“Repent!”
Second Sunday Of Advent 2016

Reflection By: Deacon Paul Hursh

“Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!” (Matthew 3:1) Last week our scriptures called us to be alert and awake in preparation for the coming of the Son of God. This week, as we have become more aware and mindful, we realize that there is a need to reform our lives. To reform, that is to change the very shape of our existence and to reorient our lives towards God. Aircraft pilots call this a course correction; they realize that only a few degrees error in direction can mean missing their intended destination by more than 100 miles in a coast-to-coast flight.

In flying an airplane, there are many things that can put one off course – strong winds, the pilot’s inattention or distraction, or bad weather. Worse yet is not having a clear understanding of the intended destination. During wartime, military aircrews are aware of, and train for, electronic counter measures. The enemy will, with various means, attempt to confuse aircraft navigation equipment and lure aircrews off course and into traps. We face similar challenges as we chart our course in life here on Earth in the hopes of reaching the kingdom of God.

As young adults we start out with high ideals and believe we can chart a clear course to what we think will lead to success and a happy ending. We leave home and take off, and once at cruising speed, we may be tempted to just turn on the autopilot and enjoy the ride. With sophisticated aircraft navigation equipment this might work in a modern airliner, but it doesn’t work that way with our lives. There will always be things in life that will distract us, or divert even our best efforts. Perhaps a failed relationship, the loss of a job, or the death of a spouse
will call for a serious course correction. A poor choice of friends, sex, or alcohol; may even ground us. Any of these can put us way off course if not put us in a deadly tailspin.

The interesting thing about all these painful travails is that any one of them can be the very thing that awakens us, like John the Baptist, with a harsh call for repentance. Sometimes, when I look back at some of the things I would rather forget. I see now how God uses even the unpleasant and dangerous things in my life to show me my need for His grace and mercy. In the big picture, the things that I had judged to be the worst that could happen to me, is what was needed to awaken me. It awakened me to the forgiveness and mercy that only a loving parent could give. And besides all this, it was humbling to me and showed me that I cannot do it on my own. This gave me both a deep love for this God of second chances and instilled in me a compassion for others who have not been as fortunate as I. There is a part of me that wants to blame my past failures on others and attributes my successes to me alone. I see now that this is not true. In truth I can do nothing without the grace of God. (John15:5) But, on the other hand, I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

The tempter will try to divert me from my course, like enemy electronic counter measures, by the promise of easy success, illicit pleasures, and willful power. It is at these time that I need to remind myself that I don’t have to prove my worth to anyone, because I have a merciful and loving Father. …but when I do fall (and we all do), I need to ask the Father for forgiveness. He has sent his Son to point the way, so I can find the way back to the path of life. I also need to be gentle and to forgive myself for not being perfect, because if I can’t love myself enough to forgive me, I probably will not be willing to forgive others when I am wronged or offended. Conversely, if I can forgive myself, I will probably be compassionate enough to forgive others. Remember, that, with God as your Co-Pilot your destination is assured.