

8 DAYS FOR LIFE: SUNDAY, MARCH 31 – SUNDAY, APRIL 7

Day One: Sunday, March 31, 2019

Intercession: May a culture of life grow ever stronger in our communities.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: God has carefully, lovingly created every person—in His own image and likeness—to be in a loving relationship with Himself. From each tiny child knit within a mother’s womb, to every person approaching death, all are loved perfectly and completely by God. “It is therefore a service of love,” Pope Saint John Paul II explains, “which we are all committed to ensure to our neighbor, that his or her life may be always defended and promoted, *especially when it is weak or threatened* [emphasis added]” (*Evangelium vitae*, 77).

In a world in which the most vulnerable are so often overlooked and disregarded, Christ calls us to embrace and uphold the unconditional dignity of every human life. In doing so, we help to build “a new culture of life, the fruit of the culture of truth and of love” (*EV*, 77).

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Do you love your cup of tea or coffee? Abstain from caffeine today, or try your coffee black.
- “Unplug” for some time, and reflect on how God may be asking you to help build a culture of life in your home, workplace, or Church community.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: Watching the news and reading headlines, we may often feel helpless in the face of a heartbreaking lack of respect for human life. When our efforts to make a difference feel small, it’s important to remember that changing the culture is a process of conversion that begins in our own hearts. It includes a willingness to be instructed and a desire to be close to Jesus—the source of joy and love.

For more ideas, “How to Build a Culture of Life” (www.usccb.org/culture-of-life) briefly explains where to start.

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Day Two: Monday, April 1, 2019

Intercession: May all people embrace the truth that every life is a good and perfect gift and is worth living.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: At every stage and in every circumstance, we are held in existence by God’s love. The presence of an illness, disability, or other challenging circumstance never diminishes the value of a human life. For God does not call us to perfection of appearance or abilities, but to perfection in *love*. Christ invites us to embrace the lives we have been given, for as long as they are given, as true gifts.

Our relationships on this earth are meant to help us grow in God’s perfect love. Everyone we encounter is a gift, not because of what they can do or accomplish, but because of who they *are*—a beloved child of God. May each of us experience the power of God’s transforming love, that our eyes may be opened to the incredible beauty of the people the Lord places in our lives.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Take a break from television, movies, and social media today. Consider spending some of that time reflecting on today’s message.
- Pray the short prayer “Every Life is Worth Living,” reflecting on how you can bring Christ’s love to others today. (The prayer is also available at www.usccb.org/worth-living.)

*Heavenly Father, thank you
for the precious gift of life.
Help us to cherish and protect
this gift, even in the midst of fear,
pain, and suffering.
Give us love for all people,
especially the most vulnerable,
and help us bear witness to the
truth that every life is worth living.*

*Grant us the humility to accept
help when we are in need,
and teach us to be merciful to all.
Through our words and actions,
may others encounter the
outstretched hands
of Your mercy.
We ask this through
Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: Our culture is obsessed with perfection—a superficial perfection. Social media, magazines, and television are staged and edited to depict seemingly perfect lives. When life doesn’t seem to measure up to these standards, we may doubt our worth or God’s love.

In “A Perfect Gift” (www.usccb.org/perfect-gift) one parent shares about the experience of raising a child with Down syndrome, contrasting it with what onlookers might perceive: “It’s like looking at a stained-glass window from the outside: The colors look dark, and you can’t quite make out the figures. From the inside, however, with the sun shining through it, the effect can be brilliant. From inside our family, love illuminates our life with Charlie.* What may seem dreary to others, perhaps even unbearable, is actually filled with beauty and color.” Every life is a gift.

**Name changed for privacy.*

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Day Three: Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Intercession: May all who have experienced sexual abuse receive justice, healing, and God’s peace.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: Recent reports have once again exposed the terrible abuses that many have suffered at the hands of a member of the Catholic clergy. Our hearts ache for the grave harm that has been inflicted on our brothers and sisters. Words alone cannot express our sorrow, shame and disappointment that such affronts to human dignity have been carried out within our Church.

It is our prayer and hope that all who have experienced abuse will find the healing and justice they so rightly deserve, knowing that they are never alone. For, “only by confronting our own failure in the face of crimes against those we are charged to protect can the Church resurrect a culture of life where the culture of death has prevailed” (*President of U.S. Bishops’ Conference Response to Pope Francis’s Letter to the People of God*, 2018).

Acts of Reparation (choose one):

- Fast from one meal today.

- Seek the intercession of Our Lady by praying a Rosary for Healing and Protection (www.bit.ly/rosary-for-healing-and-protection).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: In 2002, the crime and sin of child sexual abuse in the Church was brought out in the open for all to see. While there is still much more to be done, over the past 16 years, the Church has worked to provide healing for victims and survivors and to prevent future abuse through the implementation of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*.

To learn more about preventing abuse, read this article: "Protecting Children" (www.bit.ly/10-tips-child-protection).

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Day Four: Wednesday, April 3, 2019

Intercession: May God's peace fill the hearts of all who travel upon the path of adoption.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: The Letter to the Hebrews reminds us to "hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm" (Heb 6:18-19). Families hoping to adopt children and mothers considering placing their children for adoption often face many challenges along the way. We pray that all who are involved in the adoption process would be filled with the hope of Christ and "the peace of God that surpasses all understanding" (Phil 4:7). We also remember that we too can cling fast to this anchor of hope, for we have received "a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!'" (Rom 8:15). May our loving Father envelop each of us in His love today and open our eyes of faith that we may see and rejoice in His love.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Do you have a sweet tooth? Or do you prefer salty snacks? Pick your favorite kind of treat, and give it up for the day.
- Make an act of faith, hope, or love (www.usccb.org/faith-hope-love).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: "Accompanying Expectant Mothers Considering Adoption" suggests nine ways to offer ongoing support to a woman who is considering placing her unborn child for adoption (www.usccb.org/women-considering-adoption). Many of the tips given are also helpful for supporting a friend who is experiencing a challenging unexpected pregnancy, even if adoption has not been brought up.

Supplemental resources regarding adoption can be found at www.usccb.org/adoption-resources.

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Day Five: Thursday, April 4, 2019

If you or someone you know is suffering after abortion, confidential, non-judgmental help is available. Visit www.hopeafterabortion.org.

Intercession: May each person suffering from the loss of a child through abortion find hope and healing in Christ.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: After more than four decades of legalized abortion, many children’s lives have been ended, and many parents and family members suffer that loss—often in silence. Yet God’s greatest desire is to forgive. No matter how far we have each strayed from His side, He says to us, “Don’t be afraid. Draw close to my heart.” Be assured that it is never too late to seek God’s forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Consider the parable of the Prodigal Son. After repenting of sinning against his father, he returns from far away to seek forgiveness and work as a servant. But the father sees him approaching from far away, runs to warmly embrace him, and hosts a banquet to celebrate his return. So, too, does God welcome all repentant sinners, no matter how serious the sin. Let us run into the arms of Our Lord, Who is love and mercy.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Abstain from meat today. If you are already abstaining from meat today, skip your favorite snack, too.
- Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy (www.usccb.org/divine-mercy-chaplet) for those who are suffering the loss of a child through abortion, asking that they find healing and peace.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: If a friend confided in you that she had an abortion, would you be able to respond in a way that brings her closer to healing? Learn what to do and say in “How to Talk to a Friend Who’s Had an Abortion” (www.usccb.org/friend-had-abortion).

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Day Six: Friday, April 5, 2019

Intercession: May all victims and survivors of human trafficking find freedom, refuge, and healing.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: Those who are vulnerable are most at risk for being lured into situations where they are trafficked. Migrants and refugees often face increased risk factors like changes to language and culture, lack of support systems, and the burden of poverty. Young people on the margins, especially runaway and homeless youth, are targeted for sex trafficking and may subsequently be forced to have abortions. Easily tempted by the false promises of traffickers, victims often find themselves enslaved with no means of escape.

Christ came “to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives” (Is 61:1, cf. Luke 4:18). May all who are trapped in situations of slavery be released from their chains of captivity and find freedom, refuge, safety, and healing in Christ and His Church.

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Give up sleeping on your pillow tonight. Allow this small sacrifice to remind you of the sufferings endured by those in our world who are enslaved.
- St. Josephine Bakhita, who was born in Sudan and sold into slavery, has become known as the patron saint of human trafficking victims. Pray for victims and survivors of human trafficking, asking the intercession of St. Josephine Bakhita (www.bit.ly/saint-josephine-prayer).
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: Would you know how to identify a potential trafficking situation? Learn more about human trafficking and recognizing the red flags through the USCCB’s Anti-Trafficking Program at www.usccb.org/stopslavery.

Almost half of the reported victims of human trafficking in the U.S. in 2016 were foreign nationals. Consider bringing the Amistad Movement to your parish to help raise awareness about human trafficking among immigrant populations. www.usccb.org/about/anti-trafficking-program/amistad.cfm

If you suspect someone is a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline (888-3737-888) for immediate assistance. They can communicate in over 200 languages and provide immediate information, assistance, and local referrals for potential human trafficking situations.

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Day Seven: Saturday, April 6, 2019

Intercession: May those who long to welcome a child into their family be filled with trust in God’s loving plan.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: It can be very difficult and painful when the Lord doesn’t answer our prayers in the way we hope. A couple that finds themselves unable to bring a child into the world through their loving union can experience this disappointment very deeply. During such times of trial, we may wonder why we face the particular challenges that we do. Yet even though suffering is often shrouded in a sense of mystery, we believe that the Lord loves us with great tenderness and compassion that is beyond our imagination. Knowing this, we can trust that “all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

Acts of Reparation (Choose one.)

- Smile. Ask God today for the grace to be extra joyful and share Christ’s love with those who need encouragement the most today.
- Offer the Prayer for Those Hoping to Conceive or Adopt a Child (www.bit.ly/prayer-day-4), and spend some time reflecting on the accompanying excerpt from Psalm 145.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today’s intention.

One Step Further: “Seven Considerations While Navigating Infertility” (www.usccb.org/navigating-infertility) seeks to provide compassionate guidance that is both practical and informative for married couples who are walking on this road. Although geared to such couples, the article is also helpful for anyone to read, offering insight into the experience of infertility and giving awareness of the need for sensitivity in our relationships with those who may be affected.

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Day Eight: Sunday, April 7, 2019

Intercession: May those nearing life’s end receive medical care that respects their dignity and protects their lives.

Prayers: *Our Father, 3 Hail Marys, Glory Be*

Reflection: The dying process is a sacred time—a final season to seek closure in this life and prepare for the next. We know earthly death is not the end, but rather the door through which we must pass to gain eternal life. The deadly practice of assisted suicide—now legal in several states—shortens or even eliminates this sacred season, carelessly cutting short the life of the patient. To support the “false compassion” of assisted suicide is to see people as a problem to be eliminated. End-of-life care should instead help eliminate or alleviate the patient’s problems, whether they are physical, spiritual, or emotional.

Those who die in God's grace and friendship live forever with Christ. Because of our belief and hope in the Resurrection, we can face death not with fear, but with trust. We pray that society might recognize that every day of our lives is a gift and is always worth living, *especially* our final days. We need not fear. Christ is with us.

Acts of Reparation (choose one):

- Sacrifice some of your free time to do a small act of service, such as making breakfast for a family member, writing a note of encouragement for a coworker, or praying for the intentions of a friend.
- Pray a decade of the rosary (www.usccb.org/rosary) for your friends and family who have passed away, as well as the departed who have no one to pray for them.
- Offer some other sacrifice, prayer, or act of penance that you feel called to do for today's intention.

One Step Further: Assisted suicide is in the news and on lawmakers' agendas. Supporters call it "aid in dying" and claim it is just another option for ending intolerable pain as part of end-of-life care. Learn why assisted suicide is radically different from end-of-life care and the practice of palliative care in "Killing the Pain, Not the Patient: Palliative Care vs. Assisted Suicide" (www.usccb.org/killing-the-pain).

When family members or friends approach life's end, we may not know how best to accompany them. For suggestions on authentically compassionate care anchored in unconditional respect for human life, read "Caring for Loved Ones at Life's End" (www.usccb.org/endoflifecare).

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