

SAFE HAVEN SUNDAY

February 23, 2020

SAMPLE HOMILY¹

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A, Lectionary # 79: Lv 19:1-2,17-18; Ps 103:1-4,8,10,12-13; 1 Cor 3:16:23; Mt 5:38-48

Note: *This text is intentionally longer than a Sunday homily to give you a greater selection of ways to develop your message. Please feel free to copy, cut, paste, borrow, steal, edit, and adapt from this Sample Homily. It is offered only as resource to assist you in preparing your homily for Safe Haven Sunday!*

“When someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other as well.” These words of our Lord startle us. What, we ask, does Jesus really mean? And the word “really” is important.

Jesus IS NOT giving us a “PLAN OF ACTION” for all circumstance in life when being attacked. Rather, he IS teaching us an ATTITUDE OF THE HEART that we should cultivate as sons and daughters of God our Father. Jesus wants us to be aware of the dignity of our relationship to his Father as our true security. Jesus is revealing “WHO WE ARE” and teaching us to live our lives rooted in that dignity and drawing our strength from it.

Jesus uses words that startle in order that we take notice and ponder. He uses a figure of speech called ‘hyperbole’ – a good teaching tool to stress a point. He uses hyperbole when he states, “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off.” We realize this is not a plan of action. He does not want us to actually mutilate our bodies. His goal is to teach a wisdom that goes deeper than his words – a wisdom that goes beyond expected mere human reaction.

Jesus warns us not to react from impulse and be carried away by anger or rage. A person may strike our body, but let us not let that blow—physical or verbal—reverberate down into our heart, penetrate into the core of our being—and rob us of our inner peace. This can open us to the deadlier wound of hatred. Jesus is saying, “When someone harms you, act from within, from your heart, the safe haven where the Holy Spirit dwells.”

In other words, a person may injure your body, but no one has the right nor even the power to injure your God-given dignity, your identity as a child of God. Jesus emphasizes in today’s Gospel, “Remember who you are. You are a child of God your Father.” Do not let anyone cause you to react – as if that person had power to rob you of your relationship to the Father. Remembering WHOSE you are will deepen your secure identity of WHO you are.

St. Paul’s words in the Second Reading echo the same truth: “Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you.” No one has the right to violate your inner

¹ Prepared by Msgr. John A. Cippel, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, FL.

being that is the temple of God. And do not give them the power to rob you of your inner peace.

So, I repeat, Jesus is NOT giving us a “PLAN OF ACTION” but an ATTITUDE OF THE HEART. He is not prohibiting us from defending ourselves or our loved ones from violent attacks. He teaches that reacting impulsively out of vengeance or resentment will invite the malice of our attacker to infect our hearts. As a result, our hearts will slowly become like that of our persecutors. We must never allow anyone to invade our hearts and desecrate the sanctuary of our inner souls where God dwells.

The sanctuary of our hearts must be guarded as a “SAFE HAVEN” of our God-given dignity and self-worth.

This brings me to the purpose of Safe Haven Sunday, a program that Bishop Parkes introduced into our diocese and that many of our parishes are celebrating this Sunday. Safe Haven Sunday addresses the dangers that threaten to desecrate the inner “safe haven” of God dwelling in the temple of the hearts of us all – especially the hearts and minds of our children.

Safe Haven Sunday addresses an old enemy that threatens us today more than ever. The enemy I speak of wields the powerful weapon of shame. And shame always draws us to hide in darkness and leads us to avoid the light of God and to isolate ourselves from family and friends. Shame also hinders us from bringing the enemy’s attacks and tactics into the light of God’s truth.

Before I name this enemy, I first want to mention the channels that it uses to invade and violate us. Principally it attacks us through the internet.

The internet is not the enemy. In fact, the internet provides us with many gifts. Among them are instant communication via email and text messaging. Search engines provide us with unlimited possibilities of news, wholesome entertainment, and information and education. Moreover, there are many good Catholic websites that teach the truths of the Gospel and inspire prayer and devotion.

But unfortunately, there is a dark side of the internet as well. We live in a world where the internet is used by the powers of darkness to infect and desecrate the inner temple of our souls, as well as the heart and souls of our spouses and of our children, from the youngest to the oldest.

We tend to avoid speaking about this enemy that infects us spiritually, psychologically, and socially. You already know what it is from what I have said so far. It is pornography. It offends us even to mention the word, let alone hear it pronounced in church. But by the very fact that we avoid speaking about it, we also permit it to spread unchecked. These dangers threaten the hearts and minds of everyone here as well as the hearts and minds our children. It causes all of us to forget that we are the Temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells within us.

This infection has reached epidemic proportions, and I do not exaggerate when I say a good percentage of us present here in church today have at one time or another viewed pornography. It's painful to admit this. But let's face it, that is the truth. I do not say this to accuse. I make this candid statement simply to prove its prevalence that we prefer to ignore or minimize.

This dark industry has been very aggressive and has seeped into our laptops and tablets, and streams into our smart phones, like poison gas pervading the atmosphere we breathe. Viewing pornography robs us of our peace of mind, heart, and soul. It arouses shame that binds us and deepens self-condemnation. It makes us awkward to face God in prayer and causes us to avoid the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It damages marriages—even destroys some. The reason is: “porn kills love.” It causes people to lose their jobs and sends people to prison. None of this is new to you. We read and hear of it daily in the media. Safe Haven Sunday has us face the darkness of pornography here in the presence of God. And let us join together with the power of God to scatter this darkness with the Light of Christ who is alive in our hearts.

As we politely have been silent about it, the pornography industry is active and has drawn and continues to draw our children into its web. Once children and teenagers begin to view it, shame leads them to view it in secrecy and to isolate themselves. Pornography may cause them to distance themselves from their parents and peers and affect their studies.

Here are a few facts that may astonish you, with the hope that this astonishment will motivate you to act – for the welfare of our children.

Statistics on use of pornography reveal that the average age of a child's first exposure is 11 years old. New research from the security technology company, “Bitdefender”, has reported children under the age of 10 now account for 22% of online porn consumption for youth under 18 years old. In a U.S. study, 70% of 15- to 17-year-old boys said they had watched porn.

National Council on Public Polls: Childline found a tenth of 12 to 13-year-olds fear they may actually be addicted to pornography. 10% of children in the 7th grade have stated that they are watching enough porn to be concerned that they may have an addiction issue and not be able to stop.

(If you think these figures are overblown, simply check them out on Google.)

Many parents find it difficult or awkward to speak to their children about the reality of pornography on the internet. Safe Haven Sunday helps us to do that.

Today our parish is offering you a plan of action to prepare you to become confident in speaking with your children about online exposure to dangerous websites. It's all in the booklet

for you, free of charge as you leave church today. It's title: *Confident: Helping Parents Navigate Online Exposure*. Please take one as you leave the church this morning. It's not a matter of IF your child will see something harmful online. It's only a matter of WHEN. And regrettably, internet pornography is teaching your children how and what to think about sex and marriage.

The sooner parents have this conversation with the children the better. Passive parenting on this issue is no longer an option. The internet never sleeps. Countless websites have a plan for your children, a plan that feeds them lies and robs them of the awareness of their God-given dignity. Pornography hinders the development of their future sexual maturity. Their identity as sons and daughters of God their Father fades into the fantasy world of the internet which envelopes them. Safe Haven Sunday helps parents to form a plan to defend your children from the porn industry's designs upon them. Please take advantage of the resources that are offered you today.

Please read this week's bulletin which has very important information about Safe Haven Sunday. It describes wonderful resources we've made available to you. These include signing up for the seven-day text-to-opt-in program of free digital parental tips and the superb resources available on our diocesan website. I remind you. The parish is providing for parents a booklet entitled: *Confident: Helping Parents Navigate Online Exposure*. Please take one as you leave the church this morning.

May the message of Jesus in today's Gospel stir us all to action. He tells us to be aware of who we are and to live our lives as children of our heavenly Father. St. Paul states it clearly, "Do you not know that you are the Temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you."