

Domestic Violence Homily Tips Fall 2023

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. Msgr. John Enzler and the Catholic Charities Priest Domestic Violence Advisory Committee encourage priests to speak about domestic violence in a homily in September or October and use materials provided to alert suffering families that help is available.

Catholic families deserve to be safe and loved at home. Yet 1 out of 4 women, 1 out of 7 men have experienced severe physical violence in an intimate relationship: being kicked, beaten, choked, burned, having a weapon used against them. (CDC 2017)

Msgr. Enzler invites pastors to use the two homilies and homily tips included here to encourage parishioners to seek help if they suffer abuse.

Catholic Parishioners Speak Out

*“My mother lost two baby boys due to my dad’s physical, mental, emotional abuses.
We were like baby birds in a cage.”*

“I honor my grandmother who suffered 18 years of abuse.”

*“I was stalked for a couple of months by a guy I no longer wanted to date. It was so bad
that I had to change my phone number.”*

“My grandpa hit my grandma. “

“I lived in an abusive marriage for 21 years, both physical and emotional. “

“He said he would kill my child if I try to leave.”

2023 Parish Domestic Violence Materials Available

at www.catholiccharitiesdc.org/familypeace:

- Pastors’ Domestic Violence Resource Packet
- Phone scripts for office staff
- Restroom flyers
- Victim and abuser counseling resources
- Homily tips and examples
- Bulletin inserts, Prayers of the Faithful

Catholic Charities Priest Domestic Violence Advisory Committee

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Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time: September 17, 2023

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 103:1-2, 3-4, 9-10, 11-12

R. (8) The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

Bless the LORD, O my soul;
and all my being, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and forget not all his benefits.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He pardons all your iniquities,
heals all your ills.

He redeems your life from destruction,
crowns you with kindness and compassion.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

He will not always chide,
nor does he keep his wrath forever.

Not according to our sins does he deal with us,
nor does he requite us according to our crimes.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so surpassing is his kindness toward those who fear him.

As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he put our transgressions from us.

R. The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion.

This psalm presents a beautiful image of living in a place where one's soul is safe and refreshed, with only goodness and kindness present. If only our own homes could follow the Lord our shepherd's example. "The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger, and rich in compassion."

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness month. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reports that 1 out of 4 women in this country have suffered not safety and compassion at home, but instead severe physical violence at home; being beaten, choked, punched, kicked, threatened with a weapon.

"He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion."

We as community of God are called to be part of helping friends and family suffering abuse. If you know someone suffering threats and beatings at home, help is available.

Through the grace of God and the sacraments, through counseling, developing safety plans, learning new relationship skills, family members in danger can get to safety, and abuse can stop.

See the bulletin today for a number you can call for help. The National Domestic Violence Hotline 1 (800) 799-7233.

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time: October 1, 2023

Phil 2:1-5

Brothers and sisters:

If there is any encouragement in Christ,
any solace in love,
any participation in the Spirit,
any compassion and mercy,
complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the
same love,
united in heart, thinking one thing.
Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory;
rather, humbly regard others as more important than
yourselves,
each looking out not for his own interests,
but also for those of others.
Have in you the same attitude
that is also in Christ Jesus.

“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love...humbly regard others as more important than yourselves.” Beautiful words to encourage love and compassion in every aspect of the lives of the faithful.

October is National Domestic Violence month. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reports that 1 out of 4 women in this country have suffered not love, compassion and mercy at home, but instead severe physical violence at home; being beaten, choked, punched, kicked, threatened with a weapon.

Recently a parishioner at St. Rose of Lima shared her story of suffering repeated horrible beatings over 15 years from her husband who she loved so dearly. Marieta begged her husband to stop his violent rages as she tried to raise three beautiful children in a home that could turn violent at any moment. To save herself and her children she fled the home.

If you or someone you know is living with terrible abuse, help is available. Seek help in the church and agencies helping families. Contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1 (800) 799-7233.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time: October 15, 2023

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

R. (6cd) **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

R. **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

R. **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

R. **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

R. **I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.**

The Psalm today speaks of living in the house of the Lord. What would that mean to our spouses and children if our homes were like the house of the Lord? A place where our souls are refreshed.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops reports that 1 out of 4 women in this country have suffered severe physical violence at home; being beaten, choked, punched, kicked, threatened with a weapon.

“Even though I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side with your rod and your staff that give me courage.”

We as community of God are called to be part of helping friends and family suffering abuse. If you know someone suffering threats and beatings at home, help is available.

If you find yourself raising your fist in anger or know someone who raises his fist to his wife and children, help is available. Through the grace of God and the sacraments, through counseling, developing safety plans, and learning new relationship skills, family members in danger can get to safety, and abuse can stop and families can live in the house of the Lord.

For more information, please see the note about the National Domestic Violence Hotline in the bulletin. 1 (800) 799-7233.

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time:

October 29, 2023

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 18:2-3, 3-4, 47, 51

R. (2) I love you, Lord, my strength.
I love you, O LORD, my strength,
O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer.
R. I love you, Lord, my strength.
My God, my rock of refuge,
my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold!
Praised be the LORD, I exclaim,
and I am safe from my enemies.
R. I love you, Lord, my strength.
The LORD lives and blessed be my rock!
Extolled be God my savior.
You who gave great victories to your king
and showed kindness to your anointed.
R. I love you, Lord, my strength.

Gospel

Mt 22:34-40

When the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees,
they gathered together, and one of them,
a scholar of the law tested him by asking,
"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?"
He said to him,
"You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your mind.
This is the greatest and the first commandment.
The second is like it:
You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

"My God, my rock of refuge, my shield, the horn of my salvation, my stronghold! Praised be the LORD, I exclaim, and I am safe from my enemies."
The Lord is a God of strength for those suffering.

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. 1 out of 4 women, 1 out of 7 men have suffered severe violence at home: being beaten, kicked, punched, choked, burned or threatened with a weapon. More families suffer emotional and verbal threats and abuse.

Marieta, a parishioner at St. Rose of Lima, suffered 15 years of beatings at home, while caring for three beautiful children. She was cut off from family and friends. Crushed in spirit, the violence became more cruel and life threatening. Marieta feared her husband would kill her. She prayed to the Virgin Mary and Jesus to help her. God was present to her and through an elderly woman helped her to escape.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself." God calls spouses, parents to a deep love not only for the neighbor but for the family itself. God does not want women, children, or men to suffer violent abuse at home. The Lord hears their cries and wants their safety.

Check in our bulletin today for the National Domestic Violence Hotline. 1 800 799-7233

With the grace of God and the sacraments, with counseling and safety planning, families can get to safety and abuse can end.

Homily about Family Peace/Domestic Abuse

Msgr. John Enzler, CEO of Catholic Charities DC

11/13/2022

This Sunday all the priests of the parish are speaking about an important issue that's rarely addressed from the pulpit. Some people call it family peace. Others call it domestic abuse. It deals with the sadness of relationships broken by physical, mental, and emotional abuse by another. While women seem to experience it more often, at times men are abused as well. This is a chance for us to think about this issue and to know that the priests here at St.

Bartholomew's are ready and willing to help you if anyone needs any particular assistance. I hope that you'll stop at the table at the back of the church when you leave and pick up the materials.

I will share you some statistics that will shock you, I'm sure. 1 out of 4 women in this country at some time in their lives have been severely abused. 1 out of 4 women, and nationally 1 out of 7 men. Even more shocking is this statistic. In the Vietnam war we lost more than 58,000 soldiers, armed forces died in Vietnam. At the same period of time, 53,000 individuals were killed by domestic abuse. Imagine, almost equal. So, the Vietnam War got all of our attention, lots of headlines, lots of concerns and this particular scourge we didn't think about. 53,000 people in this country died of domestic abuse during that time.

In one of our first meetings there was a story about a family in PG County with a woman who got married. She was happily married for a while and then her husband began to be difficult, abusive. She went to her dad and said "Dad, my husband is not behaving well." Dad said, "Stay with him, relax it's only been one year. Don't worry. It will be fine." It got worse and worse so she finally went to her dad and said, "I can't do it anymore." Her father said, "You come home." She came home to her dad's house and over the years when she was home her husband acted perfectly: kind, generous, apologized - all the things you would do if you had this bigger problem. Sadly, she went back to him and within one week she died. He killed her.

It's a difficult scourge. It's not just in poor places. It says 1 out of 4 women, even women here have been abused. It's not just abuse we have at home, sometimes it's date rape in college. It's ways we don't take care of each other. So as a church and Catholic Charities we are doing a better job of speaking about this issue. But it's not just me today, all the priests have spoken about this today. Your pastor Fr. Mark Smith was on the committee with us when we first began. He still supports us and spoke about this this morning. We're trying to do our best to stay faithful to education, to bring you something to think about. To think about how it is that we can help people who might be in our midst who find themselves in a situation of abuse.

I helped a family before I came here. A woman called me and said, "I come home at night and my husband locks me out of the house. Can't get in. I'm on the front porch. Can't get in. It's controlling and abusive behavior." It's not just downtown, not just in Southeast DC, not just in Prince George's. It's right here in our own county that people have abusive situations that are very difficult to deal with. So today I'm asked to say a few words about this, mostly education for you, so that you are aware of the fact that the church is trying to do its best to make a difference for people who may face this particular challenge. Let me read you a definition:

Domestic violence encompasses any kind of behavior used to control an intimate partner through fear or intimidation. Includes physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, economic abuse. Happens to spouses living in households, but not always. Also happens to teenagers, bullying and abuse, date rape is also abuse.

Many of us were trained like the dad was when his daughter came home. We came to believe there is no turning back. There are a lot of priests that would say to someone who has been abused, "You must stay." You made a promise. You are committed. I'm here to tell you that is not the Church teaching anymore. The Church sees the fact that sometimes the abusive behavior is such that you should not stay.

I want to read what the US Bishops said in a letter back in 2002 said about this, what would happen if you are abused, "We emphasize that no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage. Some abused women believe that church teaching on the permanence of marriage requires them to stay in an abusive relationship. They may hesitate to seek a separation or divorce. They may fear that they cannot re-marry in the Church. Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage."

It's important to know that if you are married to someone who is abusive that you are not stuck, that you should come and talk with a priest and talk about that. Because in fact the Catholic Church says an annulment is probably going to work. It was not a sacrament. What's an annulment? An annulment doesn't say you weren't married. An annulment says it wasn't a valid marriage. There's a difference. In some cases, an annulment says you were married, you have kids, but it wasn't a true sacrament. You got a present there, but God wants you to move on. That was a concern for many people clearly in an abusive situation. It's hard to make that commitment to call it a sacrament. Recently in the National Catholic Reporter Fr. Charles Dahm spoke about the need to welcome people who come who need an annulment because they find themselves in very abusive situations.

So today later Laura Yeomans from Catholic Charities will say a few words. She is retired but frankly does this because she loves to take care of people in need and to advocate for this. But this is something you should think about. Should we as a church put together a little committee, a little group that might be willing to talk about this so that we can be a church that provides support for those who find themselves in need.

Let me say this to you. If anybody knows anyone who is being abused you can come to any of the priests, Oscar, myself and Fr. Mark. And I promise we'll listen, react and do the best we can to help you. Because this is a bad situation when people find themselves suffering abusive behavior in an untenable situation. Pray for those who are being abused. Pray for those who are abusers. Pray for those who need help and assistance and make sure that we don't forget that this is one of the issues within Respect for Life.

Again, this is not a normal homily for Sunday. I did not address the scriptures, nor talk about the wonder of our gospel for today. Rather we talked about an issue that affects so many people today and I suspect some people in the church this morning. Please know again that the church cares deeply about all that suffer domestic violence, and we the priests of this parish are ready and willing to help you in any way we can. Thank you for your attention today. When you leave, please stop at the table set up by our domestic abuse violence committee and learn more about these issues and possibly even volunteer to be a part of this committee that will work with this issue here in the parish in the months to come. May God root out all abuse from our families. We pray for the abusers. We pray for the abused. May God bring all families peace.

Homily About Domestic Violence
27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)
October 2, 2022
St. Joseph Church, Beltsville
Luke 17:5-10

Introduction

Today is Respect Life Sunday and October is Domestic Violence Awareness month. In our first reading from the prophet Habbukuk, he laments that there is destruction and violence all around him: “*How long, O Lord? I cry for help but you do not listen!*” The tone of desperation is clear. How many of us, of our neighbors or parishioners might cry out in a similar way?

When we talk about Respect Life Sunday, we are certainly passionate about protecting the unborn at every stage of their development. But it also means respecting the God given dignity of every human life from conception to natural death. And National Domestic Violence Awareness month is an essential part of this respect that we give to all human life.

What is Domestic Violence? Domestic Violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses to control an intimate partner through fear and intimidation. It includes physical, sexual, psychological, verbal, and economic abuse.

The USCCB reports that 1 out of 4 women and 1 out of 7 men in this country have suffered severe physical violence at home, being beaten, choked, punched, kicked, or threatened with a weapon.

We as a community of faith are called to be part of helping friends and family suffering abuse. If you know someone suffering threats and beatings at home, help is available. My experience on the Priest Advisory Committee on Domestic Violence has helped me tremendously in my ministry in support of these persons and families. I share this with you because **I want you to know that I am approachable if you are dealing with this issue and need a safe place to talk about it. I want you to know that St. Joseph’s is a parish community that cares for those who are suffering with domestic violence.**

If you find yourself raising your fist in anger or know someone who raises his fist to his wife and children, help is available. Through the grace of God and the sacraments, through counseling, developing safety plans, and learning new relationship skills, family members in danger can find safety and the abuse can stop.

As we reflect on faith, it’s important to mention that **this type of suffering is not a punishment from God for your past sins.** It is never God’s will that any person be abused in this way. And this is where faith in God becomes even more essential. In this case, it means believing that God loves you and would never leave you or forsake you.

“Increase our Faith”

I love how the apostles simply ask the Lord in today’s Gospel: “*Increase our faith.*” Jesus responds that if we have “*faith the size of mustard seed, we could say to a mulberry tree, ‘be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey us.*” Here Jesus uses an exaggeration or

hyperbole in order to make a point. A mustard seed is about the size of a grain of sand. Jesus is saying **even the smallest amount of faith can lead to extraordinary things.**

Jesus is saying that **we need to begin to exercise our faith rather than waiting around for it to just happen. Faith is supernatural** because we cannot acquire it by ourselves. However, it is **increased through prayer and continual exercise.**

There's a story about a man named Fidelis (Fidelis means faith). One day Fidelis was walking through the jungle and heard something behind him. He turns around and sees this lion, who is charging after him, to eat him. Fidelis tries to outrun the lion but he doesn't see a cliff and falls over about 100 feet down. There's another drop of 700 feet below that. On the way down there's a branch and Fidelis grabs hold of it and is just hanging there afraid. He cries out, "Hello, hello." Suddenly a voice yells back "Hello, hello." Fidelis yells, "Can you help me, help me!" Then the voice says, "Don't you want to know who I am?" Fidelis says, "I don't really care who you are, just help me." The voice replied, "I am the Lord your God. Do you trust me?" Fidelis says, "Yes, yes I trust you! Please get me down from here!" And the Lord God says, "Okay, first let go of the branch." And Fidelis looks up as he hangs there for his life and yells: "Is there anybody else up there?"

I love this story because it illustrates that faith is a real relationship to God. It means that we know who He is. Faith is an attitude of confidence and trust in God because we believe that God is our Father. It's **letting go of the branch** (so to speak) and **trusting in God completely.** This weekend we celebrate the feast of St Thérèse of Lisieux and this is what Cardinal Basil Hume wrote of her:

"In 1987 I visited St. Thérèse's room in the Carmel of Lisieux. By the door of her room, scratched into the wood, she had written, "Jesus is my only love." That was not written in exaltation but in near despair. She was thus crying out to her Beloved that even when she experienced nothing but absence, emptiness, darkness, she clung to the assurance of being loved and carried in his arms. That is faith at a heroic level – that is trust, clinging to God when everything in our experience would seem to contradict his very existence, or at least his love for us."

St. Therese of Lisieux's experience reminds me of St. Teresa of Calcutta, who also felt a similar abandonment and absence of God's presence in her life. These beautiful women remind us that faith is not ultimately a feeling. **Faith is an act of the will; it's a choice we make to trust in God no matter what the circumstances in our lives. When we make an act of faith, we trust that God is working behind the scenes for our good.**

Conclusion

What about us? Is your faith the size of a mustard seed or are you like Fidelis, holding on to the branch? If I'm really honest, there are some days it's like a mustard seed and there are other days when I'm still holding on to the branch like Fidelis. Most days it's much stronger than that, but to be human is to experience those times that really test our faith. It's in those weaker moments that we can all pray like the apostles: *"Lord, increase our faith."*

- Reverend Robert G. Maro, Pastor

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