

## First Sunday of Lent

**Kansas Citians this week enjoyed the exhilaration of a Super Bowl victory and the devastation of a mass shooting. Our community is stronger than the evils wrought by a couple of juvenile shooters. The crime has rallied voices to put a stop to gun violence. We've heard such voices before, but the tide of violence continues to rise. Unlike the flood of Noah, which wiped out evil people from the earth, the flood of guns is wiping out confidence and instilling fear. We let guns pervade our ordinary language: We bite the bullet, sweat bullets, ride shotgun, stick to our guns, jump the gun, go ballistic, and shoot from the hip.<sup>1</sup>**

**The First Letter of Peter reflects on the account of Noah. Peter says God patiently waited during the construction of the ark, but God was anxious to get on with a whole new beginning, to wipe out the miscreants and restart with better human beings. Peter then writes that "a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water." He calls this a symbol of baptism, through which we are rescued from sin. In baptism, we became those God patiently awaited to build a better world. The number eight refers not only to Noah, his wife, their three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth) and their wives, but eight also symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus. He rose on a Sunday, which we honor not only as the first day of the week but also the eighth day, a perfect day that concludes a more complete week. Sixty years ago the Beatles wrote a lyric, "Eight days a week I love you," to show the perfection of one's complete love for another. Eight symbolizes life made perfect.**

**During Lent most of us focus on the penitential practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. We face our sin and develop disciplines to overcome it. But Lent is also a time for catechumens to undergo their final weeks of preparation for baptism. We have quite a number in the cathedral parish in preparation for this Easter Vigil. Today's first two readings about the flood raise the anticipation of that day when our neophytes will emerge soaking from the waters of that font.**

**As we sort through the horrible news of a mass shooting not far from this cathedral, we do not lose heart. We can make Kansas City a stronger, more loving city. Perhaps one exercise to try this Lent is to examine what role we let violence have in our lives and words. Do we let the vice of anger resolve our problems? One reason we get angry is we haven't found a peaceful, rational way to express our views. There could be something wrong with our views, which of course we resist changing. Getting angry is often a sign we haven't thought things through all the way. Unchecked anger can result in harsh words that hurt people, or in violent acts that injure people. We could ask this Lent, "What entertainment do I pay for?" Certain games, movies and songs entice our fascination with violence. In some stories, the "hero" is the one who enacts stronger violence, even if the hero's purpose and methods are evil. When you experience a story on film or in electronic media, whom are you pulling for? And why? Is the good guy really a good guy? Or a bad guy whose violence is fascinating? Could you find new expressions that avoid casual references to guns? Are you drowning in the flood of violence, or is baptism keeping you afloat?**

---

<sup>1</sup> NPR <https://www.npr.org/2013/03/19/174767346/gun-metaphors-deeply-embedded-in-english-language#:~:text=Think about it: We bite,What a hot shot.>