

6th Sunday of the Year A February 13, 2011

Many people have complained about the snow this year, I have been one of them. I have just returned from Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and they have had 300 inches of snow this year, the last two and a half feet why I was there. Too much some days to even go out, but also some sunny and glorious days. I keep trying to prove to myself that I can do the things I used to do, this year I was more successful than last year, I just can't do it as long as in the past.

Skiing trips also mean reading time, and I want to mention two books that I read. I know I dislike the Pittsburg Steelers too much, and I am trying to change that. So I read the book, Dan Rooney, My 75 years with the Pittsburg Steelers. He and his family have owned and run the team all those years. What a good man, a Catholic and proud of his faith, a happily married man with nine children. It brought back many memories of the NFL, and I can only hope the Browns can some day have such stability.

The book I began on the way home was John Grisham's latest novel, The Confession. In the opening chapter, an ex-convict comes into the office of a Lutheran church and asks to see the minister. He had heard his sermon the previous Sunday on Forgiveness, and he wanted to talk to the minister. As he does talk to him he wonders if God can really forgive him for he has

done some horrible things in his life. What he really needs is to confess them to the minister. The real sin is that he had killed someone, and an innocent man charged with that crime will be executed that week. The story continues, but the point that struck me was that regardless of our faith, we need to confess and we need forgiveness.

I arrived home this morning at 1:30 am, but I got up early to go to the funeral mass of Fr. Paul Rehling at St. Williams in Cincinnati. It was packed, four bishops, about 70 priests and a church full of laity. He had been a priest for 55 years and touched many lives. I had to go to that funeral for he touched my life very much, for he has been my confessor for the past 30 years. I grew up as many Catholics, going to Confession every other week, and that habit or tradition continued until I was ordained. And then the tradition changed for many of us, instead of every other week it was every once in a while at best. I finally realized that I was missing something, and I started to go to Fr. Paul two or three times a year, during Advent and Lent and before or after a retreat. It has been a great blessing. It has enabled me to take a good look at myself, helped me to realize my sinfulness, helped me look at not only how I am living or not living up to my obligations, but also how much I love God and neighbor, the deeper part of the commandments.

This afternoon I heard the confessions of many eighth graders making a retreat in preparation for their confirmation this spring. I think they were sincere and good confessions. But as I finished, the thought struck me that for many of them, it might be their last confession for many years, such is our custom today. That is very sad, for so many are missing a wonderful gift from God.

Our readings today deals with the commandments. In the first reading we read “If you choose you can keep the commandments, they will save you; if you trust in God, you too shall live.” At the Penance service at today’s retreat, for the examination of conscience, each of the commandments were read, and some practical examples were given showing how we might fail. In the gospel Jesus said that he came not to abolish the commandments but to fulfill them. And he gave examples. Not only must we not kill, but we must not be angry at another. Not only must we not commit adultery, but we must love and be faithful to our spouse. You see, we could obey the letter of the law, we could go to mass and not take God’s name in vain, but not really love God as we should, we could not commitment adultery, but fail to really love our spouse. That is why Jesus reduces all the commandment to two, love of God and love of neighbor. That is not being mushy, but that is getting to the heart of the commandments. And that is more difficult We all fall short on those two commandments, and

that is why we still need confession, or the sacrament of reconciliation.

Lent will soon be here, a time for reconciliation. There will be several penance services here and in neighboring parishes, all the children will have the opportunity to attend one. We are all children of God, in need of confessing and in need of forgiveness. God is always there, ready to offer his loving forgiveness.