

FOR YOUR MARRIAGE

Preaching Resource on Domestic Violence Throughout the Liturgical Year

Dear Pastor or Deacon,

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month. This month offers us the opportunity to draw attention to the Church's teaching on the dignity of all human life and the wrongdoing of violence in the home. However, the scripture readings of *almost every Sunday of the liturgical year* afford us the opportunity to speak about gospel values of love, respect, kindness, and gentleness to others, especially to those with whom we live. Be attentive to the many times that the assigned Sunday readings of the liturgical year readily lend themselves to some application or reference to issues pertaining to domestic violence.

Just a simple and pastorally sound reference to domestic violence in a homily lets people know that it is okay to approach you, the pastor or deacon, about the matter for help. *Be aware, however, that possibly some form of domestic violence may impact at least a third of the assembly that is listening to your homily on any given Sunday.*

The following are offered as some examples of opportunities for preaching against domestic violence. Thank you for bringing this issue to light.



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Liturgical Sunday

3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C: Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Summary and Suggestions

Luke presents Jesus returning to Nazareth where He had been raised. He enters the synagogue and reads from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah: “the spirit of the Lord is upon me ... sent to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives... release to prisoners... to announce a year of favor.” Jesus would desire to release individuals held captive by the fear and shame which results from abuse and violence. Would Jesus want a spouse or children to be held as prisoners in their own homes? How tragic that so many might be in need of liberty from acts of violence right in their own homes. What responsibility do we have to speak up and help bring such glad tidings to those in need?

11th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C: Luke 7:36-8:3

Luke presents, in the setting of a home, Jesus treating a woman known to be a sinner with great compassion and gentleness. He praises her great love, forgives her sins, and sends her away in peace. The passage ends with a reference to women who accompanied Jesus on his journeys and who assisted him out of their means. Why not use this passage, not only as an opportunity to reflect on our need to seek forgiveness from the Lord with a contrite heart, but also to illustrate the kindness, gentleness, appreciation and respect that Jesus showed to women? Contrast the gentle approach of Jesus to the woman with that of Simon the Pharisee.

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B: Mark 4:35-41

Mark tells the story of Jesus and the disciples in the boat during a bad storm. They wake the sleeping Jesus and ask him, "Teacher, doesn't it matter to you that we are going to drown?" Jesus rebukes the wind, calms the sea, and reminds them to have faith. The miracle story provides us with the opportunity to reflect upon the power and care of Jesus who can calm the storms and tribulations the Church and her members' experience. The individuals who are victims of domestic violence may often feel abandoned by Jesus and the Church while they struggle to survive in the midst of their situations. Preach about the power of Jesus to calm their storms and strengthen them to do what is necessary to achieve tranquility and peace in their lives.

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22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B: Mark 7:1-8, 21-23

Jesus states that wicked designs come from the deep recesses of the heart and he identifies evils coming from within that render someone impure. Talk about how acts of fornication, murder, adulterous conduct, greed, maliciousness, deceit, sensuality, envy, and arrogance can exist in families today and the devastating toll they can have on individuals within the system.

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A: Matthew 21:33-43

Jesus tells the parable of the property owner who leased out his vineyard to tenant farmers. When vintage time arrives, he dispatches his slaves to the tenants to obtain his share of the grapes. The slaves, and eventually his son, are beaten, stoned or killed. Use this Sunday as an opportunity to discuss how the vineyard of God is still troubled or plagued by acts of violence, and how the tenants often still fail to provide the master with good grapes at vintage time.

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B: Mark 10:2-16

Mark presents Jesus discussing with the Pharisees whether it is permissible for a husband to divorce his wife, and Jesus describes the intentions of God at the beginning of creation. The reading from Genesis gives the story of the creation of woman from the side of the man. Use this Sunday's readings as an opportunity to discuss the Church's vision of marriage and some legitimate responses when a marriage falls short of that vision in significant ways.

30th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A: Matthew 22:34-40

The lawyer attempts to trip Jesus up by asking the question, "Which commandment of the law is the greatest?" Jesus responds with laws of loving God and neighbor. The first reading describes the compassionate God who hears the cries of the poor, widow, foreigners and orphans who are exploited by others. Use the readings to challenge your listeners to take a good look at who they may be harming in any way by their thoughts, words, and deeds.

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3rd Sunday of Advent Year C: Luke 3:10-18

The holiday season is a time of stress for many. In fact, research indicates that acts of domestic violence actually increase during this time of year, though we think of this season as being one of peace and tranquility. John the Baptist, in Luke's gospel tells the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers what each must do to prepare for the coming of the Lord. His advice is concrete and he challenges each to take a look at what he needs to reform in his life. Ask what the Lord would have each change in his or her own home and interactions with family members. Challenge them with specific examples regarding how to better speak to and treat one another as the holidays approach.

4th Sunday of Advent Year A: Matthew 1:18-24

As above, the holiday season is a good time to draw attention to the issues relating to domestic violence. Matthew presents the story of how Joseph, guided by the words of an angel in a dream, receives Mary into his home as his wife. The virgin is with child and he will be named "Emmanuel," a name which means "God is with us." Preach about family and the need to work at making God present within the family in special ways during the holiday season.

Be aware of the fact that a misinterpretation or a partial interpretation of the assigned readings on some Sundays of the church year can be problematic for victims of domestic violence. The following are some examples of such readings.

7th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A: Matthew 5:38-48

Matthew presents Jesus urging his disciples to offer no resistance to injury, and Jesus states, "when a person strikes you on the right cheek, turn and offer him the other ... love your enemies, pray for your persecutors." The reading from Leviticus calls us to bear no hatred for our brother in our hearts, and to take no revenge and cherish no grudge. When preaching about Jesus's command to love, to forgive, to be non-violent, etc., be sensitive to how your words and the interpretation of these passages will sound to the people in your congregation who are or have been abused by a spouse or parent. Offer guidance on how to respond to the acts of violence and when and how to forgive.

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7th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C: Luke 6:27-38

Year C gives the Lukan parallel to the Matthean text mentioned above. Be sensitive to the same issues.

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A: Matthew 18:21-35

Peter asks the Lord, "how often must I forgive?" and Jesus responds, "seventy times seven times." The reading from Sirach states that "wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight." Our words about the need to forgive are often difficult to hear for the person who has been seriously hurt by another, especially a member of his or her own family. Perhaps what we need to preach regarding these and similar texts is how forgiveness is a process that takes time, and how the Christian is challenged by Christ not to "hug too tightly, cherish, or nourish anger and hate." There is a great difference between being legitimately angry and cherishing or nourishing that anger.

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