

## Encourage families and society to love children

There has never been a better time for the Church than now to reignite and restore the family's and society's love for the children.

Children, in whatever status they are born (in marriage or outside marriage), are a gift from God. Every single life and every single child on earth is a perfect joy of God. Every good and perfect gift is from Him, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Jesus says, *"whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not just welcome me but the one who sent me."* Driven by indignation at the Church's treatment of the children Jesus went on to teach, *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my father in heaven."*

All the above words, however divine, they are as good as statutory silent pictures decorating our walls, if what we currently witness as cruel treatment of children is anything to go by. Every parent should be praying for the children caught in the crossfire of parental conflict. Domestic violence has saturated the media space. We read daily about angry fathers and mothers who intentionally hurt one another by killing the innocent children by poisoning, shooting and hanging them. What abnormal anger!

The effects of child abuse and maltreatment at homes has far greater impact that spiritual and psychological therapists can tell. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defined it as *"all forms of physical and /or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or the exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power."*

Some of us keep quiet, or peep out our windows, knowing and hearing the screams of domestic violence. We pretend it is normal, or that we do not know when a child is being hurt or killed. Many of the children we see at schools, in churches and in society bear the signs of domestic violence and child abuse. There are many examples of these signs of a dysfunctional community.

The most obvious is anger - enraged rhetoric or war talk when one expresses a point, whether in debates or group discussions, bullying, the loss of respect for others by reducing one's opponent to less than an animal or, in extreme cases, killing someone just because they have a different view or background.

The failure by society and officialdom to address family violence and abuse tells of a society raising a community that devours itself. The burglar proofing, security alarms and high fences are no longer a guarantee for one's safety. Children are no longer safe to play or visit friends and neighbouring children. Parks are no longer playgrounds. There is daily fear that children will not get home from school safely – they are in danger from both their peers and scholar transport.

It is a nightmare society. Aisha Mirza says, *"It is not just the bruises on the body that hurts. It is the wounds of the heart and the scars in the mind"* we incur as a result family violence and abuse that result in so much brokenness.

The church must shoulder its God-given leadership role in restoring family values. Whoever brings a child on earth must take responsibility in caring. Human values begin at home, otherwise we will never have a right society. The Church must intervene in the restoration of these values. Increasing

violent rhetoric, children carrying knives at schools and sexual violence are signs of a depressed and suicidal society. A society where violence, greed and selfishness by those in authority have become the norm.

Let us love these children and nurture the innocence God has given them. We must not love them because we expect anything from them, but because they are a wonderful gift God has given to us. Any country, home or church that treasures its children has a bright future, economically, politically and socially.

We must therefore rise to love all children as gift given by God, regardless of colour and race. The Psalmist says, *"Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are children born in one's youth. Blessed is the one whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court."* (Psalm 127; 3-5).

Look at the first child you will come across, give them a smile, a word of encouragement and, most importantly, love. Yours may be the first (and last) kind word they will receive in a day filled with violence at home, in the streets or at school.

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