

Homily - Fr Jeff

This homily might make some people feel uncomfortable, and it might disturb some others, but most of all, I hope it will make everyone who hears it, **stop and think**. If there's anyone here who believes that Domestic Violence isn't occurring around them; in the words of Darryl Kerrigan: ***You're dreaming!*** Domestic violence occurs ***everywhere***. The reason you mightn't be aware of it, however, is because it usually takes place in secret, hidden from the view of everyone except those it affects. Embarrassment, shame and not knowing where to turn are some of the reasons why people - mainly women - often keep it secret. Current statistics reveal that not only is it an epidemic, but it's one that's been around much longer than Covid 19, and yet, not enough is being done to curb its spread.

Although many victims of domestic violence are aware of what's happening to them, there are, sadly, many who aren't, because their definition only includes physical violence. Domestic violence, however, often entails one persons' use of power and control over another, and exists in forms that might be physical, verbal, emotional, economical and or sexual.

Of all the things that domestic violence is, it is not genetic, it's a learned behaviour that can also be unlearned. The majority of male abusers, however, won't change unless they're held accountable for their actions. Some will even try to excuse their behaviour, whilst some victims might even believe their abuser's rationalizations. Whilst stress and alcohol can aggravate abuse, they're never the root cause. Abusers can utilise many different forms of violence in their efforts to maintain power and control over their victims, and the reason that many victims struggle to liberate themselves from their abusers is because it is difficult. From the outside, many people can't understand why victims don't just pick up and leave, but for the majority, this is much easier said than done. So many victims feel ashamed to appear as though they've failed in their marriage. Others don't think they can make it without the abusers' financial help. Some don't want to separate their children from their fathers, and despite the abuse, children often pressure their mothers not to leave their fathers. Sometimes the abusers themselves use their children against their wives or partners. All too often abused women interiorize the emotional abuse and begin to believe that somehow ***they*** are responsible for provoking the abuser's violence, which of course they aren't. Despite that, many begin to believe the claims that they're ignorant, incompetent, helpless and ugly. With their self-confidence eroded it becomes easier for abusers to gain control, especially when the woman works solely in the home. Devoid of any income, she's forced to ask, sometimes beg, for every cent she needs, with the abuser demanding full accountability whilst at the same time belittling her as financially irresponsible and or unable to be trusted with money.

Many victims of domestic violence often try so hard to please their abusive partners, but motivated by fear they're constantly on edge. If an abuser simply says he'll hurt them, it may be enough to silence and subdue his wife or partner for a lifetime. At the end of the day, abusers will not change until they are held accountable for their violence.

Unfortunately, our church has in many ways been silently complicit in this epidemic by failing to speak out against it. We haven't preached that no one deserves to be abused and no one should stay in an abusive relationship. Many victims take literally, the notion that their marriage is forever, irrespective of how they are treated, and therefore, they can never leave their abusive husbands without offending God. Some abusers will even quote Scripture to justify themselves; distorting the Word by insisting women were created to serve men and that wives must be subject to their husbands, but the time has come for us to set the record straight. The church definitively rejects all forms of domestic violence and urges women to protect

themselves and their children, even if that means a separation and/or divorce from their abusers. As a community of faith we must help to protect and assist all victims in freeing themselves from the violence, and at the same time reach out to every victim of domestic violence, encouraging them to step out into the light and seek help. We want to support all victims in their struggle for peace. We want them to live their lives safe, free, and filled with love, joy and hope for the future.

Many of us here today *will* know someone who is experiencing domestic violence. We need to tell them they don't have to suffer alone and we assure them that we support them in their efforts to free themselves from violence and abuse.

The Prophet Habakkuk cried out to God about the violence in his time, and he thought God did not hear him. Today, many victims of domestic violence cry out to God and *we must* hear them. The Bible reveals that our God, is a God of love and justice; who hears the cry of the poor, the oppressed, widows and orphans as well as victims of domestic violence. We need to open our ears to their cries and respond to all who suffer, with the same love and understanding that Jesus would. As individuals and as church, we can and should be God's messengers of love, liberation and peace, for everyone, especially those enduring the torment of domestic violence. Let us be sensitive but strong in our response and let us be compassionate but firm in our resolve to bring God's liberating grace to victims of domestic violence everywhere.