

It has been almost a year since this mysterious and terrible virus descended like a flood covering the earth, causing us to build an ark of safety, separated from those we love and with whom we had gathered for so long to pray. Huddled together as family, or alone, the sickness invaded the earth, our homes and our church, like raging flood waters claiming too many lives, disrupting so much we came to accept as ordinary; family and friends have become ill, many still in danger, some we know have died.

The world has been flooded with sickness, and all the horror it has brought. Like Noah we have built an ark for safety; in the new chaos we longed for healing, and an end to the devastating flood of lives disrupted by sickness and fear. Could we have ever imagined such life changing tragedy as we gathered one year ago on the First Sunday of Lent?

But now, on this 2021 First Lenten Sunday, one year later, we are given a sign, a bow in the sky, filled with hope – the promise of ordinary life to be restored, the “holy communion” of gathering again on the horizon, defining a renewed relationship with one another and with God. The flood has changed us, the days in the ark have challenged us, as the signs of hope on the horizon begin to reassure us.

Still, though, we find ourselves driven to the desert—the desert of our own struggles, suffering, loss, and isolation. Still, we are among the wild beasts of world-wrenching upheaval, feeling we are victims of forces beyond our control, certainly the people of Texas today feel that terror.

Still the ancient and ever-new struggle between right and wrong continues to haunt us as persons and as a people. The end of the Covid-19 virus may be on the horizon, but the “wild beast” pandemic of loss, hatred, and violence are still contagious.

We are “driven” to the desert as lent begins.

Driven, we must believe, by the Spirit—the Spirit of God—who promises not to abandon us. We are driven there, amid all the wild beasts of the day and times, to be tempted to believe that those beasts are in charge, that they have the first and last word and that we have no power, no spirit deep within our heart, to overcome or to be saved from weakness, doubts or wounds. Tempted to believe that the power of darkness, with all “its works and empty promises,” cannot be overcome.

We are “driven” to the desert for the next forty days—driven by the Spirit—to confront those wild beasts all around us and in our own heart and spirit; to confront them by **praying** as if our lives and the lives of others depended upon our prayer; to **fast** in such a way to make a difference in the life of another or others; to **give** that another or others might find new hope in their battle against the “wild beasts” harming them. “*Driven by the Spirit,*” to learn God’s ways of truth, compassion, and kindness.

But we are also sent to the Lenten desert to discover, to see, to hope and to feel anew. Sent to look for, find and welcome the angels who minister to us; who love, support, and stand with us. The angels whose prayer touches our heart; the angels whose fasting fills our spirit; the angels whose giving saves and heals us. The angels who care for us, protect us. The angels who love us. The angels all around who free us and the many from those terrorizing wild beasts.

We have forty days in the desert of our time and life. Forty days among the wild beasts *and* the angels. Forty days to be driven by the spirit to a new kind of flood—this time a flood to wash away the demons, to fill the desert with new life and offer a home in which all can find a house of love, compassion, and truth. Driven by the Spirit to that new flood of healing, flowing water rising from the tomb of Christ, marked by a new bow in the clouds rising from its depths—a river of glory upon which a new ark is being built from the broken scraps and lessons learned of a year-long

sickness. This time, not an ark for protection but a ship of heart-changing hope, making its way on the river of life with room enough for all; an ark on which life is saved, hope restored, justice served, sickness healed, and the holy communion renewed, never to be the same again.

A new ark on which even the wild beasts are transformed into a new creation by the many “angels” who love, serve, and believe.

In the dark clouds, can you see the rainbow?

