

Homily Sample- Safe Haven Sunday

I want to begin this homily with a brief prayer. “Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that You would cover us, our families, and all of our possessions with Your love and the power of Your Most Precious Blood. Bind and drive out from among us any spirits who are opposed to Your Kingdom. Soften our hearts and heal our wounds so that we may receive Your Word today. Surround all of us with Your heavenly Angels, Saints, the strong arms of St. Joseph, and the mantle of Our Blessed Mother. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Consider this hypothetical situation: What if we all knew that some defect in the water pipes of this church was resulting in harmful exposure to a high percentage of parishioners and running the high likelihood of serious physical health risks and even death ... and we did nothing? You would think that is crazy and irresponsible. You might even demand the pastor and other parish staff be replaced. We basically have that very situation, but in the area of spiritual health. And most people hear nothing about it from pulpits or read nothing about it in the parish bulletin. Little is said or done to battle the crisis which is at epidemic proportions.

Today, I want to discuss a topic that impacts many men and women across many age categories. While the impact is broad, it does seem true that this spiritual health risk seems to have a more significant hold on men and boys. **I think it is necessary to speak on the topic of the pervasive presence and use of pornography in our society.**

All indications are that this is a widespread problem in our society, made ever broader by easy access and free content through the internet.

The statistics are alarming.

Studies indicate that:

- 93% of boys and 62% of girls were exposed to pornography before the age of 18.¹
- 71% of teens have done something to hide what they do online from their parents. This includes clearing browser history, minimizing a browser when in view, deleting inappropriate videos, lying about behavior, using a phone instead of a computer to browse, blocking parents with social media privacy settings, using private browsing, disabling parental controls, or having email or social media accounts unknown to parents.²
- 57% of young people seek out porn once a month.³
- 75% said their parents had never discussed Internet pornography with them.⁴
- One in 10 American males view porn daily.⁵

- 68% of men and 18% of women said they used pornography at least once every week. Another 17% of men and another 30% of women said they used pornography 1-2 times per month.⁶

- 56% of divorce involves one party having “an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.”⁷

No one is immune from this invasion, and the problem exists in Catholic homes as it does in other homes. I do not want to be misunderstood as if the problem does not exist among girls and women too. However, boys and men fall prey to this at significantly higher rates. In all categories of statistics measuring things like type of content viewed, age of first exposure, and frequency of use, boys and men outpace girls and women by large percentage margins. One study indicated that the strongest predictor of use of explicit material is simply being male.

One of the realities of this topic is that a person, through no fault of his or her own, can be exposed to this material quite innocently. A misspelled word in a search engine can lead to exposure and that can place a hook in a person. If we are not careful, first exposure develops into repeated curiosity and that develops into habitual use that impedes healthy human development and spiritual development. First exposure happened easily enough in past generations, but we must admit that with the dawn of the internet, it happens much more easily and frequently now, and it comes directly into your home. First exposure to explicit material now happens in our homes, right in the room where your child is on the computer, tablet, or smartphone.

This is a matter that cannot be ignored in the parish, in your family life, or in each person’s examination of conscience. We cannot be silent while souls are being ensnared. Use of this explicit material makes its users spiritually crippled and deadened. It is serious sin that needs to be confessed, and especially before coming forward to receive Holy Communion. It becomes enslaving. It negatively impacts personal discipline, dating, marriage, and even the ability of a young person to discern a call from God to priesthood or to a religious vocation.

I hope I do not cause rash judgment or awkward situations here, but given the statistics on use of explicit material, **parents, you should likely just assume that your child has been exposed**, and that your middle school and high school aged child may already have a habit of use. You must speak with them. You must first treat this issue in your own life with serious resolve. You must take measures to control and eliminate the entry points for this material into your home. Use internet accountability and filtering software and even have everyone in the house turn in all cellular and internet devices each evening, where they remain locked in the parents’ bedroom until morning. Men, dear brothers in the faith, you especially need to take such measures to protect yourselves, your wives, and your children. You need to live courageously in your fatherly role of protector in your home.

As your spiritual father, I want to set the tone for our response to this moral epidemic by saying that in the spiritual family of this parish, no one is permitted to shame anyone else about this struggle. The devil knows what he is doing in trafficking this filth. Anyone who is struggling needs to know they are loved, they are supported, and that they are called to true

and authentic human relationships. Jesus gives us the example from the woman caught in adultery who easily could have been shamed. Instead, He says, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again” (John 8:11). Therefore, in this parish, I am opening this topic for conversation, and I am asking you to continue it in your home and with your family. Opening this to conversation can allow healing to take place. This is because in talking openly and honestly we will draw each other, our spouses, and our children into more authentic relationships that, together with confession, prayer, struggle, and acts of penance, will result in lessening the grip of false virtual “relationships.” Anyone struggling needs to be prudent, but opening this matter—not to everyone, but to a trusted friend—can offer accountability in the battle. I want you to know that there are in fact people who do not use explicit material. The battle is possible. Victory is already won with Christ Jesus. Moreover, others in this parish will be ready to stand with you as you engage in battle. It is time to reject the devil’s message that tells you to keep this matter hidden. Kept hidden in the darkness, he increases his power over you. In the light, he flees.

Furthermore, we are also going to confess this matter with humility and honesty each and every time there is a fall and a sin. God is ready to meet you in this struggle. He already loves you as you hear this invitation to confession. He loves you and He wants you to have a deeper relationship with Him.

To fight against the evil of pornography in our lives and the lives of our families, I am going to suggest a few important spiritual weapons.

I want every person in this parish to learn how to pray the Rosary to invoke Mary in this battle. She brought us her Son who crushed the serpent’s head. Her intercession is powerful. Pray it in your home with your family. Additionally, you are invited to pray the prayer on the Safe Haven Sunday prayer card together as a family. ***(pray it together during Mass if possible)***

Reverent worship is a weapon in the battle and so, in addition to faithful attention at Mass, I ask each of you to sign up for a Holy Hour of Eucharistic Adoration, or to share an hour with your family or another friend. Come receive blessing in the Lord’s real presence and train your eyes to look upon the Holy One in our midst.

Men, I encourage you to invoke Saint Joseph in this battle and to ask his intercession. See in him a great companion and example of what it means to be a man of faith, strength and purity in the family.

Don’t forget the value of reading and praying with Sacred Scripture, taking on practices of fasting and using devotionals like Holy Water and religious medals.

Finally, make a regular confession and take the necessary steps to find an accountability partner.

Today, our diocese celebrates Safe Haven Sunday—an opportunity to appropriately spread awareness about the issue of pornography. Safe Haven Sunday is an annual initiative inspired by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ statement *Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, where they explain, “The use of

pornography by anyone in the home deprives the home of its role as a **safe haven** and has negative effects throughout a family's life and across generations."

The 2018 Safe Haven Sunday resource being provided today to each one of you and your families is the Covenant Eyes book, *Equipped: Smart Catholic Parenting in a Sexualized Culture*. On the front cover of *Equipped*, you will find simple instructions to join a seven-day text-to-opt in email program. These emails contain videos with easy instructions for turning your home into a safe haven. The videos explain the latest apps, Google Safe Search, YouTube Restricted Mode, social media risks, how to address online pornography, and more. Again, this is all in video format, received in a series of emails. I know this resource will be helpful to you!

In conclusion, pornography is a grave offense against God and His gifts to men and women. God created men and women "in His image" to share in His divine life. Rather than respecting and cherishing this image of God, pornography promotes a harmful and destructive anthropology. It teaches people to use others as "objects"—in this case, a means of selfish, lustful gratification. In addition, since pornography attacks sexual desire and the conjugal act itself, it wages war on marriage. Let us be strong men and women of purity, chaste and holy, and fight to preserve the garment of salvation we have received in Holy Baptism.

May God help us to do so against the snares of the pornography epidemic!

This homily was slightly modified from the message given by Reverend Father Robert T. Cooper, a Priest of the Archdiocese of New Orleans.

1. Chiara Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor, "The nature and dynamics of Internet pornography exposure for youth," *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 11 (2008): 691-693.
2. Jamie Le, "The Digital Divide: How the Online Behavior of Teens is Getting Past Parents," McAfee.com. June 2012. <http://www.mcafee.com/us/resources/misc/digital-divide-study.pdf> (accessed Dec. 9, 2013).
3. Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography In the Digital Age*, (Josh McDowell Ministry, 2016), 41.
4. "Put porn in its place," *Psychologies*, Aug 2010. <http://www.psychologies.co.uk/put-porn-in-its-place> (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).
5. Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography In the Digital Age*, (Josh McDowell Ministry, 2016), 142.
6. Gert Martin Hald, "Gender differences in pornography consumption among young heterosexual danish adults," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 35 (2006): 577-585.
7. Jonathan Dedmon, "Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces." Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/is-the-internet-bad-for-your-marriage-online-affairs-pornographic-sites-playing-greater-role-in-divorces-76826727.html> (accessed Dec. 27, 2012).