

Cultivating Love



through EPIPHANIES

Spiritual Practice: Praying with Fire



Fire appears in so many places in the Bible. We read hearts on fire, flames of fire, tested by fire, consuming fire, pillar of fire, answered by fire, refiner's fire, burnt offerings, the fire of God, a burning bush, eternal fire, burned by fire, flaming fire, burning coals, fiery flames, burning fire, lake of fire, devouring fire, fire from heaven, chariots of fire and baptized by Holy Spirit and fire. On the Day of Pentecost, May 19 this year, we read how the tongues of fire came down on all gathered with Peter and the other apostles, and they were filled with the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2) Fire is found in stories of God's people from the time of creation through the book of Revelation.

Fire can be seen as evil, dangerous, essential for survival, calming, inspiration or heaven sent. For this month's spiritual practice, you are invited to gather around the campfire. You might consider starting your campfire time with hotdogs, foil packets or s'mores and use the burned-for-a-while-fire the spiritual practice. Please exercise caution and follow safety rules regarding where and when you build your campfire and always have a bucket of water to completely extinguish the flames when you are done. You might like to purchase color changing powder to add to your fire once you are done cooking.

Begin by lighting your fire using these line of William Arthur Dunkerley's prayer.

Kneel always when you light a fire!

Kneel reverently, and thankful be for God's unfailing charity.

And on the ascending flame inspire a little prayer, that shall upbear the incense
of your thankfulness for this sweet grace of warmth and light!

For here again is sacrifice for your delight...

As you watch the kindling (the little pieces) begin to catch fire, consider how each little piece of wood is contributing to the fire. The same is true for us - each of us bring our gifts to the fire, to the community, to the church and we become something more. Each piece of firewood has a story; each of us have a story, each congregation has a story of vocation and call. There's a good chance your firewood is not all the same kind of wood. You may have picked up small pieces of cottonwood, maple, oak, or elm. Each tree has its own characteristics, colors, and assets. Diversity is an asset in the forest just as it is in our congregations. Think Holy Spirit as you watch the flames dance in the shifting winds.

As your fire grows you can add logs. Count the rings in one of the bigger pieces. How old was that tree? How many storms did it weather, droughts did it survive, critters did it protect? Think of the saints that have gone before and how they survived hard times and they offered, in Christ's name, food, shelter, care, love and forgiveness to those in need.

Sit with the fire. Slow your breathing. Make yourself comfortable. Take in the colors. Watch how the wood burn. See how the new wood is ignited by the pieces already burning. Note the building up of coals and the ash.

The fire gives warmth, a sense of wonder and awe, joy, surprise, and beauty. How can you do the same? How can we, the church brings the flames of the Holy Spirit to our communities? We are called to be the church, to be God's hand and feet in the world, preach the good news, live lives grounded in the gospel of love and share the gift of hope. Amen.