

Year 2: Homily Helps & Sample Homilies

Key Reflection Points for Safe Haven Sunday 2020

**NOTE: Covenant Eyes is available to provide Homily Helps for whichever dates you have selected to celebrate Safe Haven Sunday.*

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

February 8-9, 2020

Homily Helps

Reading 1 (Isaiah 58:7-10)

We are instructed to help others who are in need and to remove evil from our midst. Our goodness will shine, our misery will go away, and God will be with us. Children are being exposed to pornography at younger and younger ages. Both boys and girls are being affected. We have the power to protect our families by taking precautions.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 112:4-5, 6-7, 8-9)

A person of good example stands out and helps others. Light meets light and the generosity of the good person is blessed. We are to be steeped in goodness which is godliness. Parents should initiate conversations with their children in age appropriate ways about the goodness of human sexuality and the potential harms threatening it. Start the conversation.

Reading 2 (1 Corinthians 2: 1-5)

The Gospel is not about eloquence but about Jesus Crucified, a demonstration of Spirit and power. Faith is not in wisdom but in the power of God. Parents have great power in the Lord to safeguard their home. Parents can prepare themselves and be educated on how to have conversations of great importance to protect their families and homes.

Gospel (John 8-12)

We are to be salt and light in the world. Our light is to be visible and shining so that others can see our goodness and give glory to God. We must be involved in the lives of our children as good examples and openly talking about what our children are doing with their smart devices, so that nothing remains in the dark.

Homily Sample

“Do as I say, not as I do.” It’s a popular phrase, isn’t it? But is it in the Bible? Well... kind of. There is a scene in the Gospel where Jesus tells his disciples to do everything that the Pharisees and scribes tell them but that the disciples are not to act like them. So, the saying is kind of Bible-based, but more as a reproach than as words to live by.

Here is another popular phrase: “Monkey see, monkey do.” Yes, that phrase is also not in the Bible. But the principle is certainly true. People imitate other people. And children imitate their parents. Story after story of peoples’ lives indicate that they experienced all sorts of things in their family homes which they simply presumed were happening in everyone else’s’ homes, until they left home and realized that maybe nobody else was doing what their family was doing.

One child’s parents only allowed them to have a can of soda on Sunday, and that child was shocked to find out that in some other homes the kids have a can of soda every day. A child from a large family in a small home grew up presuming that of course all eight kids shared one bedroom with two beds and is amazed to find out that there are people who grew up with their own bed, or even their own room!

These examples may be simple, but the point is that each home has its own particular culture to it, and that parents are the ones who set the tone and the culture. And children will imitate what they see their parents doing. “You are the light of the world,” Jesus said to his disciples, and he says it to us today. We are the light of the world! Our light is supposed to shine before others. Notice: We are supposed to shine, not be hidden. We are supposed to be light, not to be darkness. We can rework one of those popular phrases to be in harmony with the Gospel: “Do as I say, and also as I do.”

This Sunday we mark as Safe Haven Sunday. We proclaim that our lives are supposed to be lights. Our homes, too, should be little cities set on a mountain, or as lamps set on lampstands, so that they give light to all in the house. What does that look like? Parents should be excellent examples for their children to imitate, which includes the way they behave, the way they speak, the shows they watch, the openness with which they speak about the goodness of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, their striving to obey the teachings of the Church, and so on.

Isaiah gives some examples in today's first reading: share your bread with the hungry, clothe the naked, and remove oppression, false accusation, and malicious speech. In summary, increase goodness and remove wickedness.

In a particular way, parents, you can make your homes places of light by safeguarding your family. Some tips regarding the devices in your homes include: Putting filtering and accountability software on the devices, and not allowing devices into bedrooms or other private places (for your kids and for you – be the example!), especially at night or overnight. On top of that, choose to watch and listen to clean and pure entertainment and explain why we are privileged to choose the good and wholesome things which are leading us ever more into the light.

Our house is a house that belongs to the Lord, and so we gladly form our lives to the pattern of the Gospel. And all of this redounds to the glory of God. “Your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.”

Seventh Sunday of Ordinary Time

February 22-23, 2020

Homily Helps

Reading 1 (Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18)

We are to be holy like God, by living in justice and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Parents need to be courageous and ask God for help to keep righteousness in their families. Parents can communicate the goodness of God through talking about pornography and how God has a better plan for our holiness.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 103: 1-2, 3-4, 8, 10, 12-13)

We are to bless God and his name, and remember his kindness. God forgives, heals, and redeems. He removes our transgressions as far as the East is from the West. He is a compassionate Father toward those who fear him. Make sure children know that there is a way forward for them if they have been exposed to pornography and that God is able to help them. Apologize to your children that you haven't had these conversations before that you want to get to know them better.

Reading 2 (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)

We are temples of God and are to keep our temple holy. We belong to Christ and Christ to God. If we disrespect our temples, we will have to answer to God. Families should continue to grow in holiness by frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist to strengthen themselves against temptations.

Gospel (Matthew 5:38-48)

We are to give to those who ask, to love our neighbor and our enemy, praying for our persecutors. We are to be perfect like the heavenly Father. Even though pornography is a serious danger, parents should not shame their children when they talk about

it. Pornography is the thing to be hated, not the children. A parent's tone is very important, along with establishing a relationship of safety and acceptance of the child.

Homily Sample

If we remember back to the first pages of Sacred Scripture, to the very first stories of creation, it was said, over and over again, that as God created, he called it good. Everything he made he called good. And at the end of creation, upon establishing male and female, he said that it was very good. Among all of his creation, God endowed humanity with a special reflection of his glory. As sacred scripture states, we are made in the image of God. At the beginning of this homily, may we just pause there, for a moment, and drink in these truths.

Brothers and sisters, we are made good. You and I are created good. (pause, repeat) You and I are created good. The second truth to ponder is this: you are made in the image of God. (pause, repeat) You are made in the image of God.

We were made by God, and he has made us in his own image, and we are capable of becoming like him. We are capable of imitating all of the great attributes of God. We are capable of love, of friendship, of mercy, of kindness, of righteousness, of heroic selflessness, of forgiveness.

Listen to the great message of grace: that we are capable of holiness! We are capable of becoming like God in all of these ways, to begin to imitate his very perfection! If the Bible didn't say it, would you believe it? But the Bible says it!

God never commands something that he doesn't give the grace to accomplish. You've heard it said in many ways: "If God brings you to it, God will bring you through it"; or said in another way, "Where God guides, God provides."

The words of God today are of the highest dignity and calling: "Be holy, for I, the LORD, your God, am holy"; "So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect"; "You are a temple of God"; and "the Spirit of God dwells in you."

Brothers and sisters, we were created good, in the image of God. We are capable of imitating him in his perfections, and the dignity of our calling is very high. And it's possible!

Today we are marking Safe Haven Sunday, equipping families with confidence to speak these magnificent truths within their homes, in particular with regard to the high and beautiful calling to living chastity within the home environment. We want to be holy, and we want our homes to be holy as well. Just as our bodies are temples of God, so our homes are to be holy dwellings for the Lord, we call them domestic churches. Your home is a church!

The truth is that we must be assertive in this matter, because the media, Hollywood, Netflix, and secular outlets of all sorts are not proclaiming the same message as Christ and his Church.

Social and peer pressures are making it harder, not easier, for families to believe and live the beautiful truth that our bodies are holy temples of God. It is our pastoral concern, and your Christian responsibility, to be assertive in the proclamation within your family of the truth of the human person, the goodness of creation, the beauty of chastity, the honoring of marriage and sexuality, and to clearly mark those things which fall from the high standard.

You want the best for your children and for your family. Your attendance here indicates that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is where you are looking for direction. Thanks be to God! We believe in love, we believe in truth, we believe in holiness. The Church proclaims it far and wide.

Today, we commit to bringing this ever more fully into our homes. Our Church is to be holy. Our homes are to be holy. Each of us is to be holy. “For the temple of God, which you are, is holy.”

First Sunday of Lent

February 29-March 1, 2020

Homily Helps

Reading 1 (Genesis 2: 7-9; 3: 1-7)

God breathed life into man and established him in the garden. The serpent is cunning and will tempt us to disobey God. Adam and Eve recognize their nakedness and cover themselves and then hide from God. The terrible consequences of pornography begin by first being exposed. If that is not dealt with, experimentation and curiosity will continue into riskier use, as temptations get stronger and darker. Regarding chastity, children should understand that nakedness is a private thing.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17)

We have sinned and are in need of God's mercy. God can wash and cleanse us, giving us a new heart, restoring us in relationship with him. The human body and soul are beautiful gifts from God. The body is a beautiful gift to be offered and not used.

Reading 2 (Romans 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19)

Adam allowed sin, and thus death, to enter the world. All men die because of that sin. Because of the gift of Jesus, all men can now live and be set free. The obedience of Jesus makes up for the disobedience of Adam. Even if people have been exposed to pornography, we should not for that reason give up. The power of Jesus is able to have victory.

Gospel (Matthew 4:1-11)

Jesus was led to the desert and was tempted, fasting for 40 days and 40 nights. Jesus relies on God and his Word as he conquers the temptations of the devil. The lies of pornography include suggesting that sex is casual or that people are objects to be used. The Word of God must be used to speak the truth. When we go against temptation rather than consenting, we experience true freedom.

Sample Homily

Lent has arrived! Does everyone have their Lenten practices figured out yet? If you have, great; if you haven't, great. I want to hone in on some things about Lenten practices for a moment. Our "giving up" or our "taking on," as good as they are, can sometimes become disconnected from their true purpose. The purpose of Lent is for us to return to God with repentant and converted hearts, freer to love God and neighbor with sincerity and generosity. So, our practices do well to serve that end.

For example, if I decide to sleep on the ground in penance, and am angry, tired, and quarrelsome with everyone I meet, even if this was indeed a great suffering for me, it has also become a great suffering for others! Or take the classic "giving up caffeine" approach. If a person does that, and exercises heroic charity, maybe it is a good idea. But when a person becomes snappy, with headaches and withdrawals and becomes a bear around others, it has failed to accomplish its goal.

Yes, those are obvious bad examples, but I point them out so as to point out all of our resolutions. I want to suggest resolutions that truly grasp for their goal, greater conversion of heart, greater love of God and neighbor, decrease of the self and increase of service to others, in short, a greater freedom to be who God created me to be.

Adam and Eve are singled out today as the primal example and causation of human brokenness. They had everything they needed for happiness as God had provided. Eve was tempted, and chose her own way, breaking her communion with God. Adam followed suit. Immediately, having chosen poorly, knowing that they could have done better, they clothed themselves, symbolic of their shame and new belief that they must hide themselves from each other and from God. Isolation, shame, brokenness. The original sin.

I'd like to pause here and address something which needs to come to light. Among all of the threats in our world, one stands out which we must face today. Pornography.

One aspect of the fall of Adam and Eve was that there was now a disorder established regarding their very bodies and the way they understood themselves and each other. Human sexuality was wounded along with all of the other wounds. Thoughts, desires, the way one looks at another or desires to be looked upon, interior impulses and

inclinations, powerful passions, the very nature of human love was greatly harmed. The modern phenomenon of rampant pornographic production and consumption speaks loud and clear to this wounded aspect of humanity.

And so, we mark today as Safe Haven Sunday, even as it is the beginning of Lent. It is easier to leave the conversation and the problems in the darkness, clothed in shame and isolation, but that would not be the Christian approach. In fact, Saint Paul makes it clear that even though sin and death entered the world through the fall of our first parents, even more so has the arrival of Jesus Christ ushered in an era of grace in abundance, restoring life and holiness. His sacrificial death, which we are journeying toward on Good Friday, has already brought about the opportunity for redemption, reconciliation and reunion.

So, I'd like to offer some ideas for Lenten practices in this regard. Parents, pledge to have some important conversations with your children. Do not let fear or lack of knowledge keep you from protecting your children and home. Talk about media, the use of devices, the purpose of human sexuality (in age appropriate ways). Talk to your spouse, mentor, or minister about how to bring this conversation into the light. Start a conversation. There is no need to be harsh or condemning, for these kinds of conversations are already hard enough. But the hiding, isolation, quiet, and covering must come to an end.

This Lent, among all the other practices that we undertake, we commit to safeguarding our home and family, the redemption and restoration of human sexuality and love, resisting, with Jesus, any temptations to settle or be selfish. We choose God. We live on every word which comes from his mouth. We worship and serve him alone. We live with Jesus. We have victory with Jesus.

Second Sunday of Lent

March 7-8, 2020

Homily Helps

Reading 1 (Genesis 12: 1-4A)

Abram is to go in faith and is promised a nation and a blessing. Parents might be afraid to have serious conversations with their children about pornography, experiencing fear, failure, shame, or anger, but should turn to God for his promised assistance.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 33: 4-5, 18-19, 20, 22)

The word of the Lord is filled with righteousness. God delivers those who serve him; he is our help and our shield. Parents can share with their children their own stories of growing in chastity and how the Lord has helped them over the years.

Reading 2 (2 Timothy 1: 8B-10)

We are to bear our share of hardship for the Gospel. God has given us grace to live holy lives. Jesus has destroyed death and brought life and immortality. It is more and more difficult to live virtuous lives due to social and peer pressure regarding sexuality and pornography. Both pornography and Jesus appeal to the deepest longings of our hearts. Pornography offers us bondage. Jesus offers freedom.

Gospel (Matthew 17: 1-9)

Jesus is transfigured, and the Father declares that he is the beloved son and that we are supposed to listen to him. Listening to God and listening to your children is very important, especially with regard to their sexuality. It's ok to allow silence when speaking with your child. Having the conversation is not about porn, it's about listening and getting to know your child.

Sample Homily

We are on our way to Heaven. We must always remember the goal of life. We are on our way to Heaven. The Transfiguration of Jesus is the sneak peak of his future and ours— the glorification of our bodies in Heaven forever. This is our future!

This weekend we want to address a major stumbling block to this heavenly goal: the stumbling block of pornography. We are marking this as Safe Haven Sunday, a time to address this ever-increasing reality of our day.

Pornography is easy to access. In fact, even for a person who isn't looking for it, it will often come across in ads, commercials, videos, pictures, search strings, etc. The experts tell us that exposure to pornography is not a matter of if but of when. That is why we want to address and educate families, so that they may have help to keep their homes and families safe.

One might think that it's not actually that big of a problem to see some pictures or videos from time to time, as long as a person knows not to engage it and redirect their attention to something else. Well, if that was the case, we wouldn't need to address it.

The research indicates that seeing pornography leads to curiosity and experimentation for many. That leads to further use for sexual gratification, which can lead to riskier use, and even to dependence and addiction.

Speaking about this today isn't meant to be some form of fear or shame tactic, but rather to invite a continued conversation and serious effort to protect our families, children, and homes from this pervasive reality.

Saint Paul tells the church today to “bear your share of hardship for the gospel with the strength that comes from God.” We have been redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus, we have been sanctified by the Spirit of the Father, and our goal is Heaven. Any and all sin stands as a threat to us arriving at our goal. Among other sins, pornography stands as a threat to diminish one's innocence, challenge one's holiness, confuse one's relationships, and more.

Every time we frequent the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist, we are allowing Jesus into our lives more fully—he “who destroyed

death and brought life and immortality to life through the gospel.” As we allow him into our lives, we must ask him to protect and deliver us from all sin. As we allow him into our homes, it is high time to beg Jesus to protect and deliver our families, children, homes, devices, relationships, in summary all things... to beg Jesus to protect and deliver us from pornography and any other affront to the dignity and beauty of the human person, human sexuality, and relationships.

Our purposes today are not to say that pornography is the only threat on our way to Heaven, but it has become a most serious threat. We want to be able to speak about it here at church, so that you are able to continue speaking about it with your spouses and with your families. The point is not simply to talk about pornography, but to talk about relationships, holiness, the goodness of the human person, the goodness of human sexuality in its privileged place of marriage, and to remove anything which threatens to cheapen or destroy that goodness.

We are on our way to Heaven. We are meant to be transfigured into glory with Jesus. Today we recommit to seeking the goal of Heaven, the honoring of our bodies and the human person, and the removal of anything which threatens it. May the Cross of Jesus save us. Amen.

Fourth Sunday of Lent

March 21-22, 2020

Homily Helps

Reading 1 (1 Samuel 16:1B, 6-7, 10-13A)

Man looks at the appearance of others, but the Lord looks into the heart. David was chosen, anointed, and the Spirit rushed upon him. The human person has great dignity in the image of God, but pornography invites us to only see the outer person rather than the full person. Screens cheapen the goodness of sex, making it seem that we are to be selfish rather than giving, looking at images rather than beholding the deeper person.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 23: 1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6)

The Lord, who is our shepherd, gives us pasture, water, and refreshment to our souls. He directs us and keeps us safe. We are protected and provided for in the house of the Lord. Our homes are to be safe havens where we proactively filter what comes in and goes out, which includes TVs, smartphones, and other internet-enabled devices.

Reading 2 (Ephesians 5:8-14)

We were once in darkness but now are light in the Lord and are to live in the light. We are to learn what is pleasing to the Lord and to avoid the fruitless works of darkness, even to expose them. Pornography is easier to access now more than ever before due to the internet. Thus, children are exposed to it even without trying. We must respond by preventing and removing these works of darkness from our devices.

Gospel (John 9: 1-41)

Jesus heals the blind man to make visible the works of God. Jesus is the light of the world, and the man who can now see gives testimony of what Jesus has done. The Pharisees do not receive the work of Jesus as from God. It is important to have conversations with our children where they can share what they experience. Let them

share and do not reject them or react strongly. Let them share about their interests, temptations, enjoyment, so that you can accept them and help them. God loves us right where we are and too much to leave us there.

Sample Homily

“Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.” The Lord shares this insight with Samuel at the time of the election of David as king. Man sees the appearance. The Lord looks into the heart. This is a beautiful and merciful truth to ponder. How many of us spend an incredible amount of time and energy trying to make our appearance better? Clothes, jewelry, cosmetics, cars, the places we frequent. Social media is filled with people putting their best life on display, the life they want people to see. This is such a strong desire of the human person, to be viewed as beautiful, wonderful, acceptable, loved, to be seen as enough, etc.

Priests hear it all the time. Counselors and therapists hear it all the time. The desire—the insatiable desire to be the focus of another’s gaze—truly seems insatiable, unquenchable, ever-present, and unceasing.

But the Lord looks into the heart. The heart is symbolic of the center of the human person, the very core of our being. The Lord looks there. So, as we are frenetically laboring for people to see our worth and our beauty, looking for that gaze which brings our hearts to rest, we often miss the gaze, because the gaze is already within us, but we are outside of us.

Saint Augustine once wrote of this reality in these words: “See, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you.”

It’s true, isn’t it? It’s ok to admit it. The Lord will not be harsh or quick to harm you. In fact, the Lord is merciful and kind.

Today we mark as Safe Haven Sunday. This is an opportunity to speak about the truth of the human person, in particular the dignity of the human person, the body, human sexuality, and the threats against it.

In a very particular way, I want to speak about the lies and falsehoods presented by pornography. It can be said that both Jesus and pornography appeal to the deepest longings of our hearts. That may seem crazy, but it's what we have already said—the human person longs to be accepted and will often look to the outer things rather than to the inner places of love and the heart.

So, pornography stands as a powerful substitute, a false but luring option, an incredibly potent imitation, but is in fact a complete mockery of the love and gaze we each are seeking. In it, we find selfishness instead of giving, we find an image but not the whole person, we find abuse rather than nourishment, and instead of the honor we deserve, dishonor at every turn.

But we are being called up from that. Saint Paul writes that “you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light, for light produces every kind of goodness and righteousness and truth.” So, “take no part in the fruitless works of darkness.”

Dear brothers and sister, today we are invited to return to the place of the gaze which satisfies. To have the eyes of our hearts meet the eyes of the Lord. To make a pledge to not settle for imitations of love in any of its forms, but that we see and that we are seen in our fullness, with that gaze which sees the heart.