

Grace Notes in Miniature

For Thursday, May 28, 2020

Dear friends:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Shik7rMBb_0

As we look forward to Pentecost this weekend, we are very aware of the symbolism of fire which accompanies this feast. The account of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts speaks of tongues of fire dancing among and upon the disciples.

In the Roman Catholic Rite, we look forward to the blaze of colour which will light up the sanctuary with the red vestments and altar hangings. I was reminded by Father Andrija, chaplain at Corpus Christi Catholic Secondary School, that in the Eastern Rite, on the feasts of the Holy Spirit, including Holy Trinity Day (Pentecost), and Holy Spirit Day (Monday after Pentecost), green vestments are worn; they are also the choice for feasts of prophets and angels.



I was interested to learn also that in the Eastern Tradition, fire is not just for Pentecost but plays a role in Easter too. I read of the Holy Fire ceremony which takes place every year at two o'clock in the afternoon on Great Saturday, the day before Orthodox Easter. There is a tradition traced to the fourth century CE, when the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was initially built, that fire (symbolizing Jesus's resurrection) miraculously comes from inside the site which marks Jesus's tomb. At the appointed time, the Greek Orthodox Patriarch enters the tomb, and emerges with candles lit by the holy fire. The fire is then passed around to the candles of the thousands of faithful in the church and carried off by designated couriers to all corners of the Orthodox Christian world. In days gone by, they would have travelled by camel and steamboat; this year, the fire was carried on empty 'planes. Especially for you who are science teachers, you may enjoy this lesson by William DiPuccio, PhD, who



explores the mystery of the Holy Fire. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhOsZXtKK3w>

Scripture gives us several examples of the glory of God being symbolised by fire.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3BPNOKPCaVU> You can probably remember many of them: the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2); God leading the Children of Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21-22); in Leviticus 9 we are told of the fire being sent from the presence of God to consume the sacrifice on the altar. The advice of Moses in Deuteronomy is to pass the Word on from one generation to the other so that the fire may be kept burning. Fire is often used as a sign of life, as opposed to ashes representing what is dead. Jesus said, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

The Phoenix, or "firebird", known to Harry Potter readers in Fawkes, was a favourite symbol



for the Resurrection and often appeared on tombs in the early church. Because of its legend of self-rebirth – of rising anew from its own ashes, it was also used on occasion to represent the virginal conception and birth of Jesus. Many people in the early centuries of the Church believed in the existence of the phoenix; St Clement, the

fourth Pope, wrote that it was a bird from the Arabian countries which lived to be about 500 years old. In Jewish tradition, it was held to have been granted long life by God because, of all the animals, it was the only one which refused Eve's offer to share in the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erOEatu5aH8>

May we all be re-inspired by the Holy Spirit this Pentecost. Bishop Barron reminds us in his first video of his series on the Sacraments from Word on Fire that, in our baptism we are all anointed priest, prophet and king: We are called to set the world on fire with love for God! You can watch this segment for free at:

<https://sacraments.wordonfire.org/available-now#section--53530-137>

(For anyone who would like to listen to more of Stravinsky's Firebird Suite, you can try)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0pOXQnBPE4> or

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHxstilybz4>

Come Holy Spirit and fill us with your love!

With every blessing,

Gillian

