



At A Distance ~ Pentecost 2020 – Dakota Fire

Greetings Saints, and welcome again to our celebration of the Spirit this morning. Today we celebrate “Pentecost”, the 50th day after Jesus Resurrection, and the 10th day after Jesus’



exaltation and ascension. It is on this day that we again hear the story of the incredible transforming power of the Holy Spirit. We hear of the dramatic and almost instantaneous transformation of Jesus’ Disciples from a scared, traumatized, guilt-ridden and spiritually broken group of individuals into a renewed, strong and motivated community of teachers and leaders. A lot of really amazing things happened on that 1st Pentecost in the course of this “fast-track”

spiritual make-over that the Disciples experienced on that day. Crazy and mysterious things going on... Spirit Visits; Whistling Winds; Speaking in New Languages; “tongues of fire” appearing and swooping around, fire, fire and more fire. Powerful messages and symbols all, for us to wring the learning from. Symbols signaling... pointing to... and focusing on... the receiving of Sacred gifts, the receiving of Sacred responsibilities...the receiving of Sacred Instructions.

The celebration and stories of the 50th day after Easter are the stuff of a pyromaniac’s dream vision. Fires everywhere. Songs about fire, liturgies ignite and combust. We wear red to symbolize the fire of Spirit. Fireballs fly from pulpits everywhere. We hear of “tongues of fire,” conversion lightning bolts and the apostles burning with their Message and speaking in tongues. One of my children’s earliest memories is from the tiny Church of the Nativity in Montana. Every Pentecost the Vicar would invite Pastor Illudi from Tanzania to speak and also to sing. His song “Fire, Fire, Fire...Fire Fall On Me,” is literally burned into the memory of my children. So much that they sing is spontaneously now from time to time, especially at Pentecost.

But what about now? How are all those giant warming fires, bonfires, lightning strikes to the heart and other spiritual forest fires and blazes doing now? Fuel depleting? Oxygen low? Not much left but a small glowing bed of embers...soon to extinguish...fighting to stay alive as we wait our re-emergence into a post-pandemic new reality. Are we simply awaiting our annual

Pentecostal ignition and blaze? Or are we looking for something more sustainable? Let's have a look again to our Indigenous Elders' Wisdom for a traditional solution that still makes sense in a 21st Century world.

The First Nations people knew fire well. A friend, a companion, a lifeline for the families and the community. Fire that sustains, fire that produces results - heat and warmth - yet without all the "flash" ...sustainable, on-going, dependable. Fire that is efficient, effective, sustaining. Fire that does no damage. Fire that is hard to spot, but amazing to feel up close, personally, intimately. Dakota Fire.

The Dakota Fire was born out of necessity. The First Nations Tribes of the Great Plains had several important things to deal with regarding fire. The first issue was the environment of the plains grasses themselves. The grasses of the Great Plains were so tall and expansive that it is hard for us to imagine today. As the Tribes moved through the plains grass in search of the buffalo herds, the grass was like a huge green, waving ocean. When the people stopped, and the lodges were being prepared for raising, the first thing that was required was to manage the grass. This was the beginning of the traditional Grass Dance, still danced with great joy today at First Nations Ceremonies. The Drums would come out and the Grass Dancers would stomp down the Plains grasses in ceremonial style. Only after the Grass Dance was complete, could the lodges be erected, and the People's Village emerge.

A plains grass fire was a disaster. Grass fires, once ignited would burn for months, often being extinguished only by the onset of the winter snows. While restorative in the long term, the fires both scared away the game so important to the people as a food source, and ultimately destroyed the food supply of the buffalo on which the people depended on for just about everything. Fire, both necessary and important but also needing control and understanding.

Wood was scarce on the Northern Great Plains. The Dakota, Lakota, Assiniboine, Ojibwe, Blackfoot and Northern Cheyenne needed to create fires that were fuel efficient, yet effective enough to cook with and to warm the People. Also, concealment was a factor in fire making as well. Large, smoky fires gave away the position of the village to one's enemy and put the people at risk.

And so, the Plains First Nations...always adapting to their ever-changing environment, developed a high thermal output fire, that could be easily controlled, that required very little fuel and was smoke free and "stealthy." The Dakota Fire....

So, let's learn a bit about the Dakota Fire of our Ancestors and see how this stealthy little fire could possibly help us to sustain the spiritual and thermal high of Pentecost into a post-Pentecostal and pandemic-laden world.

Like many traditions, symbols and ceremonies in both the Indigenous Path and the Jesus Way, making a Dakota Fire has 7 steps. Let's have a look.

Step 1 – Dig a Hole – The Understanding Hole

To make the Dakota Fire we have to get intimately re-acquainted with our Earth Mother and with ourselves. We have to dig...a nice circular hole about 12" in diameter and about 12" deep. We have to dig out all the dirt, the rocks, the root fragments...the debris and have a nice clean place for the fuel to do its work. The Elders call this the "Understanding Hole." As we are attempting to light our sustainable Spiritual Fire we need to do the same thing. Dig deep, understand what is getting in our way, chop through it, dig around it...get it gone, so that the Spirit's Fuel can ignite. The Understanding Hole belongs to us, represents us, is us.

Step 2 – Dig Another Hole- The Spirit Hole

Uff! Another hole! Yep this one is just about a twin to the "Understanding Hole" you just dug. About 12" around and 12" deep, only it is very important that this hole faces the direction of the Wind. This companion hole is called the "Spirit Hole." This is the place that the Spirit Wind enters and makes amazing things happen.

Step 3 – The Connection

Poke a hole in the dirt wall between Understanding and the Spirit. Make a clean connection. Pull out and throw away all the debris in the connection channel between us and the Spirit. If the connection path gets blocked, the fire can no longer sustain on its own and will extinguish. Take as much time as you need to insure you have a strong connection to the Spirit Hole and to the Spirit.

Step 4 – Load the Fuel

Gather some small sticks about 8-10" long and load them vertically into the Understanding Hole. It doesn't take much fuel to ignite and sustain the Dakota Fire. If we do our digging right, clean things out and make a good connection to the Spirit Hole...Spirit Wind does the rest.

Step 5 – Prepare for Ignition

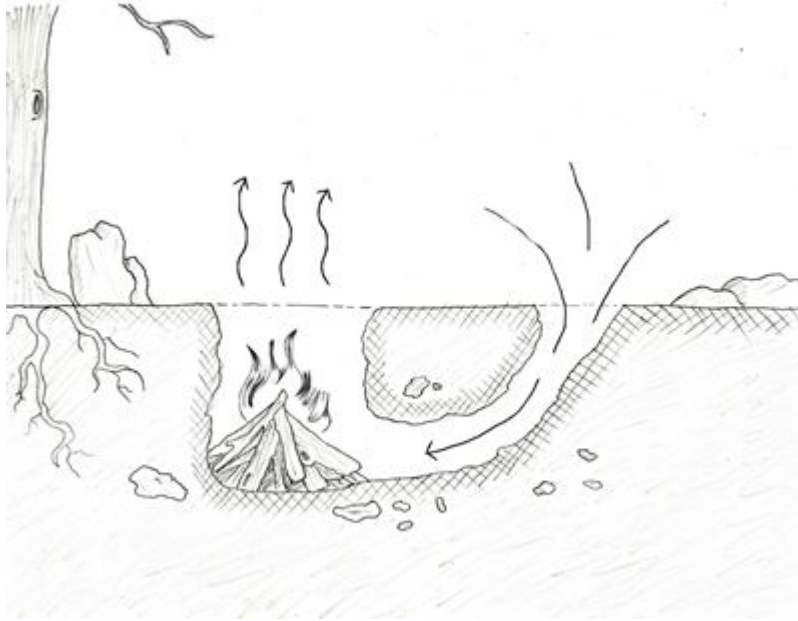
Construct a "tinder ball" of twigs, dry moss, leaf fragments and dry vines. Don't make it too compact with dogma and rules. Give it room to breathe. Room for the Spirit to work inside the tinder wrapped with new understanding, new visions.

Step 6 – Strike a Spark

We have to do this work. We have to say, "I am ready Spirit...come and ignite me!" Whether we use a flint or a bow stick...we have to make the first move.

Step 7 – Ignition – The Dakota Fire is Birthed...The Spirit Lives

The smoldering Tinder Ball of our beliefs and understandings contacts the fuel and suddenly the Sacred Spirit Wind is sucked into the Understanding Hole through our Spirit Connection and Boom! The Dakota Fire is born.



The Dakota Fire is an amazing piece of ancestral work. The scientists tell us that the connection between Understanding Hole and the Spirit Hole is actually a venturi tube that creates a drop-in air pressure and a subsequent vacuum that continues to combustion air into the Understanding Hole at a very high and sustainable rate. As long as that connection is maintained the modest fuel will be combusted effortlessly and efficiently yielding the maximum BTU from every ounce of fuel. The Dakota Fire is so efficient, it can boil a quart of water in under 5 minutes, rivaling any natural gas, propane or electric stove currently on the market.

So, I've been hinting about the connection between the Dakota Fire and us and our Spirit Fires. What's the deal? Well think about it. Pentecost seems to be about the flash, big fires, big miracles, big transformations. Do those fires happen sometimes? Absolutely, but I have found that the Dakota Fire is more like how I have always engaged the Sacred Spirit.

If I dig my personal "Understanding Hole" deep, and try to remove the spiritual impediments that are causing difficulties for me; if I get in touch with the Earth and re-learn her lessons; if I chop out the roots and clean out the stones...If I do the work...I make myself "Spirit Ready" if you will.

Next, and most importantly I make a clean connection so that Spirit and I can conjoin. The Elders call this "being a Hollow Bone." It is through that connection that the Spirit Wind flies, ignites our fuel and how we "inject grace" or "good Medicine" or the Sacred Fire back into the world. The Spirit Wind singing through the hole sustaining our fire to do the Creator's work in the world. We don't need very much fuel, if we do things right. We don't have to be brilliant, or rich or beautiful or strong. We just have to understand the gift of the Dakota Fire. Build it carefully and with intentionality. Offer the gift of the Dakota Fire to the Spirit...quietly stand back and let the Spirit do the rest.