

**2023 Domestic Violence Awareness Month Vigil Mass
Opening Remarks and Homily
by
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**Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Washington, D.C.
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Greeting – Opening Remarks

Welcome, brothers and sisters, to this solemn and holy Mass in observation of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, an initiative also being marked by churches, organizations and governments across the country. In the face of this evil that touches individuals and families in all sectors of society, we come together to raise awareness and pray for and help those who are affected by it to find peace and security, healing and hope. We want to “break the silence, break the cycle, begin the healing.”

Thank you to National Catholic Domestic Violence Awareness Partners, the National Institute for the Family, and the USCCB Secretariat of Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, for hosting this Mass, and thank you to all who have committed themselves to fostering and nourishing peace and healing in the home.

Now let us open our hearts and turn to the Lord.

Homily

In the beginning, when God created humanity, He made them man and woman, equal and complementary of one another. He settled them in a fertile Garden and bid them to be fruitful in a loving communion of persons as a living reflection of the Lord’s own love for humanity. And God found this community of love and life made according to His plan to be “very good.”

In our day too, the joining of man and woman in marriage with their enduring dream of lasting love is one of our most festive and joyous occasions, together with celebrations of newly-born babies, with each continuing to be celebrated in happy anniversaries and birthdays.

Marriage and family are essential goods for all of us. As Pope Saint John Paul II remarked, “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” (*Familiaris*

Consortio, 86). Marriage and family in their lived reality are of utmost concern to the Lord too. Indeed, Jesus began His ministry at the joyous wedding feast in Cana. Throughout history, however, marriage and family have also faced many challenges – and the pains that come with these challenges. Immediately after Cana, for example, Jesus encountered the socially-marginalized Samaritan woman at the well, whose own experience with marriage and family was a most unhappy one.

At this solemn Mass dedicated to domestic violence awareness, we are similarly confronted with the tragic reality of what should be “very good,” in the words of God, being replaced with something very wrong. As noted by President Biden in his recent proclamation for this month, “Domestic violence touches every community in this Nation. Americans of every race, religion, and background are affected; its consequences transcend generations, impacting children and reshaping whole families.”

The readings for today are unsettling as well. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the Lord planting the choicest, best vines in His vineyard – which the Psalm tells us is the house of Israel, but more broadly can be seen as all of humanity planted in the Garden in the beginning – and how it all goes to ruin when what is produced is instead bitter fruit, worthless for producing wine. This is a picture of the human condition in history, including, sadly, marriage and family: Instead of a community of love, there is too often violence, oppression and suffering.

Jesus picks up this theme with the tenants who are supposed to produce good fruit instead killing the servants and even the Son of the landowner, who as in Isaiah, is God Himself. It all seems very grim, but there is hope to be found in the word and promises of God here, just as Jesus brought the healing of new life to the Samaritan woman.

Marriage and family are often filled with joy and comfort and fulfillment, but as we may know from personal experiences, they also endure all the pains and sufferings, the trials and tribulations, of humanity’s fallen condition. What God planted can be marred by “the presence of pain, evil and violence that break up families and their communion of life and love” (*Amoris Laetitia*, 19), as Pope Francis sadly reminds us. This division and discord that at times even descends into physical, sexual, mental, emotional, verbal or spiritual abuse between spouses or siblings or parent and child, sometimes happens to people close to us – neighbors, friends, family members. Sometimes it happens to us. And maybe some of the people we know and care about can see the perpetrators of violence in the mirror.

In the wake of domestic violence is left wounded, broken people who may experience extreme stress, depression, rage, or an inability to trust. Or they may be paralyzed by fear, feeling unable to get out of the situation. Those who are subjected

to abuse may even blame themselves, while perpetrators may seek to justify it. But let us be clear on this: neither case is true. Domestic violence can *never* be justified, and its victims *never* deserve it.

Instead, our response as a people and in the Church to domestic violence must be one of personal outreach and patient accompaniment. If someone turns to us, we must listen, believe, offer our support and refer them to professional assistance. If you are experiencing abuse or living in fear, know that you are not alone, and that *it is not your fault*. Change is possible. You can be safe and bring peace to your family. If you or someone you know is affected by domestic abuse, confidential support is available 24/7 through the national hotline 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or by texting “START” to 88788. Emergency assistance, ongoing support and resources for past victims and survivors is also available at Catholic Charities offices, diocesan ministry offices, and many secular organizations as well.

In this month dedicated to awareness of this evil, there is another crucial component to both the Gospel and reading from Isaiah: Within the vineyard is constructed a watchtower. A place for sentries to be on the lookout for threats. Not only do we need to raise awareness of domestic abuse by public education and training, we each are called to be on the lookout, we each need to take steps to become aware of it when it happens in our midst – when it happens to others or when it happens to us, and to take steps so that we do not find ourselves mistreating those we should love.

Meanwhile, all of us can pray for hope, help, and healing for those affected by domestic violence. The readings about the vineyard being left in ruin and the servants and Son being killed are disturbing, but the Lord does give us hope in the peace of God that surpasses our understanding: The evil which victims and survivors of abuse have endured will not have the last word. The Son brings us new life. The cornerstone that scripture speaks of is Christ Himself, from whom a new building is raised.

Soon in the Eucharist, we will again stand at the foot of the Cross. From there, let us lift up our own sufferings and wounds, repeating the Psalm, “O Lord, God of Hosts, restore us.” And let us be comforted: The choicest vines planted by the Lord have, in fact, produced the choicest wine as at Cana and in the wedding banquet of the Lamb.

Readings for October 8, 2023
Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/100823.cfm>

Reading 1

[Is 5:1-7](#)

Let me now sing of my friend, my friend's song concerning his vineyard.

My friend had a vineyard on a fertile hillside; he spaded it, cleared it of stones, and planted the choicest vines; within it he built a watchtower, and hewed out a wine press. Then he looked for the crop of grapes, but what it yielded was wild grapes.

Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard:

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I had not done? Why, when I looked for the crop of grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes?

Now, I will let you know what I mean to do with my vineyard: take away its hedge, give it to grazing, break through its wall, let it be trampled!

Yes, I will make it a ruin: it shall not be pruned or hoed, but overgrown with thorns and briars; I will command the clouds not to send rain upon it.

The vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his cherished plant; he looked for judgment, but see, bloodshed! for justice, but hark, the outcry!

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 80:9, 12, 13-14, 15-16, 19-20](#)

R. (Is 5:7a) **The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.**

A vine from Egypt you transplanted;

you drove away the nations and planted it.

It put forth its foliage to the Sea, it shoots as far as the River.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Why have you broken down its walls, so that every passer-by plucks its fruit, The boar from the forest lays it waste, and the beasts of the field feed upon it?

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Once again, O LORD of hosts, look down from heaven, and see; take care of this vine, and protect what your right hand has planted, the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Then we will no more withdraw from you; give us new life, and we will call upon your name.

O LORD, God of hosts, restore us; if your face shine upon us, then we shall be saved.

R. The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel.

Reading 2

[Phil 4:6-9](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Have no anxiety at all, but in everything,

by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,

make your requests known to God.

Then the peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Alleluia

[Cf. Jn 15:16](#)

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

I have chosen you from the world, says the Lord, to go and bear fruit that will remain.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

[Mt 21:33-43](#)

Jesus said to the chief priests and the elders of the people:

"Hear another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a hedge around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went on a journey.

When vintage time drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to obtain his produce. But the tenants seized the servants and one they beat, another they killed, and a third they stoned.

Again he sent other servants, more numerous than the first ones, but they treated them in the same way.

Finally, he sent his son to them, thinking, 'They will respect my son.'

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and acquire his inheritance.' They seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenants when he comes?"

They answered him, "He will put those wretched men to a wretched death and lease his vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the proper times."

Jesus said to them, "Did you never read in the Scriptures:

The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

by the Lord has this been done,

and it is wonderful in our eyes?

Therefore, I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that will produce its fruit."