

Support Life Sunday – Aotearoa New Zealand

7/8 October 2023

Homily Notes & Prayers of Intercession

Use these notes in whatever way you find helpful.

Perhaps skim quickly and ponder just a couple of the thoughts below, using them as a starter for preparation of your own homily reflections.

Begin by reading the Scriptures for the 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

- The image of the vineyard is vibrant through these scripture readings, including the psalm of the day. As you read, take note of how this image speaks to your own life and/or the life of your parish community, and what the image might offer for Support Life Sunday.
- You might find it helpful to consider the seasonal cycle of the grape vine: a dead branch of wood in the winter which buds and blooms in spring to produce a harvest of grapes and wine in the summer.
- Notice, also, the importance and place of human care of the grapevine mentioned in the first reading, the psalm and the gospel reading. Humans are called to participate in the ongoing creative activity of God. Unfortunately, part of the story of our stewardship of each other and the planet on which we live includes the ruin and destruction of life motivated, among other things, by the consequences of human greed.

A story... You may have heard of the gardener who was proudly showing a visitor around her garden. Towards the end of the tour the visitor commented on the wonderful creative work of God. The gardener quickly responded that God had nothing to do with it since (she added) you should have seen it before I came along and God was looking after it on his own! It's an insightful story since God is asking us, daily, to work with him to continue the work of creation. Therefore, the decisions we make today need to be in harmony with the architect of creation and his intention for our earth and for ourselves.

Follow by reading the NZ Bishops revised document:

Te Kahu o te Ora - A Consistent Ethic of Life

A revision of the NZ Bishops 1997 document will be released on the NZ Catholic Bishops website on 28 September 2023.

- Set aside 20 minutes to reflectively read the document. While many Catholics may think that our Catholic-Christian vocation to defend life applies primarily or only to the beginning and end of human life issues (abortion and euthanasia), this statement takes a broader and more integrated approach, based firstly on the goodness of all creation and secondly on the interconnectedness of all things. This Support Life Sunday inspires us to view life from God's perspective, understanding the entire work of divine creation as a consistent whole and recognising we are collaborators – participants and labourers – in the divine ongoing creative activity.
- As you read the letter, cut and share any brief sections which you might pass to the parish secretary to use as newsletter-gaps-fillers over the next few weeks.

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Te Kahu o te Ora - The Garment of Life

- The title of the letter links with the image of the seamless garment of Jesus which was stripped from his body at the time of his crucifixion by the Roman soldiers present. Even in the midst of the brutality, torture and grief that was around them, these soldiers realised its value was related to its wholeness. As you prepare the homily consider the joys, hopes, griefs and anxieties of every person who will hear you preach. Let your desire be that the primary fruit of your homily is that every parishioner will know more deeply that Jesus Christ is the mantle or cloak of life, covering them with divine love, healing and power in every moment of their lives and the lives of those they love. No human experience or situation need be without the loving mantle of God.

The Gift of the Earth in which we Live

- There was a time when virtually every New Zealander worked with the soil, planting, tending and harvesting to provide food for family or produce for sale. Gardening for food (vegetables and crops) and for beauty (as with a flower garden) was understood to be a necessary part of a healthy human life, ensuring awareness of (and teaching us about) the seasonal cycles of life, and giving the satisfaction of recycling garden and household waste as the nutrients for the following season's food. Someone who works with the soil, even for a few minutes each week, understands the fundamental pattern of all life, birth, growth, labour, patient waiting, hope, harvest, death... in other words the seasonal cycle, spring, summer, autumn and winter. A gardener understands the interconnectedness of all that is living.

Life in Today's Scripture Readings

- The scriptures speak to the interconnectedness of all life. From the opening verses of Genesis and through every Bible chapter, it is evident that the creative activity of God was not a simply a series of events which reached its climax in the creation of human beings. The creative activity of God continues today – the well-known “creation account” in the opening chapters of Genesis speaks to our time as much as it refers to the beginnings (genesis) of life. We are called to realise that we humans are the instruments of God and collaborators with God in this ongoing creation.
- When Jesus speaks of life he does so with a broad, consistent and practical appreciation. In addressing the many people who are struggling with life, he seamlessly threads examples from the earth and nature, sower and seed, mustard seed and, in today's gospel, the vineyard image. We believe that because we are created in the divine image, we humans represent the peak of God's creative efforts. However, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato si*, “We are not God.” (n.67). Rather than focussing on how or whether our status makes us more important or valuable than other life, being created in God's image means bringing a divine perspective of love and care for everything that exists, acknowledging our unique responsibility for the gifts of God's creation. “We must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.” (*Laudato si*, n.67)
- It was Pope Benedict who once stated that the external deserts in the world are growing because our internal deserts have become so vast. There is thus a close link between our spiritual health and the way we treat fellow human beings and other forms of life. As the psalmist pleads: “O Lord, God of hosts, restore us ...”

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A New Era

- One of the most often quoted comments of Pope Francis is that we no longer live in an era of change but, instead, we are living in a change of era. You might share examples of this epochal change in your own life and in the life of your parish. While the central teachings of our faith remain a sure foundation, our understanding of what Jesus desires for us is constantly growing and our way of communicating this therefore must change and mature.
- Only a few decades ago Catholic leaders often focussed on abortion and euthanasia as the only life-death issues. Note that in the document *Te Kahu-o-te-Ora*, these serious issues are approached from a broader perspective enabling us to consider our sinful responsibility in enabling an environment where honouring life in every form from conception to natural death is more difficult. The reduction of our faith to fear-fuelled religion communicated in moral and legal terms can make it more difficult to see hope in a teenage pregnancy or a terminal diagnosis. Many Catholics continue to live with a narrow capitalist mentality, ignoring the suffering of the poor and placing financial gain and commercial success ahead of care for the earth and care for the poor and vulnerable. Many Catholics continue to support the death penalty and seek to close our national borders to needy immigrants while strongly opposing abortion and euthanasia. Such contradictions indicate a lack of understanding of a consistent ethic of life.
- Note that the last section of the document reflects on the development of Artificial Intelligence – a sign of God’s continuous creation unfolding and evolving. Even ten years ago a church document on life would never have considered technological developments as a central life issue.

The Gift of the Synod

- Just a few days before you give your Support Life Sunday homily, the first (bishops) session of the Synod on Synodality will begin in Rome. Many parishioners across Aotearoa took part in the conversations which have formed the agenda for this three-week meeting of the 364 delegates.
- In the not-too-distant past, parishioners would look to bishops and priests to take the lead in communicating the breadth and depth of Catholic doctrine. This reflects a more passive approach to being church, one in which parishioners too often felt left with the option of simply accepting or rejecting what was presented. In this new era of being church, all Christians are called to recognise the responsibilities of discipleship that are conferred by baptism – we are all called to act, to speak and to lead. The synod proposes a fundamental shift in the church with all the baptised being active participants in the communication and growth of church doctrine.
- With this in mind, you might email three or four parishioners inviting them to write an idea or a paragraph of your homily on the theme of *Catholic Teaching on Life – a seamless garment (kahu) with all of creation*. You might add these reflections to your parish newsletter over coming weeks.

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Election 2023

- Next Saturday, October 14, our nation goes to the polls. While it is inevitable that our first instinct might be to consider the needs of ourselves, our family and our work, as sisters and brothers sharing a common earthly home, our faith calls us to prioritise the needs of the most vulnerable as well as the common good. One way of doing this is to consider which party and electorate vote would be most helpful for the most vulnerable person you know. Take a day this week to consider life from the perspective of this person, and you may feel moved by Jesus to use your vote that they might live more abundantly.

Homily Studio Podcast Conversation

The weekly www.foodforfaith.org.nz Homily Studio for Support Life Sunday (which will be uploaded on Wednesday 4 October) will provide a half-hour conversation between four people reflecting on the scriptures of the 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time relating to a consistent ethic of life.

Thoughts for Prayers of Intercession for Saturday/Sunday – 7/8 October 2023

A litany based on one of the prayers with which Pope Francis concludes his Encyclical Laudato si. You might include this in the Prayers of Intercession.

E te Atua - All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer** (or whatever response is usual in your parish)

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your aroha, that we may protect life and beauty.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

Fill us with rangimarie, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this whenua, so precious in your eyes.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

Bring healing to our lives, that we may live as kaitiaki in the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

Teach us to discover manaaki - the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for tika, pono and aroha – justice, peace and love.

Lord Hear Us. **Lord Hear Our Prayer**

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Additional Prayers of Intercession

(Adapt and re-form as necessary)

- We pray for those who have died, our ancestors in life and in faith. We give thanks for the first people of Aotearoa who taught us to live not **on** the earth but **with** the earth and for those of our own families and communities who taught us to live with their consistent ethic of life.

E te Ariki **Whakarongo mai ra ki a matou**

- As representatives of our Catholic community gather in Rome this month to reflect on synodality, may we grow in our awareness of and dependence on the Holy Spirit who is the vibrant soul of the church on pilgrimage.

E te Ariki **Whakarongo mai ra ki a matou**

- In preparation for this month's general election may we be ready to set aside our own agendas that we may hear the voice of the most vulnerable in our land, and be ready to cast our vote that they may have a greater abundance of life.

E te Ariki **Whakarongo mai ra ki a matou**

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