



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. Being “pro-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? But 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 pro-life homily idea, a prayer of the faithful or an insight which can be used to foster the abundant life that Jesus came to bring to 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.

December 2, 2012 – 1 ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *We wait in hope and love – for the sake of our lives and those of others.*

In the midst of readings about the end times, and in a world filled with signs of the culture of death, it can be tempting to become self-righteous with a haughty gratitude that God will at least save *us* – when the time comes. But the salvation we hope for depends on *how we wait* on God’s coming. Though we walk amidst the death and suffering of our world, we are to be witnesses to the light of Jesus. When things seem too far gone, we don’t have the luxury of holding up in a bunker of disciples, smugly waiting for deliverance. We are called out in the dark, searching with flashlights for anyone and everyone who is crying out for God.

Prayer of the Faithful: For waiting hearts filled with hope and love, that will be beacons of light to those in need of God’s life, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of light and life, give us hope as we wait for your coming again. When we are tempted to be grateful to have found you while others are lost, send us out into the darkness in search of those who need you most, we pray to the Lord.

December 9, 2012 – 2 ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *Reject sin, find life.*

In recent years, sin has not been a favourite topic for homilies. This week's readings challenge us to reject sin, precisely because we have to "take off mourning and misery" in order to put on "the splendour of God". If God is going to fill in the valleys and flatten the mountains in our lives, we have to acknowledge that the mountains and valleys are there. What are the behaviours, attitudes and sins that we cling to, which keep us from really receiving the life God has for us? During Advent, as we wait for the Christ Child, what mourning and misery needs to be cleaned up and taken out so our hands are free to hold the baby who brings us life?

Prayer of the Faithful: For eyes to see the sin we cling to and grace to ask for forgiveness, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, you came among us with the irresistible power of a baby, requiring both our hands and captivating our whole hearts. Help us to cast aside the sin and brokenness that we cling to, so we might be ready to hold you when you come again. Amen.

December 16, 2012 – 3 ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *If the God of Life is drawing near, make sure that people see him coming in you.*

Each of the readings this week proclaims God is near. God comes near. In just over two weeks, we will celebrate how he comes again, into our world, our churches, our hearts. The readings give us a ton of practical ways how we can proclaim Jesus is coming: forget fear and grudges, be kind, share generously, pray, wear joy on your lips, be satisfied with what you have, and cry out (with song, perhaps?) about how excited you are! Lots of our friends and neighbours will be exhausted and frustrated with the busyness and demands of celebrating Christmas. What if we, his disciples, were to go about the fullness of this season with the excitement and joy that comes from the Giver of Life?

Prayer of the Faithful: For the joy that comes from anticipating Jesus coming into our hearts and lives, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Joy-filled Giver of Life, let the anticipation of your birth fill us with overflowing joy. May our excitement and anticipation be a sign to the world that you are always near, we pray to the Lord.

December 23, 2012 – 4 ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *Be a prophet of Life.*

Our God delivers life from unlikely places: from slavery and exile, out of collapsed kingdoms, from crucifixion and from the womb of a virgin. Elizabeth's baby was miracle enough, after a lifetime struggle with infertility, but John is our model as a prophet of Life. When Mary arrives and greets her cousin, it is the baby inside Elizabeth who recognizes the Author of Life in a most unlikely place. Advent and Christmas are great opportunities for us to share God's story of life, because our culture celebrates too, even if people don't fully understand why. Wherever you see life in unlikely places, name it, celebrate it, protect it. If words fail you – just leap for joy.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the zeal to leap for joy like John the Baptist, at each and every sign of the life of Jesus among us, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, you are constantly coming to your people, even when we fail to see you. In each and every moment that we are blessed to recognize you here and now, give us the courage to leap with joy at your coming. John the Baptist, pray for us.

December 25, 2012 – Christmas Mass During the Night

Homily Idea: *Do Not Be Afraid!*

There is a reason that Jesus' birth is announced by the angel with the same words God used for Moses and Gabriel used for Mary: when we see the fullness of life (who is God), we are tempted to run with fear. Since Adam and Eve hid in the garden, we feel unworthy of the Life we are called to. So on this holy night which inspires our whole Christian life, remember that our greatest joy is also a bit scary, though we have no reason to be afraid. This very night, a young woman will discover she is unexpectedly pregnant. A prisoner of war will attempt escape in hopes of landing as a refugee in our nation. A person with HIV will long for a loving touch. When we leave here tonight, Babe-in-Arms, remember to carry him gently, and remind people they do not need to be afraid of the life he brings to them.

Prayer of the Faithful: For our fears to be dispelled by the Infant Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Holy Spirit, Animator of Angels and Fire, draw fear out of us like the cold evaporates before flame. Give us courage to stand before you, to find life by following the star to the Baby in the manger.

December 30, 2012 – 1 CHRISTMAS, Year C – Feast of the Holy Family

Homily Idea: Every family is holy – nurture life there.

In each of the families presented in the readings, we have something atypical. Hannah was barren and infertile; we are the adopted children of God the Father; and Joseph is the most famous step-father in history. Each family that joins itself to God's family is a holy family, called to receive and celebrate the life of each of its members. This year, when you are making resolutions, begin all pro-life ministry in your family. Celebrate the birth and growth of each member. Mourn losses. Reject violence. Practise forgiveness. Extend mercy. Give justice, each according to his or her need. Suffer each other's pain together. Laugh and be filled with joy. Grow in appreciation of the dying that comes with living. And then, let the abundance of grace in your holy family spill over into your neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and community. Every family is broken, and yet holy enough to find God's life at home. As Pope John Paul II said, "Families, become what you are!"

Prayer of the Faithful: For a growing awareness that every family will see its own holiness, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God the Father, draw us into your arms, that we might know how cherished we are as members of your family. May our homes and our hearts be living expressions of your desire to gather all people into your family, now and forever, Amen.
