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Pro-Life Activities

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Remembering Life Throughout the Liturgical Year

The following dates provide the opportunity to recall the importance of the Gospel of Life in the course of the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries throughout the year.

Dec. 8th Immaculate Conception

This patronal feast of the United States of America is a perfect time for all who profess the Gospel of Life to beg God to make our laws just and protective of every one of our citizens from conception until natural death. Each year, the Holy Father places a wreath at the foot of the statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception at the Piazza di Spagna in Rome. Last year, as he placed the wreath, he prayed to the Blessed Virgin a prayer that we might make our own: "Watch over all families in a special way: may love sealed by the Sacrament ever reign between spouses, may children walk on the paths of goodness and true freedom, and may the elderly feel surrounded by attention and affection."

Dec. 12th Our Lady of Guadalupe

She is the patron of all the Americas, through whom the faith was first brought to this land. She is, likewise, the patron of the Gospel of Life, through whom the weak, the poor, the forgotten, and the dispossessed may know love and the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. At the canonization of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin last year, the Holy Father asked the new Saint, who brought the image of the Blessed Virgin to America, to intercede for this very cause: "Happy Juan Diego, true and faithful man! We entrust to you our lay brothers and sisters so that, feeling the call to holiness, they may imbue every area of social life with the spirit of the Gospel. Bless families, strengthen spouses in their marriage, and sustain the efforts of parents to give their children a Christian upbringing. Look with favor upon the pain of those who are suffering in body or in spirit, on those afflicted by poverty, loneliness, marginalization or ignorance. May all people, civic leaders and ordinary citizens, always act in accordance with the demands of justice and with respect for the dignity of each person, so that in this way peace may be reinforced." (Pope John Paul II, July 31, 2002)

January 22nd A Day of Penance and Prayer

In November, 2001, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops approved the following adaptation of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Following confirmation by the Holy See in February, 2002, the following became particular law for the dioceses of the United States of America: "In all the dioceses of the United States of America, January 22 (or January 23, when the 22nd falls on a Sunday) shall be observed as a particular day of penance for violations to the dignity of the human person committed through acts of abortion, and of prayer for the full restoration of the legal guarantee of the right to life. The Mass 'For Peace and Justice' (no. 21 from 'Masses for Various Needs') should be celebrated with violet vestments as an appropriate liturgical observance for this day."

The first option for the Opening Prayer from the Mass for Peace and Justice begins by recalling that those who work for peace will be called the children of God. The second sentence of the prayer reminds us of the words of Pope Paul VI in his famous address to the United Nations: "If you want peace, work for justice." The prayer asks God's grace to help us "to work without ceasing for that justice which brings true and lasting peace." The homilist might well reflect today on how we will never find true peace until God's justice prevails. True peace reigns only when every human being, especially the littlest and most defenseless among us, enjoys the blessings of that peace. The work of spreading the Gospel of Life and defending the right to life of the not yet born must be the unceasing agenda of each person who seeks to bring "the peace the world cannot give" to our day. The Prayer after Communion asks that as God has renewed us with the body and blood of his Son, so he might fill us with "the spirit of love." Thus, we might be strengthened for the work ahead: establishing among all "Christ's farewell gift of peace." When related to the opening prayer, it becomes clear that to establish this peace we must work for justice: a justice which recognizes the infinite value of every human life from conception until natural death.

March 25th The Annunciation of the Lord

On this day we recall how the Angel Gabriel came to the Blessed Virgin Mary and told her that she was to be the Mother of God. The significance of this feast for the Gospel of Life was recalled by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Evangelium Vitae*: "The one who accepted 'Life' in the name of all and for the sake of all was Mary, the Virgin Mother; she is thus most closely and personally associated with the *Gospel of life*. Mary's consent at the Annunciation and her motherhood stand at the very beginning of the mystery of life which Christ came to bestow on humanity (cf. *Jn* 10:10). Through her acceptance and loving care for the life of the Incarnate Word, human life has been rescued from condemnation to final and eternal death."

July 26th Sts. Joachim and Anne

Saints Joachim and Anne were the grandparents of Jesus. Wouldn't this day (and even the preceding weekend at all the Masses) be a great time to bless families? The *Book of Blessings* provides the rites and prayers for blessing of families in chapter one (*Book of Blessings*, nos. 62-66). Joachim married Anne at Nazareth when he was still a young man. After some years they were ridiculed for remaining childless and legend has it that even Temple priest refused Joachim's offering of a lamb. Joachim withdrew to the desert and fasted for forty days to ask

God for the gift of a child, while Anne wept beneath a laurel tree, fearing that she not only was childless, but had now lost her husband. It was then that an angel appeared to Anne and told her that God would answer her prayers and give to her and Joachim a child who would be praised throughout the world. Thus was the Virgin Mary conceived immaculately through the love and faithfulness of Joachim and Anne.

August 14th Saint Maximilian Kolbe

Saint Maximilian Kolbe lived and died for the Gospel of Life. The story is told of how when he was forced to drag a cart filled with bodies to the ovens of Auschwitz he would quietly pray: «*Et Verbum caro factum est... Holy Mary, pray for us*». Even in this place of evil, the martyr knew the victory of life over death, a victory of faith and love.

Sept. 15th Our Lady of Sorrows

Indeed, the Blessed Virgin Mary's heart was many times pierced with the sword of sorrow. Yet she who had nurtured within her womb the Word incarnate through whom all life came to be, remained faithful to the Gospel of Life at every turn. At the foot of the cross, in the face of death, she clung to the source of life. Is there any image of undefeated love and life as powerful as the Pieta: a mother's faithful love perdures as she anoints the murdered body of her son with her tears and her embrace? Mary knew the Gospel of Life and replied, "Let it be done to me according to God's will!"