We are all here today because we want forgiveness. Christ’s Advent makes forgiveness possible, which the church compassionately ministers in this Sacrament. Fr. Robert Barron’s tells a story in his book: “The strangest Way”, (NY: Orbis, 2002, p. 110). It goes like this. An Amish family (father, mother, and teenaged son) were riding along in their horse-drawn buggy. A car came up behind them filled with rowdy and impatient young people. Annoyed at the slow-moving buggy, they honked the horn and waved fists in aggravation. Finally they rushed around the Amish in a swirl of dust. As they passed, one of the young men hurled a stone at the horse – intending just to harass the family. But the stone missed its mark and hit the Amish boy in the head, killing him instantly. Of course, the community was outraged and the young killer came to trial for manslaughter. To everyone’s utter amazement, the Amish parents came to the trial and, although still crippled with grief, they actually testified on behalf of the stone-thrower and asked for mercy for him. Despite this more than gracious testimony, the young man was found guilty and sent to prison. Now, every month, the Amish
Mom and Dad come to the jail and visit their son’s slayer – comforting him, encouraging him, seeking to bring him back eventually into the community. Fr. Barron concludes: “That is forgiveness.”

Of course we also just heard another story about how you and I need to build our homes on rock. What does it mean to embrace the mercy of God as the rock of our faith?

In the Lord’s Prayer, we say “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” People like the Amish live out this prayer. They show us what forgiveness truly is. It is not some wimpy “I will forgive but I can’t forget.” It is not some namby-pamby half-hearted resolution to forgive. The Amish radiated pardon from the depths of their hearts. And we are called to do the same today as we humbly confess our sins and receive absolution. God’s forgiveness is whole-hearted. He holds nothing back. In fact, he delivered himself up in his Son Jesus Christ to take away our sins; and this Christ excused us too in his words from the cross: “Father, forgive them; they do not know
what they are doing” (Luke, 23:34). The Amish parents had the graced insight that that boy did not really want to kill their son. The way of our forgiveness, the crucifixion, was not namby-pamby. And it all began at Christmas when a special child was born into poverty in a seemingly God-forsaken part of the world.

So I challenge us to make this a time when we truly weave forgiveness into the fabric of our lives by God’s grace – like the Amish have. When we receive pardon today, let’s honor this gift by truly offering the same gift to others.

God always takes the initiative. If we really treasure the gift of mercy we will receive today, we will be serious about forgiving others. Christ is forgiveness and we are Christ. The Amish teach us this. Like all of Christianity, there is a paradox here. The crucifixion of being a forgiving person is the only road to happiness – here and hereafter.