

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday B February 12, 2012 – Fr. Gerald Haemmerle

I have always taken the responsibility of preaching very seriously. I always give sufficient time to prepare a homily. I was away this week, my annual ski trip, and was due back on Friday evening, but because of travel difficulties, I got in late last evening, switched masses with Fr. Tim, and here I am. I could have pulled out an old homily and given it, but I do not like to do that. Or I could tell a few stories about the trip, and make a little effort to tie them in with the readings of today. I chose to do that.

My first story, why I was a day late getting back. We were at Steamboat Springs, Colorado, myself and two priest friends. We got to the airport by 11:00 for our 1:00 flight on Friday. We stood in line to get our boarding passes, finally got on the plane, and sat for an hour. Finally the pilot announced that we weren't going anywhere, the window of the plane had cracked, and one had to be flown in from Salt Lake City. Finally they let us disembark from the plane, and we had to get in line to be issued vouchers for overnight lodgings, meals, plane for the next day, etc. After that, we had to get into another line to get the transportation to our lodging for the night. It seemed that we were standing in line waiting all day. Finally there were the last nine people, including me, heading back to Steamboat for the Holiday Inn. Guess what? As we approached, we got word that there was no room in the inn. They searched and finally found the last rooms at the Hampton Inn. Which of course has no restaurant. The next morning we were picked up at 5:30 and headed back to the airport.

The amazing thing were all the people. No one got angry. Everyone was anxious to get home, but everyone was calm, patient, and friendly. People allowed the mother with the infant to go ahead. There was even laughter. The next morning we greeted every one as long lost friends.

When we read the newspaper, listen to radio talk shows, watch T. V. we sometimes think the worst of people. I found the people in that airport to be wonderful people. In fact, most people are good people. We just sometimes fail to see that, and appreciate that.

The second story is about skiing. I began skiing about 50 years ago. You start on the beginner slops, they are marked by green signs. You advance to the intermediate slops, they are marked by a blue sign. If you are good, you move to the expert slops, marked by a black sign. For years I have been an intermediate skier who does some expert slops, not always well.

As you get older, you get pickier over the conditions you want on the slops. A perfect day is when the snow is good, groomed, the sky is blue and the sun is out. On the first three ski days we had blue sky, sun, and groomed trails, but the snow was actually getting a little icy in some places. We hoped for some new snow. We got eight inches, a little too much for aging and tiring legs. My ski buddies stopped after one run. I continued for a while.

Every year I try to make my last run a really good one, always thinking it might be my last one. I go up high on the mountain, and ski some difficult runs in. This year I did not go very high, and when I go there, I had three choices, a black run, a blue run, or a green run. I chose the green one, the beginner run, it even said on the sign that it was the way to the ski school. I have come full circle.

I wonder if this is not a metaphor for life, and also our spiritual life. We start as beginners, we advance to the intermediate stages in life, we might even become experts in some things, but as we grow older we begin to return to the beginner stage again. And that is not all bad. We become more childlike. We begin to trust more in God.

Now tying that into our readings is a stretch. Jesus cures the leper, showing his power and his compassion. There is another memorable story of lepers, ten of them. Jesus cures them, but only one returns to thank Him. Gratitude. How grateful and thankful we should be for all we have. I am thankful for the people I shared a difficult day with at the airport. I am grateful for the opportunity to ski. I am grateful to be back here, celebrating mass which is all about giving thanks to God.