

My Brothers and Sisters,

Mark is the only Gospel that opens with John the Baptist. From Luke's Gospel, we know that John the Baptist's birth was miraculous. His mother Elizabeth was overage and sterile. All the miraculous births in the Old Testament had two things in common. People saw them as signs of God's power and favor, and the child born always had a unique role to play in salvation history.

When Elizabeth gave birth to John, Luke's Gospel tells us, "*Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her*" [1:58]. More importantly, John played a unique role in salvation history. First, he was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the first prophet of the New Testament. Therefore, he was the bridge between the Old and New Testaments. He not only prophesied Jesus' coming; he announced his coming.

John is also called the precursor. The word *precursor* comes from the Latin *prae + currere*, which means to *run before*. According to Mark's Gospel, John the Baptist fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah in today's first reading: "*Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'*" He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah by appearing in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Likewise, Jesus would begin his public ministry calling for repentance: "*'This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel'*" [Mk. 1:15].

The Greek word for repentance or conversion is *metanoia*. To understand what John the Baptist and Jesus were proclaiming, we have to understand conversion or repentance as they did. The word *metanoia* implies a radical change. It represents a complete turn around in one's life, a change of direction, for example, from selfishness and sin to love and goodness, from self to others and God. This radical conversion to which John the Baptist calls us is a lifelong process. However, in today's second reading, Peter offers us a message of hope: "*The Lord ...is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*"

However, the root of *metanoia* suggests that *metanoia* represents a change in the way we see or a new way of seeing. In other words, if we undergo conversion or repentance as John and Jesus used those words, we are going to see all of our relationships in a new way. For example, we will see God as a loving father and ourselves as his beloved sons and daughters. We will see others as brothers and sisters in Christ or brothers and sisters in the human family. We will see the world and our bodies as gifts to be cherished. We will see ourselves as created in the image and likeness of God, as temples of the Holy Spirit, but also as people who sin and need forgiveness.

My brothers and sisters, this new way of seeing will lead us to live in new ways. We will love as Christ loved; we will love God first and our neighbor as ourselves; we will treat others as we want to be treated and not treat others as we would not want to be treated. We will make our own and live the attitudes and values of God and Christ, working for peace and justice for all people. We will strive to be the-best-version-of-ourselves. We will recognize and respond to God's call in our lives to serve him by serving others, especially those in need. We will respect and cherish all human life from conception to natural death. We will be joyful, optimistic, and life-giving; in other words, we will be people of hope. We will entrust our lives and our futures to God. We will celebrate our faith sacramentally. We will commit ourselves to membership and mission in the Church for the sake of the kingdom of God in history.