



A Reflection on the First Week of Lent
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Floods and Deserts, Angels and Demons

The first full week of Lent introduces two central themes: God's covenant with the people and the journey of Jesus.

Throughout Lent, we are reminded of both God's unfailing love and commitment to us, and the world's unwillingness to receive and reciprocate that love. This week tells us about Noah, his ark, a rainbow and a pledge. Because the people were unfaithful to God's call and caused the ruination of creation, God chose to start over again. The story of Noah tells us of one who listened to God's call, responded to it and helped to save the world. At the end of the story, the world is restored and becomes home again to Noah, his family and all of creation. The rainbow—sunlight shining through the rain—is symbol that God will never do this again. It is God's covenant sign, saying "you are mine and I belong to you." Noah knew the pledge to be true. He and his family lived under the sign of the rainbow. Creation began anew.

Whereas Noah was surrounded with water, Jesus was surrounded by desert. We're told that the Spirit led him into a desert for 40 days. Deserts are lonely places, filled with danger, bereft of comfort and distractions. There are wild beasts in deserts. There are no maps, no plans, no clear directions. One has only oneself. Deserts force us to find out who we really are. They are places that expose the heart.

And so it is to the desert that Jesus went for 40 days, just as the people of Israel did centuries before him. The desert was the testing ground, the place where—for 40 years—the Israelites were tested and prepared for what was before them. It was not a pleasant place, but it was a place where they met themselves and their God.

There are wild beasts, but there are also angels in the desert.

We are told that the angels came and cared for Jesus. Their care reminded him that his identity is always connected to God and God's love; a love stronger than wild beasts. Eventually, Jesus left the desert and began his work. The desert experience led him to cry: "The kingdom is here. Repent and believe in the Gospel." What you've been waiting for is here. Turn around, turn your hearts around, believe the good news.



Lenten Reflections

Catholic health care is frequently flooded with regulations, contradictions, competing interests. Most painfully, our health care ministry is flooded with the needs of so many who are poor, uninsured and uncared-for.

But, perhaps it is the desert experience that most often describes our ministry.

We are called to struggle with the beasts of greater numbers of uninsured persons, unhealthy competition, more and more oversight from more and more groups, and fewer resources at our disposal. In the midst of the desert, face-to-face with ourselves, we can begin to see the sometimes overwhelming needs before us. We are called to care about and care for those who are in the deserts of their own suffering, fear and loss.

Our hearts can be broken, our hopes drowned.

And still, the rainbow appears and reminds us we are loved. There *are* angels in the desert who heal us so that we can heal others.

This week, look to the rainbow. Listen for the angels. Both are in our lives.

The Catholic Health Association would like to thank Jon Sarta for allowing us to use his music from the albums "The Catholic Music Project Volume V: Lent," and "The Catholic Music Project Volume VI: Easter" for the podcast version of this reflection. His music can be obtained from mljmusic.com.