

# 2015 Respect Life Sunday Homily Suggestions

## *“Every Life is Worth Living”*

### How to Use This Resource

These homily suggestions are written to be adaptable to the varying needs of homilists. Clergy can either use the entire structure and phrasing of the homily that is suggested, or they can pull whatever pieces from it that are useful for incorporation into their own message.

Please note that the story of Maggie Karner and her father is told in a three-minute video at [www.goo.gl/4HM8Ib](http://www.goo.gl/4HM8Ib)\* and in the 2015-16 Respect Life Program article, “Maggie’s Story: Living Like Dad,” which is available in bulletin insert format at [www.usccb.org/respectlife](http://www.usccb.org/respectlife).

### Readings

*(These homily notes are written for use on Respect Life Sunday, but adaptable for other occasions.)*

#### **Respect Life Sunday: October 4, 2015**

*Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time*

- First Reading—Genesis 2:18-24  
*The Lord saw that it was “not good for the man to be alone” and created Eve from Adam’s rib. From this, we see that we are created to walk with each other and be interdependent.*
- Responsorial Psalm—Psalms 128:1-2, 3, 4-5, 6  
*The Psalmist says, “may you see Jerusalem’s prosperity all the days of your life” and calls people who “fear the Lord” blessed. This is a good reminder both that our lives, from beginning to end, are under God’s watch, and that we are invited to follow him.*
- Second Reading—Hebrews 2:9-11

*The Son’s redemptive suffering has made us adopted brothers and sisters with Christ.*

- Gospel Acclamation—1 John 4:12  
*John reminds us that loving each other leads us to God.*
- Gospel Reading—Mark 10:2-16  
*Jesus teaches on marriage, the human relationship of mutually self-giving love that reflects God’s love for humanity. He also calls us to be like little children, that we might enter the kingdom of God.*

### Homily Summary:

- *Each of our lives, and every life, is worth living, no matter the circumstances.*
- *As Christians, we know that suffering is not the end of the story; it can be the path by which the Lord perfects us in love and leads us to Heaven.*
- *We are called to respect and protect our lives and the lives of others, and we are called to be the hands and feet of Christ to all, especially the most vulnerable. We have been given one life to live, which has inestimable value—how will we choose to live it?*

### I. Introduction

**Call attention to the Respect Life Month display in the back of the church.**

On your way into Mass today, you may have noticed the display set up in the vestibule with pictures of families, friends, and loved ones. Perhaps

you recognized some of the people, or even submitted one of the pictures yourself.

***Introduce the theme for the 2015-2016 Respect Life Program cycle, “Every Life is Worth Living.”***

The display proclaims that every life is worth living, and we see depictions of happily-lived lives clearly in many of the pictures, which portray grandparents, children who are waiting to be born, couples on their wedding day, and many more.

But we know that life is not always “picture perfect.” There is uncertainty, fear, heartbreak, and sorrow. We may find out that a family member has a terminal illness, or we may discover that our unborn child has been diagnosed with a disability—life-threatening or otherwise.

In the face of heart-rending circumstances, can we still say, truthfully, that every life is worth living?

## **II. Tell the story of Maggie Karner and her father (or show the three-minute video).**

***Maggie and her father had a good relationship, but didn’t talk much about life’s deeper questions.***

Maggie Karner knew her father as “Dad,” the guy who loaned her the car keys in high school and made sure she could balance her checkbook in college. When she married a wonderful man—with whom she eventually had three beautiful daughters—her dad was there for her still. But Maggie and her dad didn’t really talk much about life’s more significant topics.

***Maggie’s active dad had an accident that left him as a quadriplegic, and the transition was hard on him and his family.***

Later on, her always active dad had a spinal cord accident, which left him without the use of his arms and legs. His age and the stress of the

accident caused his health to decline quickly, and Maggie said watching her father come to terms with his prognosis was agonizing.

Because he was unable able to do anything in return, it was difficult for her dad to receive attention from his family, and the gift of time they spent with him. However, it became clear that the gift was mutual.

***The time spent with her father quickly became a time that Maggie’s family cherished; it was a time in which they gave to each other and drew closer together.***

Although it was awkward at first, trying to converse with him, the conversation eventually deepened, and she learned more about her dad in his last months than she had ever known. Her father remarked at one point how great it was to have the time to just talk together, and it soon became a time that their family cherished.

Years later, Maggie shared that she and her siblings still cherished those moments with him. She said, “*It was a gift that my dad gave to us because he spent that time with us. I saw with my own two eyes what joy can be found in just valuing every moment. ... He left us a legacy of that time that he gave us. He could have checked out right away and said, ‘I’m done with this.’ But he didn’t. He stuck around, and he said I’m here for you.*”

***The time spent with her father in his final days helped Maggie deal with the question of her own suffering as she faced terminal brain cancer.***

The legacy that Maggie’s father left, and the lessons she learned from him during this time, were gifts her father gave her in his final days, which became especially important to her later in life when she was diagnosed with brain cancer at age 50. Maggie explained that during her time with him near the end of his life, her dad taught her that Christ experienced and understood suffering,

and that our suffering is not meaningless when we unite it with His.

What Maggie learned from her dad is true. In today's Second Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we hear about Christ's suffering—through which we have received the gift of redemption. Although suffering comes to all of us—even God's own Son suffered, for our sake—it does not decrease by an ounce the worth of any of our lives. He was not forced to, but Jesus endured to the end for something greater, giving meaning to His suffering and at the same time making it possible for our own suffering to take on great meaning.

***Maggie's time with her dad at the end of his life, and her own journey of facing terminal illness, made the question of assisted suicide (and her opposition to it) very personal.***

In the midst of a national debate about assisted suicide, Maggie shared what she learned from her experience with her father and her own personal experience facing terminal illness:

*I know that in some states, I could legally seek to end my life with a lethal prescription. However, I also know that there is much more to my story, and many more people involved in it, than just myself. Assisted suicide wouldn't end suffering; it would increase it for those left behind.*

*The current debate about legalizing physician-assisted suicide isn't about me or any other individual; it's about all of us together—as a society and as a community of faith. **We are meant to be interdependent, to serve each other in humility, and to walk together in suffering** (emphasis added).*

### **III. Conclusion**

***Maggie's story gets to the heart of our very nature: We are created to be in communion with each other and with God. We are created to love—for as long as we are given on earth, that we might live with God in perfect love forever.***

Today's First Reading and the Gospel both remind us that the Lord himself knew that “it is not good for the man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18), and that the relationship which most reflects his own nature (marriage) is one of selfless love. The Gospel acclamation reminds us that by “lov[ing] one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us” (1 John 4:12). We are given the gift of our lives here on earth in order to be perfected in love so that we might live forever with God in Heaven.

***Take courage, take hope in the Cross—the path to our salvation.***

When we are faced with mystifying and heart-breaking circumstances, we can draw hope from the words of Scripture, which proclaim, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This is not a cliché or the slogan for a trite greeting card. Life is difficult, and we each have a cross to carry. But the very cross we fear can become the path to our salvation. This is the paradox—and the beauty—of Christianity.

Rather than glossing over the fact of suffering, we are able to embrace it as an opportunity to unite ourselves with our Lord, and to let him use it to make us, as gold tested by fire, more like him. And as we become more like him, we become more ourselves—more the person he has created us to be.

***The Cross: Love (self-gift, self-sacrifice). How will we live the life we are given?***

Jesus gave us a new commandment to love one another as he has loved us (John 13:34). He showed us the self-sacrificial nature of love when he laid down His life for us, and we are called to follow in his footsteps. We are called to be his hands and feet, caring for and loving others.

Pope Francis continuously calls us to “go out to the peripheries” to care for those “on the outskirts

of society.” In remarks made earlier this year, he talked about the “sacredness of each human person” and explained that “loving life means always taking care of the other, wanting the best for him, cultivating and respecting her transcendent dignity.”<sup>1</sup>

Ours is a dignity that is rooted in the fact that we were created in love and redeemed in love by God Himself, who is unchanging. Regardless of

any circumstances, this God-given dignity can never be decreased.

Pope Francis also raised a challenging question that we each need to consider seriously: “[I]n recognizing the inestimable value of human life, we must also reflect on how we use it. Life is first and foremost a gift.”

God has given us each the gift of life. How will we live it?

\* Full URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XJwWKDGBS5o>

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(Endnotes)

- 1 Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the Meeting Sponsored by the Science and Life Association” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015).