

Lent 5 Sunday - C (Fr Mark Starr)

Ezekiel 37:12–14

Psalms 130:1–8

Romans 8:8–11

Gospel John 11:1–45

Note: Safe Haven Sunday (Per Archdiocese of Atlanta)

- I will try to post my notes up on our web-site and I hope to have time for questions at the end of this talk.

King David (example of sin AND repentance):

We read in the book of 2 Samuel that one evening David was walking on the roof of the king's house and he sees a woman bathing in the next house. He inquired of her and then had her come to the king's house where he lay with her and she became with child. The king of Israel commits adultery when the other men had gone off to war.

We glean two points in the narrative: 1) the woman was bathing and in full view of the king, she was on display and 2) the king desired to have her because of her beauty – lust settled in. Eventually one sin led to another and David had Uriah, he had her husband put in the front of the battle lines where he was killed – the king committed murder to cover his sin. That is an example of the depravity to where human sexual lust can lead when one allows the sensual to overtake mastery of mind and body.

Save Haven Sunday:

This Sunday, the Archdiocese of Atlanta, as well as many other dioceses across the United States have declared “Save Haven Sunday.” The Church, rightfully so, and her pastors, are concerned with the rising issue of pornography, in particular internet and electronic pornography. Let me say as a pastor and priest, it is an epidemic, touching every demographic of society, from early teens to adults; regardless of race or ethnicity – it is rampant in society; it knows no boundaries, rich and poor, young and old, male and female. In the past this has been mainly a male issue. Today, sadly a growing number of women are becoming addicted or are addicted to pornography. We are here as a Christian family to combat this grave evil **AND** to provide support for those who find themselves in its evil clutches.

The Beauty and Dignity of the Person:

We read in Genesis that God created male and female in his image (Gen 1), the term is Imago Dei – the image of God. And we read in the creation narrative that God saw all that he made, and it was good (Gen 1). The Psalmist writes: “I praise you because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works” (Psalm 139). God created man and woman to be fruitful and multiply and to have beauty in companionship and giving of themselves in fruitful love. And yet, because of their own desires, in the very first generation of humanity, sin enters within. That

original sin brings harm to the relationship between the man and the woman – the man blamed his companion – and to all successive generations. Man and woman are now threatened by concupiscence, that is the draw to sin, which includes the sin of lust.

Bringing Light to the Sin:

We know the end of the story with King David. His sin was brought into the light by the prophet Samuel. Psalm 51, often attributed to King David, says: “I know my transgressions, my sin is always before me.” And he cries out: “Have mercy on me, God in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgression.” David was forgiven for his sin and it is his lineage that brought forth the king of the Jews, Jesus, Jesus, Son of David.

Pornography is an Offense Against Human Dignity:

Pornography degrades the private act of intimacy that belongs solely to a man and a woman within the bonds of matrimony. It degrades the dignity of those who allow themselves to be viewed lustfully and to those who view it, distorting the image of true love. Many may think pornography is only about me in the privacy of my room or home. But pornography is linked to a host of other sins and it affects our **entire** community. Pornography is extremely addictive. Studies have shown the same brain wave patterns are observed when one is viewing pornography as when one is using addictive drugs. Let me state

emphatically, from many years of ministerial experience, I believe pornography is the greatest addiction in society today, even greater than opioid addiction.

ESPECIALLY AT YOUNG AGES WHEN THE BRAIN IS STILL DEVELOPING: IT IS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO CLOSE THE BOX AGAIN.

Pornography's Link to Other Sins:

- **Masturbation:** the use of one's own body for self-pleasure: One's own self-worth and dignity are degraded, shame, embarrassment and lack of self-mastery over other areas of life.
- **Other addictions:** alcohol or drug addictions/abuse
- **Sexual activity outside of marriage:** adultery, fornication particularly at extremely young ages and sexual promiscuity (multiple partners)
- Sexual activity can lead to **Sexually Transmitted Infections**
- **Degradation of the value of the goodness and life of others** for one's own pleasure: loss of the gift of self, one to another in the conjugal act (whether inside or outside of marriage)
- **Family:** Leads to breakdown of family and divorce
- **Unexpected pregnancy AND Abortion**
- **Domestic violence**
- **Child pornography** – a horrible sin against minors.

- **Human Sex trafficking:** Atlanta is the capital for sex trafficking in the country – not something for which we should be proud. Child sex-trafficking is almost always a death sentence – even if one were to be pulled from the sex trafficking arena, it is virtually impossible to ever restore one back to a “normal” life
- **Affecting even Church Hierarchy:** I would be remiss if I did not say that sadly, as we have seen in the past year in this country, sexual promiscuity and associated cover-ups have infiltrated those who are called to be pastors and those in Church authority. For those sins, on behalf of the Church, I am sorry, and we repent. You have every right to expect those charged with being shepherds of souls live lives of purity. No one is perfect, but we expect our pastors and bishops to practice that which is preached at the altar.

Pornography Industry:

The pornography industry is a multi-billion dollar-a-year industry in this country. Estimates range from \$5 billion to \$15 billion per year (some estimates are as high as \$97 Billion). The pornography industry wants to get people addicted. Once the addiction cycle starts there is a hunger for more and the desires for more violence grows, because the hunger is never satisfied – talk to anyone who has ever been addicted to anything (drugs, alcohol, food,

even exercise). The pornography industry does NOT care about the individual; it is all about money.

Examples I have personally witnessed:

- I was involved in an intervention once with a married man who was confronted with his addiction to pornography and tried to justify its use to those of us who intervened on behalf of his wife and the Christian community. He said, "I am only looking at the beauty of nature." He refused to take heed and ultimately his family was broken. His wife divorced him, and he left his family and children and cut off all contact with his own family.
- I know of another man, whom I have discipled for over fourteen years. He became addicted to various sexual activity, including pornography. He accumulated over \$20k in credit card debt from his addiction. He paid that off with an inheritance he received. And sadly, a couple years later he had run his sexual addiction debt up to another \$20k on his credit cards. Fortunately, today he is on the back end of his addiction achieving sobriety – however think for a moment: He accumulated over \$40k in debt because of sexual addiction. Fr. Mark could buy a nice car with that much – better than his Toyota Corolla. And just within the last

couple years he is in a state of recovery and sobriety – fourteen years to break free from the evil clutches of his addiction!

Wash me from my sin:

- **No Condemnation:** I am not here to condemn anyone who struggles with this issue. This talk is intended to be restorative, not punitive. The Church is not here to condemn or embarrass anybody. We are here to help. The Lord extends the hand of mercy to all who seek him. Pope Francis reminds us the Church is to be a field hospital to take in the hurting, wounded and broken.
- **Steps to recovery:** Do not live in despair and self-loathing but bring it into the light with someone you trust.
 - **Take Responsibility:** Take responsibility and make a firm commitment to change behavior – to break the addictive cycle. Use the sacrament of reconciliation to receive grace – even if you have to confess over and over again – the struggle will grow easier.
 - **Abstain from stimuli:** There must be a resolve to begin to move towards a life of chastity.
 - **Parents:** If you struggle, please get help so that this does not pass down to children

- **Children:** I know you are embarrassed but do not try to hide it. Feel free to talk about this with your priest and your parents. Parents, I plead with you, do NOT judge your children if they come to you with their problem. Show compassion and care and assure them of your love and desire to walk through this with them as a team and a family.
- **Families:**
 - As families, may we work together to bring peace and take the steps necessary to eradicate this from our households:
 - Parents: We have purchased the “Equipped” booklet for every household, produced by Covenant Eyes. Take one with you and walk through the steps as a family
 - Do not allow your children to use their electronics behind closed doors – sorry that is the reality
 - Be open with your children about this issue. Do not shame them if they come forward admitting a problem – surround them with love and assure your support.
 - Limit cable television selections/availability
 - Internet filtering: There are several filtering programs available. One of them (and this is not an endorsement of any

one program) is the Covenant Eyes program, which is a monitoring service with accountability partners (we were required to have this on our computers in the seminary).

- Use our “Text to Join” campaign (slide) – we have handouts after Mass

- Young People

- Finally, to our young people, I am committed to walking with you in steps to sexual purity.
- Please speak with your parents if you are experiencing a problem – I promise you they do not want to see you become addicted to this terrible problem. Do not tell yourself “It is alright, I will outgrow it.” You will not – I can attest to many whom I work with, it does not go away on its own accord.
- Please speak with me, I am here to help you and not condemn you. I will keep our conversations in confidence. But please get it out and let’s work on it together.
- If we need to start support groups or prayer groups, I am open to do whatever we can so that you will grow into healthy sexuality.

- **Address one issue regarding SSA from our PSR Classes**

- **Questions**