

International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

In December 1999 the United Nations General Assembly designated today, the 25th of November, as the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and invited governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations to organize activities designed to raise public awareness of the problem on that day.

Sadly this still remains a pressing issue in our world today. All too often we hear of terrible atrocities against women in many different countries. The so-called Islamic State is just one extreme case out of many where women are abused and humiliated physically and mentally. Not that our own country is immune from this. Domestic violence, for instance, remains a real if often hidden problem.

To a certain extent this is often attributable to the lower standing of women in many parts of the world, where they may not have the same opportunities for education and having a voice. We must remember that it is not quite a hundred years since women had the vote in our own country. And there is still not full gender equality in this country even now.

You only have to compare the role and treatment of women over history with Jesus to see a great contrast. There are many incidents in the Gospels when Jesus treats women as equals. He listens to them. He deals with them with respect. We heard one such incident just now (John 8.2-10).

There is no suggestion that the woman in question is not innocent, that she did not commit adultery. But what about the man, who may well have been married? What happened to him? Did he get off scot-free? Whereas the scribes and Pharisees want to carry out the cruel punishment of stoning the woman.

Jesus deals with this situation calmly and rationally. He does not berate those around him or go into a diatribe about the cruel practice they are planning. He quietly challenges those who are completely sinless in their own lives to cast the first stone. Whether or not they actually get the point they gradually slink away in embarrassment, and possibly in some cases a little guilt. Jesus himself does not then condemn the woman but simply tells her not to sin again.

*25 November 2016
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