

Jesus, Gender-Based Violence and Us...

23/2/20

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

There has been much coverage in the news of late regarding gender-based violence in our country, South Africa. It is one of the many factors that currently plague our beloved country. It is, however, perhaps one of the issues that remain more pertinent and demanding our direct attention, as innocent women and children are losing their precious lives on a daily basis in South Africa.

My intention this evening is not to deliver a perfect paper on this subject, but to rather create an awareness at parish level of this sad state affairs. It is important for us, as a parish, to make a positive difference in the community and world around us, as we carry the Gospel wherever we go. Part of this witness is being armed with knowledge and capacity regarding societal ills... the one in question this evening being Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa.

Firstly, what is GBV and how would we define it?

GBV is a general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with gender, as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders within the context of a specific society. Whilst most people assume GBV to involve women and children only, in fact GBV can also be extended to men and boys. They are, however, in the minority when it comes to GBV.

Secondly, it is important for us to know that there are various forms of GBV.

The main forms we can consider for the sake of this evening are:

Domestic violence: This is the most common form of GBV among partners. It often involves physical violence or threats of violence. This kind of violence may also involve sexual assault, battery, coercion and sexual harassment.

Physical violence: This form of GBV involves hitting, slapping, kicking, punching, pushing and so forth. Weapons such as knives and other sharp instruments are often used during physical violence.

Emotional violence: This form of GBV often involves verbal abuse, name calling and the belittling of the other. It entails acts of embarrassment, humiliation and disrespect. These acts can affect one's sense of self, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Economic violence: This includes control of partner's assets, access to money and other economic resources. The male partner may be reluctant for his female partner to work or may manage and abuse her payment for work done.

Sexual violence: This is the most common form of GBV and may involve rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation and trafficking for sexual purposes.

Femicide: This is characterised by the murder of a female partner by an intimate male partner and is considered to be the most extreme outcome.

(We are reminded of the candle burning here this evening representing the lost life of eight year old, Tazne van Wyk, from Elsie's River, who was found dead in a drain in Worcester on Wednesday night.)

Now that we have a brief outline of the definition of GBV, as well as the main forms that it can take, we might ask what are the root causes of GBV?

Well, we need to note firstly, that GBV is a complicated issue and cannot be attributed to any one cause, but rather a multitude of factors that contribute to the situation that we find ourselves in.

Some of the more well-known contributing factors to GBV are listed as follows:

- 1) The influence of culture, tradition and religion on GBV: Males are often placed in a powerful position due to cultural practices. A few examples of these would be labola, virginity testing and female genital mutilation, to name but a few.
- 2) Individual factors: Studies have proven that individuals who grow up with violence often promulgate that same violence in a pattern that is hard to break.

- 3) Economic factors: Many women are economically dependent on males and thus it becomes difficult for them to leave abusive relationships. There is also a strong link between poverty and GBV.
- 4) Alcohol abuse: This is linked with all forms of interpersonal violence. Women who live with men who drink heavily are five times more likely to be assaulted by their partners.
- 5) Guns and GBV: Guns remain a significant cause of violent death in SA. Most gunshot victims are men but women are more likely to be victims of gun violence in intimate relationships.

So, what is the state doing about all of this?

The South African government has signed various international and regional conventions to protect the rights of women and girls. Various laws have been signed into legislation like the Domestic Violence Act and the Maintenance Act, to name but a few.

The South African Police Service is also expected to play a supporting role for the victim of GBV. Counselling and shelter is to be made available by the Police Services.

Protection orders through the courts are available but unfortunately, many people do not find the legal system user friendly or helpful. Hopefully, this will change in time.

In conclusion, we realise that GBV is a massive problem, not only in SA, but all over the world. It is critical that interventions are developed in order to address the issues around GBV. These interventions would need to operate at various levels. Our parish being one of them. We need to have a very close look at the social construct of what it means to be a man in society today. Often, masculine identity is intertwined with the notion of power and superiority over women.

What can we do as Christians and as a parish?

Firstly, we need to take some time and make ourselves aware of the issues at hand, what causes them and the various complexities around them. We

cannot claim to be a Christian community and then bury our heads in the sand and live in isolation, ignoring people who are suffering in society around us. That would be living the Gospel in isolation and that is not what Jesus lived and died for. (Me sharing this with you at evensong this evening is addressing this first step of awareness, for knowledge is power but with power comes responsibility)

Secondly, we need to draft and accept a policy on GBV as a parish. This is essential. We would all be able to contribute or have a say in the drafting of this policy on GBV. This would be our response to GBV and how we plan to tackle it in our own small way here at St Pauls. If we have a policy around GBV, then we are saying to the world around us that we acknowledge that there is an issue and we have a plan.

Thirdly, we need to be putting concrete steps into place for those who are affected by GBV in our parish or around us. Steps like offering counselling, a safe place to be, education around GBV and perhaps even donating funds to worthy causes that address GBV on the ground level.

It is not easy to be a Christian today, especially in South Africa, where there are a myriad of complex issues contributing to a multitude of societal ills, one of them being GBV. However, if we all play our role, no matter how big or small, then we can go a long way to helping establish the Kingdom of God on here Earth, as we believe it is meant to be. Our women and children have every right on Earth to feel safe and protected at all times. It is part of our calling to ensure that this is achieved. This is all part of what Jesus wanted for us as a community.

It is our time to shine and make a difference.

Let us be that difference for the sake of Tazne.

She could, after all, have been your child or mine.

Amen.

