
Rape and femicide. Fr Patriciello: “Let us make sure our youths are not victims of street culture or of social networks: they are bad teachers. Male chauvinism is still very much a part of our DNA.”

The summer of 2023 saw a long trail of violence and bloodshed, involving female victims, from the very young to adults. Reports of gang rapes of teenage girls, older children, as was the case in the ‘Parco Verde’ neighbourhood of Caivano, near Naples, where two little girls, two cousins, were raped by a large group of teenage boys, or the case of a 19-year-old girl, raped by seven teenage boys in Palermo, or the femicides - the latest of which saw Anna Scala, 56, stabbed in the back by her ex-boyfriend in Piano di Sorrento. SIR discussed these horrors with Father **Maurizio Patriciello**, the parish priest of St Paul the Apostle Church, located in the Parco Verde neighbourhood of Caivano. **What was your first thought when you heard about the two young cousins raped in Parco Verde?** I am the parish priest in Caivano, I baptised most of these teenagers. Above all, before the indignation, before the anger, before the shock, there is an enormous and deep suffering. It's like a sudden, deadly, heart attack. **The Parco Verde neighbourhood is sadly known...** This neighbourhood was created after the 1980 earthquake. All the impoverished inhabitants who had been living in other districts were crowded into it. It is characterised by the absence of the State: apart from the church, the school and the Carabinieri police station, there is absolutely nothing, no pharmacy, no bus stop, no social services, no one to look after the people who live there. Not even the local council: there used to be a large sports centre a few steps away from the parish. It was vandalised and is now in ruins and in the process of being confiscated. The municipality has not taken it upon itself to restore it. We don't even have a mayor anymore. The area has been placed under outside administration, with three acting commissioners since the previous local council was dissolved because of 'Camorra' mafia infiltration. In a problematic neighbourhood, with high security risks, with one of the fastest growing drug trades in Italy, with no infrastructure, no meeting places for young people and no social services, street culture and social networks such as Facebook and Tik Tok, and pornography are taking over. The question we have to ask ourselves is

Who has taught these children the meaning of love, emotion, even sexuality? Nobody has taught them. They have been educated by pornography!

But these issues are never mentioned, they are taboo. **Why is this happening?** Adults have renounced the arduous work of education because, as St. John Bosco used to say, education is the work of the heart, and when there is no passion to teach a loved one - this happens with parents, with schooling, even with the Church - the streets become the teachers, they grow up very quickly, but also in a distorted way. In Parco Verde there are two little girls who are the victims, there is no doubt about that, but the boys who are the executioners are also victims. The trauma of the little girls will be the trauma that these boys will take with them, even if they try to disguise it with machismo.

We should be helping young boys to realise that being polite, kind, respectful and supportive is not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength. But have we ever tried to teach them that?

Don't both rape and the increasing number of feminicides reflect a strong feeling of contempt for women? Indeed, deep down there is always a fundamental contempt for women, who are treated as objects. We have never improved in this respect, although we claim to have overcome machismo: in reality we still carry it in our DNA. There is still a long way to go: we must insist, insist, always insist. **How can women be protected from this kind of violence? We saw it in the femicide of Anna Scala: she had filed two complaints against her ex-boyfriend for the violence he had inflicted on her, but the complaints were actually the trigger for further**

violence, a blind and murderous violence on the part of her executioner... In my service as a priest, I have encouraged dozens of women to denounce the violence they suffered. I accompanied them myself to lodge a complaint many times. When I read that Anna denounced once and then again, and that she was not protected in any way, I wondered: if a woman comes to me and says: 'Father, my husband is beating me,' will I have the courage to tell her: 'Go to the police immediately?' Or, on the contrary, will I be overwhelmed by the fear of condemning this woman to death if, after the complaint, the system that is supposed to defend her is inactive? It's a terrible thing to say, but if a complaint is not acted upon immediately, then advising a woman to file a complaint is tantamount to sentencing her to death. That is the problem, there is no point in beating around the bush. No matter how many protests there are, the red shoes, the red benches, it's all a waste of time. If, in the end, reporting only serves to incite the abuser, instead of stopping him, then, as a priest, I ask myself before God if I am condemning the woman I am suggesting to report. I worked for many years in a hospital. The emergency room is very important: when a sick person arrives, the first thing you do is try to bandage the wound, but at the same time there must be a ward where the patient can be admitted and receive the appropriate treatment.

After the complaint, which I compare to an emergency room, unless all the coping mechanisms to protect the woman and isolate the perpetrator who is threatening her and using violence against her are activated, there are far too many risks.

Let us turn to the issue of teenage rape. We should ask ourselves: what example have we set? Who killed 76 women in the first eight months of this year? Adults did it. **Is there a common thread that links them all?** I firmly believe that the rapes of these young girls and the feminicides must be studied and investigated together. Then I ask myself: who were the dear ones of these 76 women - mothers, daughters, sisters, friends - who died at the violent hands of a man? There were 76 victims, and there must be at least 760 others who are in pain. What have the children learned from social media, from Facebook, from television? That a man in his late 50s cowardly stabbed his wife in the back? What do these children need to learn? On top of this, we have the sentimental and sexual education provided by pornography and social media.

The shocking episodes that we learned about are only the tip of the iceberg, not only in Caivano, but in the whole of Italy. For every woman who denounces rape or violence, who knows how many more will not do so.

If we want to tackle this problem seriously, we have to stop it, and together, in unison, as in the end-of-year message of the President of the Republic, we all have to ask ourselves if we really want to put an end to this carnage. If the answer is yes, let us act accordingly. If we don't really care, we will continue to show our indignation for one day at the next rape or feminicide, but the next day it will be forgotten. **If you had the opportunity to talk to the Caivano youths who raped the young girls in Parco Verde, what would you say?** I don't know. It's hard to say in advance, certain thoughts come to mind instantly and you speak accordingly. Besides, one has to understand who these boys are, their background, how they got involved. They have to be dealt with one at a time and you have to try and help them as much as you can. These boys grow up very fast. A 14-year-old boy from Parco Verde is comparable to a 20-year-old from anywhere else. If he has been brought up in the street culture, then we know he has had a bad teacher, because he has grown up faster, but in a distorted way.

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