

SAFE HAVEN SUNDAY

February 14, 2021

**SAMPLE HOMILY<sup>1</sup>**

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B, Lectionary # 77: Lv 13:1-2,44-46; Ps 32:1-2,5,11; 1 Cor 10:31-11:1; Mk 1:40-45

**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 a resource to assist you in preparing your homily for Safe Haven Sunday!*

*“The one who bears the sore of leprosy shall . . . cry out, ‘Unclean, unclean!’ . . . [H]e shall declare himself unclean, since he indeed is unclean. He shall dwell apart, making his abode outside the camp.”*

The words we hear in the First Reading today pain the heart. How distressing to hear a man obliged to cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” This strikes at the heart of a person’s dignity. Forced to live isolated from the community and viewed as less than human leads to deep inner pain and self-condemnation. Such was the public treatment and humiliation of lepers. Today due to better understanding of leprosy, this fear of lepers no longer exists, and those who do suffer from it are treated in a much more humane and compassionate manner.

Still today there are people who are moral lepers when their hidden failures or perverse moral behavior come to light. And once their secret is exposed, they are also shamed and made the butt of ridicule by the media. People tend to shun them because their reputation has been tarnished. If they have committed crimes, legal action is taken to publicly punish them and possibly isolate them from the rest of society in prisons. But shame inflicts its own penalty.

In our society, there is another type of shame caused by a disease that causes its victims to feel unclean and disconnected from family and friends. Sadly, these victims are our children and teens. Their youth make them prime targets. This virus captivates their curiosity about their own maturing bodies and takes advantage of their youthful innocence. This disease is an emotional and spiritual virus infecting heart and mind. It instills fear of being discovered and seduces its victims to keep it a secret. As a result, once infected by it, the fears and shame it arouses in children and teens prevent them from admitting that they are suffering from it. This secret draws these young victims to hide and isolate from their parents or other adults who could help them. More lamentable is that this “unclean” virus is legally protected and tolerated by society. I am speaking of pornography. The very word is unsavory. We all are prone to avoid discussing it, even to the point that parents may prefer to skirt around the issue with their very young children and avoid a serious and caring conversation to set boundaries and

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Msgr. John A. Cippel, Diocese of St. Petersburg.

protect them from becoming infected. Even if parents suspect that pornography may have infected their children, they may be at a loss to know as how to address it with their children.

Confusing feelings of shame and awkwardness stir within most of us adults when pornography is a topic of discussion. Yet it is precisely this avoidance that allows it to thrive. We must openly admit that we are uncomfortable in mentioning the word in public – especially in church. And yet there is in parents and in committed Catholics an unspoken desire that pornography’s dangers should be brought into the light prudently and with due respect for those whom we address. Fears or awkwardness may inhibit parents from openly speaking about the dangers of pornography with their children for a number of reasons. They may appear to be prying into their children’s personal lives. Or they themselves feel some degree of inadequacy as to how to begin the conversation in a respectful and loving way. And if they do have the courage to begin to speak of the harmful habit of viewing pornography, they may feel inadequate as what to say beyond “Don’t do it.” Or even much worse, “I’m disappointed in you.” A hasty warning or a word of disapproval and nothing more only deepens children’s isolations from their parents.

Let me say clearly, moms and dads you are not alone in this responsibility of parenting. Our parish is offering you today highly effective aids rooted in solid Catholic truths of wholesome human sexuality. Our Diocese has set aside this Sunday as Safe Haven Sunday. It is obvious that you protect your home to be a safe haven from all harm. May your home be also a safe haven from pornography. This virus can invade your children’s bedroom through the open door of their smart phone and hold them captive in your very home.

Today I am encouraging you and offering to help you to work through any hesitancy you may have in beginning this important conversation with your child on the issue of pornography. The Safe Haven Sunday initiative equips you with multiple ongoing aids that will prepare you to address this unclean virus that possibly may have already infected your son or daughter. And please be aware, even if the pornography industry has not yet infected your child, the odds are very great that it possibly may do so in the future. Let’s face it. We live in a society awash in erotic films, sexually explicit rap music and social media. The extremely aggressive pornography industry has a plan to snag your child as young as 9 or 10 years old. And I do not exaggerate when I say this.

*“Moved with pity, [Jesus] stretched out his hand, touched [the leper], and said to him, ‘I do will it. Be made clean.’”* These same words I quote in today’s Gospel bring hope.

Notice the attitude of Jesus. He was moved with loving compassion. Jesus reaches out to us all at all times. He reaches out to you also as a parent with the very same loving compassion. There is power and strength in his love for you to guide you to be the best parents you can be in raising your children in a world fraught with dangers. I assure you. You are not alone in fulfilling the responsibilities of being a father or mother of your children. Jesus is with you. He is in you. He dwells in your home and in your family. You already possess a deep love for your son or daughter. Pray to the Lord Jesus to spur you on to put your love for them into action by broaching the topic all parents are reluctant to address with their children – the God given gift

of human sexuality. Do not let the porn industry hijack your parental role and infect your child with destructive attitudes and shame concerning human sexuality and marital intimacy.

*“[Jesus] stretched out his hand, touched him.”* Jesus actually touched the leper. He did not simply heal him at a distance. He made physical contact with his diseased body. Fear, and shame at being seen touching him – not the least revulsion – held him back. Such fears inhibit us all in speaking openly about pornography because truthfully it is “dirty,” “unclean” and “shameful.” As parents it is important to admit and face these fears and embarrassment and to pray to work through these fears in order to reach out in compassion to your son or daughter.

You are well aware that a conversation about sexuality will be awkward for your child as well. That is why spending time with the Lord in prayer and reading and reflecting on the materials offered you today will be of utmost importance to prepare you for this conversation. If you do discover your child has been viewing pornography, nothing of shame, anger or disappointment must be conveyed toward him or her in your one-on-one conversation. Remember the porn industry took advantage of your children’s innocence. It wounds their dignity and holds them captive in shame. Your loving compassion as a father and mother will be a great blessing to begin a healing of this wound of shame. Relating to them with compassion will begin a healing. Your child’s road to freedom in life will be long with ups and downs – as it is for us all. But let your child’s first step to that healing begin with your fatherly and motherly blessing. Even though it may not seem evident at the time, your open and candid acceptance of your child as God’s gift to you will bear fruit in your son’s or daughter’s life in the years to come.

Parents, please download and read this year’s e-book, *Connected: How Strong Family Relationships Lead to Internet-Safe Kids*. And be sure to sign up for the 7-day Safe Digital Family Challenge by texting-to-opt-in as described in today’s Safe Haven Sunday materials. Both resources are completely free. These will help you to work through your hesitancy and free you to reach out and “connect” with your child to face candidly and lovingly the shame ridden topic of pornography that diminishes your child’s freedom to be who God created him or her to be.

In closing, I thank you for being the parents that you are for your children. Remember, “Perfect families do not exist, but healthy families do.” And healthy families stay connected by starting anew every day. May the outstretched hand of our Savior Jesus Christ heal us all of whatever isolates us from being connected as a family in the safe haven of the Heart of God our Father.