



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.

December 2, 2018 – 1ST SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *We cannot know the future, so we live in the present, with faith.*

End-times readings can be uncomfortable for us. Who likes to read about judgment and eternal consequence, suffering and surprise? The Psalmist offers us really significant advice for this season of waiting for Jesus: “To you, O Lord, we lift up our souls. Make us to know your ways. Teach us your paths.” Christian wisdom for waiting is to avoid obsession about the future but live faithfully in the present. How can we live fully right here this week? Of course we will be preparing for Christmas, both practically (through decorating, hosting loved ones, baking, shoveling snow, getting things ready at work so we can be away) and spiritually (remembering Jesus is always coming to us anew), but how do we prepare in a way that fills our hearts in the preparing, rather than giving way to future-driven anxiety or stress? Teach us, God, to stay in this week, to avoid wishing it away, or being carried away by the busyness or stress of this season. May we *live* here this week.

Prayer of the Faithful: For faith to be present while we prepare for Jesus and each other, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Coming Jesus, teach us to live in the present moment, enjoying the anticipation of your coming again as much as your arrival. Protect us from frenzy, from the

addiction to busyness, from all the things we think we should do that stop us from seeing the gifts that are right in front of us now. To you, O Lord, we lift up our souls and our preparations for Christmas. Amen.

December 9, 2018 – 2ND SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *God uses human lives to build the Kingdom.*

What a miracle it is that God asks us to participate in preparing the way of the Lord! He asks this of each of us, that we might be personally ready to receive Jesus, but also so the world might. John the Baptist prepares himself, and he invites others to join in. God is coming among us, and attention to the roughest places of our lives will smooth a path to the glory of God for us and for the world. The peace on earth we sing about at Christmas is both a gift from God and a commitment we make by the way we live. This week, give some attention to the mountains and valleys of your life and your world. How will God bring more life and peace to the world through these unlikely and challenging places?

Prayer of the Faithful: For peace that we can participate in, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Prince of Peace, prepare the way for yourself in our lives and our world. Help us to see paths that you have prepared for us, and awaken in us a desire to create new paths to you, straight through the most challenging places. Amen.

DECEMBER 16, 2018 – 3rd SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *Fear and worry choke out the life God gives us as gift.*

Advent and Christmas can be full of fear and worry, even though they are supposed to be celebrations of peace and love. What if things don't go right? What if our relationships are strained? What if addiction, death, illness or unemployment have robbed us of joy? What if our debt catches up to us? What if everything is changing and we do not know what to do? During this season and every season, fear and worry can be useful emotions that invite us to change or protect ourselves from harm. But fear and worry are not states in which we are always meant to live. This week, prepare for Jesus with the words of the prophet Zephaniah: "The Lord will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you with his love." If your fear and worry are bigger than prayer, do not wait until after Christmas to reach out and ask for help or make changes. Call a counsellor or visit a support group, stop spending, simplify your plans, or set a boundary. We do not have to live afraid.

Prayer of the Faithful: For fear to be cast out by God's renewing love, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of salvation, you are among us and we do not need to be afraid. Prepare our hearts to live without fear. Help us to feel your gladness and know your love as we prepare to welcome you once again. Amen.

DECEMBER 23, 2018 – 4TH SUNDAY OF ADVENT, Year C

Homily Idea: *Even in the womb, we could proclaim joy with our lives. Are we still doing that?*

When Mary greets Elizabeth, John leaps inside her at the presence of Jesus in Mary's womb. So often, the movement of babies brings joy – to parents and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends. Sometimes, even strangers can watch a baby dance across a mother's belly. And when we have been born and grown, how often does our movement, speech, or facial expression bring joy to others, proclaiming God is with us here and now! In these last few days, with whatever remains to be done to prepare for Jesus, how can your life and the way you live be a proclamation of your great joy that Jesus is with us, coming again to whatever our lives look like today?

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to proclaim Jesus with the way we live, move, speak and look, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of anticipation and longing, let your face of love shine through our faces and our lives, that all who encounter us these last days of Advent also encounter you. Amen.

DECEMBER 25, 2018 – CHRISTMAS – THE NATIVITY OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *God is the light of our lives.*

One of the greatest lines of the Christmas liturgy echoes through our memories, even if we miss hearing it when we are at Mass: "The people who wandered in darkness have seen a marvelous light." How many seasons of darkness have we walked through in our lives? (A few? some? many?) How many of them have destroyed us completely? None. By virtue of our hearts still beating, we have survived, and grace, gift, and light have found their way through the darkest shadows, even if not yet completely. This is the promise and reality of Christmas, that in spite of whatever evil threatens to overtake us, God is sending His Son into the messy manglers of our lives. Light has been promised, and so we celebrate that God has conquered every darkness, even the ones yet to come.

Prayer of the Faithful: In gratitude for God sending us the Light of the World, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Light of the World, you have come again into darkness, dispelling fear and casting out evil. In the middle of the night, and early in the morning, and all through this Christmas day, help us to see you, small and unassuming in the chaos and quiet of the manglers that make up our celebrations of your coming again. May you be the Prince of our peace. Amen.

DECEMBER 30, 2018 – THE HOLY FAMILY OF JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH

Homily Idea: *God's family life is full of surprises too.*

The pictures of our families and the Holy Family often do not tell the whole story of family life. Icons and photographs usually capture an ideal moment of calm, with smiles and coordination of place and position with intentional clothing. Just ask any family what it took to arrive at Mass today if they would send out an image captured on the way out the door? These readings are a wonderful affirmation that chaos, drama, surprises and challenges are part of the joy of God's holy family. Hannah gives thanks in the temple for the gift of a son after

years of infertility. The second reading proclaims our adoption into God's family even and especially when our own experiences of family have been less than loving. Mary and Joseph lose Jesus for three days. You and your messy family are welcome here. We might even call your family holy.

Prayer of the Faithful: For families to find themselves welcome here, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Holy Family, hold our families and give us the grace to become what we are: communities of forgiveness and grace. Teach us to embrace the surprises of loving each other. Remind us that we are gifts to one another, and draw us deeper into love with every moment. Amen.

January 1, 2019 – SOLEMNITY OF MARY, THE HOLY MOTHER OF GOD

Homily Idea: *Mary is an example of how to live in the assurance of God's blessing.*

In the first reading, God gives Moses and Aaron a blessing for the people. God promises that His people will be blessed. The second reading reminds us we are the blessed children of God. The Gospel gives us the image of Mary receiving and pondering all the blessings of the nativity. On this feast day of Mary, we are invited to celebrate her example of living in and out of the knowledge we are blessed by God. How will you live today (and all year) if you are grounded, as Mary was, in a deep knowledge of how blessed we are?

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to receive and ponder God's blessing, with Mary, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Mary, Mother of God, hold us in your heart and help us to ponder the blessing of your Son. Let us be inspired by your example to live out of the knowledge and experience of God's abundant blessing. Amen.