May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

Every year at this time, the Second Sunday of Advent, the Church asks us to hear John the Baptist. John’s message interrupts the circumstances of our life. His message disrupts the patterns and habits of our life within our family, social circumstances or consumer activities. John’s messa­ge is always a message of hope and promise. The word of God comes in every time, place, and circumstance offering a new way, a new life, a new world. John points to that coming by proclaiming a baptism of repentance, echoing the prophet Isaiah: “*Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth” (Luke 3:4-5).*

With prophetic insight these words describe our life. Each of us could name the ups and downs, the highs and lows, the mountains and valleys of our life. We could recount the crooked paths on which we got lost and the rough ways on which we stumbled and fell. With prophetic foresight these words describe the possibilities that our life and world can be different – the low places are filled, the high places are made low, the crooked is made straight, and the rough is made smooth. These words describe both what is and what might be. Repentance is the movement from what is to what might be.

Repentance is about getting our life turned around and heading in a new direction. It means a change of mind and heart. The U-turn of repentance involves both a turning away from something and a turning toward something else.

Repentance begins with examining our lives and discovering the patterns and habits of seeing, thinking, speaking, acting, relating, and living as if God were not present and active. They are patterns that blind us to who God, our neighbor, and we really are. These patterns and habits distort reality, impoverishing our relationships and ultimately destroying love. They are things like anger, pride, fear, greed, the need for approval, perfectionism, being judgmental, gossip, the need to control or be right, individualism, busyness, sorrow, self-hatred, and despair.

We must then turn away from these old ways of being… in order that we might create new patterns and habits of seeing, thinking, speaking, acting, relating, and living that recognize the divine presence in all. We turn our gaze back to God, reclaiming the life that is and always has been our true life. Things like love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, justice, peace, wisdom, patience, beauty, creativity. In so doing we are conforming ourselves to the image and likeness of God in which we were created. We are preparing the way of the Lord.

Repentance becomes a way of life, a way of being. To be sure, the way to Christmas is through St. John the Baptist, the wilderness, and repentance. But repentance does not end with Christmas. It ends with the fulfillment of a promise: *and all flesh shall see the salvation of God (Luke 3:6).* Amen.