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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC

# ARCHDIOCESE OF ATLANTA



## **Archbishop Gregory Homily for Safe Haven Sunday – April 7, 2019**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

A blessed Lent to all of you. Thank you for allowing me a few moments to speak to you today about a challenge that affects all of us, including the young and innocent of our families and parishes.

As parents and those responsible for our young people, we know the various challenges that come from the availability and use of indecent and obscene material. It is pervasive online and on our mobile devices. Through first exposure, even if innocent, curiosity can lead to repeated and habitual use. It sadly then becomes the way our children are “educated”—or rather misled—about love and the human body.

The indecent and obscene material that we find online and elsewhere degrades and reduces persons to objects of use and distorts the true meaning of human love in God’s plan. Such material takes the beauty of the human body and person, and the beauty of the love of husband and wife, and twists and warps them into gross display.

Staggeringly, the average age of first exposure is between 9-11 years of age, with many instances even younger.

As a response and proactive step, today as an archdiocese we are observing Safe Haven Sunday. Safe Haven Sunday is an annual initiative inspired by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ statement *Create in Me a Clean Heart*, which states, “The use of [inappropriate content] 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.”

Parenting has never been easy, and it is only getting tougher. Parents, grandparents, and caregivers—thank you for all you do! You have my full support and prayers for your most vital vocation. Today, I encourage all of us to take the next step.

Certainly in our own lives we must treat this issue with serious resolve. But we must also take measures to control and eliminate the entry points for this material into our homes. Three practical points can be very helpful for parents and caregivers: first, protect your devices from dangerous content; second,

keep devices out of children's bedrooms; and third, talk to your children about this issue in age-appropriate ways.

As your spiritual father, allow me to set the tone for our response to this challenging area by saying that in the spiritual family of this archdiocese, no one is permitted to shame anyone else about this struggle. All who struggle need to know they are loved, supported, and called to healthy and holy human relationships. Jesus is our example here. To the woman caught in adultery who easily could have been shamed, our Lord says, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again" (John 8:11). Therefore, in this archdiocese, let us follow Jesus' example. As I open this topic for conversation, I am asking you to continue it in your home and with your family. Opening this conversation can allow for further conversations, formation, and healing to take place.

Resources will be shared after Mass that can help you as parents to create a safe haven within your home. In particular, I encourage all parents to join a seven-day text-to-opt-in program. These texts 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 explicit content, and more. Again, this is all in video format, received in a series of texts, at no cost to you. I hope this information will be helpful to you!

Lent is a time to grow closer to our Lord Jesus, to enter more deeply into a relationship with Him through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Jesus is our freedom and our light. No darkness is so great as to be out of reach of the light of Christ. Brothers and sisters, may we allow the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ to give us joy and hope in the face of whatever challenges we face. Jesus has already conquered sin, death, and the devil. Let us trust in Him!

May we all live in the freedom and light of our Lord Jesus and strive for His purity in our lives, homes, and communities. Amen.

May God bless you!