to say yes to a life of faith, even when we don't feel like it, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Faithful God, you loved us when we have walked away from you, when we have hurt you. When it would have been easier to walk away, you sent your Son and we killed Him. Then you raised Him that we might live. Strengthen us to choose to be faithful to you, especially when the kindnesses of love feel like great deaths to our own egos and desires. Help us love you and each other even and especially when we don't feel like it. Amen.
