

# The Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Fill us with your love,  
O Lord, and we will  
sing for joy!

-Ps 90, Lectionary

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CNS photo/Brad Birkholz

## October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

What's the difference between normal conflict and domestic violence? Conflict is part of every intimate relationship—that's why conflict resolution skills are important. Domestic violence, however, has no place in a healthy relationship, whether the couple is dating, cohabiting, engaged, or married.

### What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is any kind of behavior that a person uses, or threatens to use, to control an intimate partner. The two key elements are threat and control. Domestic violence can take various forms:

*Physical* – Violent actions such as hitting, beating, pushing, and kicking. In many cases physical abuse becomes more frequent and severe over time.

*Sexual* – Includes any sexual acts that are forced on one partner by the other

*Psychological* – Includes a wide range of behaviors such as intimidation, isolating the victim from friends and family, controlling where the victim goes, making the victim feel guilty or crazy, and making unreasonable demands

*Emotional* – Undermining an individual's self-esteem, constant criticism, insults, put-downs, and name-calling

*Economic* – Examples include limiting the victim's access to family income, preventing the victim from working or forcing the victim to work, destroying the victim's property, and making all the financial decisions

Both women and men can be victims of domestic abuse. According to the National Domestic Violence Hotline statistics, approximately 1 in 4 women and 1 in 7 men over the age of 18 have been the victim of physical domestic violence, and almost 50% of both sexes have experienced some form of domestic psychological aggression.



## What the Catholic Church teaches about domestic violence

The U.S. Catholic Bishops have made clear that “violence against women, inside or outside the home, is never justified. Violence in any form- physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal is sinful; often it is a crime as well.” (When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women)

## Domestic violence and the permanence of marriage

Some abused women believe that Catholic 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 Catholic Church.

In *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*, the Catholic bishops emphasize that “no person is expected to stay in an abusive marriage.” Violence and abuse, not divorce, break up a marriage. The abuser has already broken the marriage covenant through his or her abusive behavior. Abused persons who have divorced may want to investigate the possibility of seeking an annulment.

## What the Bible says

Abusive men may take a text from the Bible and distort it to support their right to batter. They often use Ephesians 5:22 (“Wives should be subordinate to their husbands as to the Lord”) to justify their behavior. This passage (v. 21-33), however, refers to the mutual submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. It means that husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church.

The Catholic bishops condemn the use of the Bible to support abusive behavior in any form. Men and women are created in God’s image. They are to treat each other with dignity and respect.

## Forgiveness

Men who batter also cite the Bible to insist that their victims forgive them (see, for example, Matthew 6:9-15). A victim then feels guilty if she cannot do so. Forgiveness, however, does not mean forgetting the abuse or pretending that it didn’t happen. Neither is possible.

Forgiveness is not permission to repeat the abuse. Rather, forgiveness means that the victim decides to let go of the experience, to move on with life and not to tolerate abuse of any kind again.

