

Grace Notes in Miniature

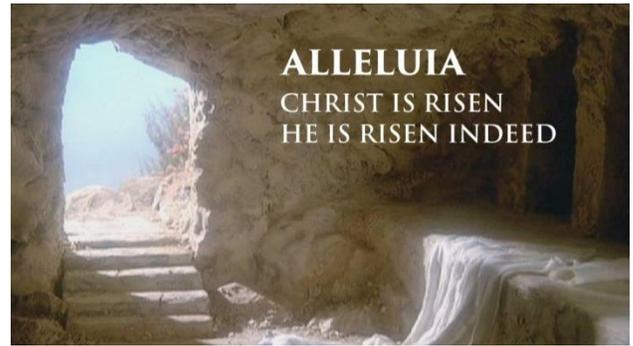
For Wednesday, May 6, 2020

Dear friends:

This year's theme for Catholic Education Week is a very timely one as we all need a good dose of hope right now. That the full slogan is "Igniting Hope" is worth examining a bit. Igniting refers to fire (Latin ignis = fire); therefore, we need to be thinking with the analogy of fire.

I think back to my Brownie days.¹ In order to move out of the probationary or "Tenderfoot" group, we eight-year-olds had to be able to lay and light a fire. On the day of the test I was given two wooden matches and a billy can of water which I was to boil for tea and, under the eagle eye of the Brown Owl (adult leader), assembled my kindling, built my fire, successfully got it to light with the second match (whew!) and keep burning long enough to make the tea. There were so many lessons in that exercise, many of which have come back to me over the years.

I should point out that living as I did, in a house with no electricity or central heating system, being able to get a good fire going was an essential skill. Although we used coal gas for light and cooking, the fireplace was the only source of warmth and, even using coal for the fire, one had to establish a good starter fire with kindling before the coal would catch. Although we weren't using peat for the fire as many in the Highlands still did, I could relate to this old Gaelic prayer:



CAIRIDH mi an tula,
Mar a chaireadh Muire,
Claim Bhride 's Mhuire,
Car an tula 's car an lair,
'S car an andraich uile.

Co iad air lian a muigh?
Micheal grian-gheal mo luin.
Co iad air meadhon lair?
Eoin, Peadail, agus Pail.
Co iad ri bial mo stoc?
Moire ghrian-gheal 's a Mac.

Bial Dia dh' orduich,
Aingheal Dia bhoinich,
Aingheal geal an car an tealla,
Gon tig la geal gu beola.
Aingheal geal an car an tealla,
Gon tig la geal gu beola.

I WILL build the hearth,
As Mary would build it.
The encompassment of Bride and of Mary,
Guarding the hearth, guarding the floor,
Guarding the household all.

Who are they on the lawn without?
Michael the sun-radiant of my trust.
Who are they on the middle of the floor?
John and Peter and Paul.
Who are they by the front of my bed?
Sun-bright Mary and her Son.

The mouth of God ordained,
The angel of God proclaimed,
An angel white in charge of the hearth
Till white day shall come to the embers.
An angel white in charge of the hearth
Till white day shall come to the embers.²

¹ Originally the youngest members of the Girl Guide/Girl Scout organisations begun in 1910 by Lady Olave Baden-Powell, wife of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Boy Scouts. Started in England and now a world-wide youth movement. Now preceded by "Sparks"

² *Carmina Gadelica, Volume 1*, by Alexander Carmichael, [1900], at sacred-texts.com



This prayer embraces the holiness in the fire of the hearth, asking an angel to keep the embers alight overnight under the layer of “smoothing” –protective – peat, so that the fire can be fanned into life in the morning. Fire can be the difference between life and death in many situations, keeping us warm, scaring away what might harm us in the darkness, bringing light into our lives, being used to prepare our food. I’m told that the flame of a single candle inside a flower-pot can generate enough warmth and light inside a car in a snowstorm to stop the occupant from freezing. We hear the motto, “It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness.” And a candle is often a symbol of hope. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1cRXgDFiSs>

We believe in the Holy Spirit and often picture this Person of the Holy Trinity as a flame; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOlj242UxpM> As we move through the fifty days of Easter to Pentecost (meaning “fiftieth”), we work to prepare ourselves for the coming of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Paraclete or Helper promised by Jesus. Pentecost also draws from *Shavuot*, the Jewish festival 50 days after Passover when the giving of the Law to Moses is celebrated. Fire means warmth, light, love, energy, passion, and the Holy Spirit in us is the presence of Jesus, bringing all these gifts into our lives. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zasyz-tJkOg> Fire can also be a symbol of renewal and cleansing and fervour: “so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1Peter1:7)

Our role in Catholic Education is very much about kindling that fire so that it is always burning and easily fanned into flame. When we light our candles at the Easter Vigil from the Paschal candle, the light continues to grow and spread until the whole church is bathed in the warmth and light. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G9m4g8H4f4Q> . The light generated by the sharing of the flame of one candle makes us one family. At our baptism, our parents and godparents accepted that flame on our behalf and the community shares in the responsibility: “This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. These children of yours have been enlightened by Christ. They are to always walk as a child of the light. May they keep the flame of faith alive in their hearts. When the Lord comes, may they go out to meet him with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.”

Gillian