

The season of Lent is made up of 40 days, but those days don't include Sundays.

Sunday, being the first day of the week, is still a day of resurrection. It is a reprieve and rest in the pilgrimage towards the great celebration of the paschal mystery. So while liturgically there are different colours and the alleluias and Glorias are put away, we still embrace the hope of a new creation established by God in Christ. Malcolm Guite calls Sundays in Lent "little islands of vision... or perhaps little oases or pools of reflection and refreshment on our Lenten journey."

The season of Lent typically begins with the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Immediately following Jesus' baptism in the Jordan by John, the Spirit leads him into the wilderness for 40 days where he is tempted by the devil.



The Judean wilderness is not a deciduous or coniferous forest as we associate wilderness. It

is a dry craggy landscape with no trees and no water: a desert of dry rocky mountains and caves without sand. It is a place to easily lose your bearings, and with only caves to find shelter sources of water are scarce. It is a place of extreme physical exposure and vulnerability where typically people are sent to die.

There was an ancient practice and understanding that the wilderness was the place that the scape goat was sent to die. In this ancient practice all that was wrong in the community was symbolically placed on one animal and it would be sent out of the community into the wilderness. It was a way to cleanse the community of whatever vice or trauma was infecting it and expel it, destroy it, so as to be rid of it.

Emotionally and often unconsciously we still use this practice today as any human system, organization or family identifies someone in the system to become the "scape goat". In so doing we place all that is wrong in the system on that person's head and figuratively we send them away, we disengage them, we expel them, in the hope that they will take all that is wrong away with them. Often it is an individual or a group that we don't like or approve of. It could be a

leader, or it could be a member of your team or family. Most often they are completely unaware that we are expelling them and sending them packing. But we know very clearly that if they were gone, we all would be a lot better off. They become the scape goat.

So when Jesus is driven out into the wilderness immediately after his baptism as the first action or movement of his ministry the gospel writers are intentionally setting us up to understand that Jesus is the anointed one who will figuratively, physically, and spiritually become the scape goat.

What unfolds is that Jesus goes out into the wilderness, where typically one is sent to die, and the very core of his physical and spiritual being is tested and challenged, and alarmingly, he doesn't die. This is unheard of. It is 40 days - or a very long time. No one can be in this wilderness for 10 days and survive let alone 40 days.

This story, at the beginning of Lent, and at the beginning of the gospel narrative, is telling us that there is something about this particular scape goat, unlike any other, that invites us to place all the burden of everything that is wrong on his head and send him out.

All the gospel writers affirm that this is precisely what will occur in the passion. Jesus absorbs all the hatred, accusations, abuse, and condemnations and eventually alone he physically dies, but - and here is the unique thing about this particular scape goat - he transforms it and overcomes it. He makes a new creation of it. He speaks forgiveness into the hatred, and peace into the chaos. He calms the storm and exercises the demons. He walks on the top of the water and creates food for multitudes in, of all places, the wilderness. At every turn this is a the power of resurrection - something we could never do for ourselves.

And so, as the refrain in one Eucharistic prayer from the church in Kenya says, "we hurl it all at the cross." Because we know that Jesus on the cross, outside the city gates, in the wilderness of Golgotha, is the rightful and only place for it all to go. It is the place where the one sacrifice for all will take place and so we no longer, thank God, need to scape goat one another.

This is the refreshment in hearing this story at the beginning of our Lenten journey and pilgrimage. That Jesus Christ goes before us to absorb all that is wrong and transform it into something new.