



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.

April 5, 2020 – PALM SUNDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD

Homily Idea: *We worship the One who felt forsaken in life and who responds by joining His life to ours.*

The Psalm chorus is one of the most well-known in our tradition: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When Jesus says these words, He points to those around and the rest of us throughout history to read Psalm 22 -- where we cry out to God when we feel abandoned, with faith that our feelings are not the whole story. At the end of the Psalm, we hear a hopeful message that even when we may feel alone, we trust we are not. With the Coronavirus pandemic, many have been in isolation for weeks. We aren’t sure when our seclusion might give way and we are back to a more regular rhythm of life. Jesus offers us an example in that He reaches out to the forsaken. From wherever you are, what are you doing to stay connected to and mindful of those who might be lonely, afraid, abandoned, or forsaken? Can you make phone calls or deliver packages? Pray, or help with yard work? If you are feeling forsaken, what can you do to cry out to God and your neighbours, with faith that God and others can find you in the midst of struggle?

Prayer of the Faithful: For the grace to reach out to the forsaken, and to cry out when we feel the same, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Forsaken Jesus, teach us to reach out to those who are suffering, and when we are suffering soften our hearts to cry out for the help we need. May we hear and respond to the cries we hear, and cry out with faith when we feel forsaken. Amen.

April 9, 2020 – THURSDAY OF HOLY WEEK (Holy Thursday)

Homily Idea: *Who would you object to having wash you? And what life are you rejecting by your objection?*

When Jesus goes to wash Peter's feet, Peter is appalled: a master is typically washed by the servants, not the other way around! Jesus insists this is necessary for those who desire communion with God. Each of us needs to see ourselves as needing to be cared for, as well as offering care. So, while you consider whose feet you might be called to wash (and whom you might be called to serve in the world), you might also consider those you might resist allowing to wash (and serve) you. Being permitted to care for others gives us much life, but when we refuse the care of others we deny them that same dignity and life.

Prayer of the Faithful: For the humility to ask for and receive care from others, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Jesus, you washed the feet of your followers to show us how those who serve must also be willing to be served. Reveal to us how we object, as Peter did, to receiving care from others. May our service always be grounded in the humility to be served. Amen.

April 10, 2020 – FRIDAY OF THE PASSION OF THE LORD (Good Friday)

Homily Idea: *We enter into life by our embrace of death – and we do this in different ways.*

This is the heart of our faith: we embrace death to find new life. It feels easier to avoid death but, in so doing, we miss out on the life of the Resurrection that follows. We need to recognize the different ways we behave in response to death, and we see some examples in the Passion reading. Judas betrays; Peter denies; Pilate becomes complicit in Jesus' suffering; those who do not understand Jesus call for His death; the soldiers profit off of Jesus' torture. Mary the Mother of Jesus, Mary the wife of Clopas, Mary Magdalene, and John stand with Him and witness; another soldier offers a drink; Joseph and Nicodemus ask for Jesus' body, and prepare their friend for burial. Each person must respond to the dying; the way they do will frame the choices they make in response to rising. Everyone grieves and encounters suffering differently. Each of these people, and each of us, will have to make our way through the grief, if we are to find the risen Jesus.

Prayer of the Faithful: For compassion in the many ways we face suffering and grief, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Suffering Jesus, we rarely know how to suffer well or to find all the ways through hurt. Teach us to follow you bravely through suffering and death, being gentle with ourselves and others, that we might follow you through to the Resurrection that awaits on the other side of every death. Amen.

April 12, 2020 – THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD (Easter Vigil / Easter Sunday)

Homily Idea: *New life begins with confusion that gives way to deep joy.*

In the Gospel both at the Vigil and on Easter Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb to grieve, only to discover it is empty. The death she expected to greet her is not there. As we walk through the sufferings

and deaths of our own life, experiencing Resurrection depends on our willingness to give ourselves over to the confusion that precedes joy. It is a fragile and beautiful thing to let go of our grip on death long enough to allow our confusion to give way into a new understanding – indeed a new life beyond what has passed away. May we find ourselves rising, if slowly, from our own lives' suffering and confusion into the joy of knowing and loving the risen Jesus, today and every day.

Prayer of the Faithful: For deep faith in Easter joy that transcends our understanding, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Spirit of New Life, draw us into the confusion and new understanding of Jesus' Resurrection. Surprise us with laughter at the discovery of new joy. Fill us with gratitude that you are ever and always with us. Move us to dancing with delight at the gift of Easter life after death. Amen. Alleluia!

April 19, 2020 – 2ND SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A (Sunday of Divine Mercy)

Homily Idea: *Jesus offers us a life of peace and sends us out to share it with others.*

When Jesus appears in the upper room, He offers peace to His frightened friends. It is okay that we experience fear – for Christ comes into our fear to set us free. It is possible that peace is actually what Jesus offers to Thomas in the midst of doubt. As we receive this precious gift of peace in the midst of a country – and world – which has been in isolation to prevent and avoid illness, perhaps what is most essential is we are sent forth to share it with others. In what way are we participating in this Easter gift of peace? How are we letting the Spirit animate us, to let Jesus transform our fear, and to reach out to offer peace to those who are afraid?

Prayer of the Faithful: For peace in the midst of our fear, and the generosity to share it with others, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: God of Peace, calm our fears with your presence and send us forth into a world longing for your peace. In the midst of uncertainty and doubt, may we be bearers of peace above all else. Amen. Alleluia!

April 26, 2020 – 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, Year A

Homily Idea: *When we recognize the new life of Jesus, we tell the story.*

The road to Emmaus has so many beautiful moments. This year, consider expanding on the last line of the Gospel reading. After all the suffering, desolation, confusion, Jesus appears on the road to be with His friends. He helps them to understand, and then He is gone. When it is all over, they tell the story to everyone who will listen. What are the stories you tell over and over? Are you proclaiming the resurrections Christ has worked in your life, retellings of the one great story? Or do you tell the stories of your suffering and confusion? The disciples on the road are lost in their misunderstanding, stuck in the desolation of not seeing what is right in front of them. Look for Christ in your stories, and allow Him to give you new eyes to see His new life unfolding right where you are.

Prayer of the Faithful: For eyes to see the Resurrection and hearts to recognize Jesus, we pray to the Lord.

Prayer for Bulletins, Small Groups or Families: Risen Jesus, meet us on the roads of our travels and help us to see your glory in the stories you are writing in our lives. As we recognize your life in ours, send us out to tell

the story of all you have done. Amen. Alleluia!
