Homily by Rev. Robert Schramm, OSFS
Advent Reconciliation Liturgy – 2016

We Catholics talk a lot about sin.
We do it at the beginning of each Mass.
We do it each time we say the Lord’s Prayer.
We come together like this from time to time
to acknowledge that we are, all of us, sinners.

So what is sin?
Another good word for sin may be “slavery.”
Sin is being a slave to something less than your best self.
Another word for slavery is un-freedom.

I do the very things I don’t want to do
and I don’t do the things I need to be doing in order to be at peace.
I am less than free; I am enslaved.

So, we just heard the words that begin a chapter in St. Luke’s Gospel,
that is, Jesus’ perspective on how God looks at our sinning.
Jesus tells three memorable stories:
one about a shepherd who had a hundred sheep and one was lost;
another about a woman who had 10 coins and lost one of them;
and a third about a prodigal father and his wayward young son.

That chapter begins with the narrator telling us that Jesus
Is doing his thing again that just drives the Pharisees and scribes nuts.
They complain, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”
YUCK!

Jesus comes to lead us to freedom.
That freedom begins with a word of forgiveness.
Jesus is God’s forgiveness in the flesh.

We are not here this afternoon to come begging for forgiveness
from some kind of stingy God.
God’s forgiveness, Jesus assures us, is 70-times-seven-fold.

And I’m are not here as the dispensers of God’s forgiveness.
I don’t hold the golden key to that forgiveness.
Each of us holds the golden key to God’s forgiveness. It is our FAITH, our trust that God means what God says about forgiveness.

We are here right now primarily for two reasons – at least as I see it: first, we gather here to celebrate, to rejoice in, God’s forgiveness and therefore to deepen our trust in that forgiveness. Second, we are here to commit ourselves in the presence of one another and really in the presence of the whole Church to do better at keeping God’s commandments – both of them.

The prophet, Isaiah, has some wonderfully reassuring words for us as we gather here, words we heard sung in this very room a couple weeks ago:
“Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. The rugged land shall be made a plain and the rough country, a broad valley, for the mouth of God has spoken.”

We are here this afternoon to recommit ourselves to an ever-deepening love of one another as Christ loves us. That is only possible if we entrust ourselves once again to that Isaiahian vision:
“Like a shepherd he feeds his flock: in his arms he gathers the lambs, carrying them in his bosom, and leading the ewes with care.”