



Reflection from Fr. Don Farnan

When we were baptized, our parents or godparents were handed a little candle lit from the church's massive paschal candle. The minister of baptism said these or similar words, "Receive the light of Christ. This light is entrusted to you to burn brightly—for this child of yours has been enlightened by Christ and is to live always as a child of the light. Keep the flame of faith alive in the heart of this child so that s/he can go forth into that wondrous light..."

On Pentecost Sunday, a fire will be lit in Saint Therese Little Flower sanctuary. This liturgical fire links us to earlier flames of annual feasts: the palms from last year's Passion Sunday that burn to create soot to mark our humanity for Ash Wednesday, the Easter Vigil that begins by calling us from darkness into the wondrous life of Christ who is forever the Light of the World, and, of course, the tongues of fire that alighted upon the Disciples in the Holy Land on that first Christian Pentecost celebration fifty days after Jesus' resurrection. The flames of faith guide us from humanity and death to share in divinity and eternal life.

We know the story of Pentecost well. The Disciples were afraid for their own lives after their rabbi had been murdered by religious and civic leaders. Even after He rose from the dead and appeared to them and many others, they proceeded in trepidation; even after He ascended into heaven before their very eyes, they were timid and confused; even after He promised that He would not abandon them, they cowered. But on the fiftieth day, they were given an experience that changed everything. It, too, caused tremendous confusion and chaos of diverse natures. But in that chaos, they discovered grace.

The promise of Christ was manifest that day in various languages that unified them, in strong and driving winds, and in tongues of fire that displayed the gift of love, reminding them that they did not have to live in fear any longer. In those flames, they found courage and humble strength to realize that they had, in fact, not been abandoned but that Christ would be with them until the end of time. Like Native American prayer, song, dance, and stories of ancestral faith that circles a tribe together around fire in pivotal times, from rites of passage to war, suffering, victory, or celebration, Jesus essentially asks the question: *"Can you stand in the fire with me through it all and bring hope to the hopeless, courage to the frightened, strength to the weak, grace to the forgotten, and not shrink back from the mission?"*

Since prehistoric times, people have been mesmerized by fire. Not only does it give light and protection, but it also gives promise to our imperfections. Like gold that is tested in fire, we are challenged on Pentecost to renew our trust in God who treasures us, even when we need fiery cleansing or purgation. If our community is on fire with the passion of Christ's love, we will burn brightly, and others will also be mesmerized and want to share in it. Let us be graced by the sacramental presence of God in the flames of faith which attract us, unite us, and direct us.

*Peace,
Fr. Don*