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## Revelation of the Holy Spirit

Sermon, Pentecost, June 12, 2011

Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

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*Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104:25-35,37, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13, John 7:37-39*

Pentecost is the day we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit manifested as the sound of rushing wind and tongues of fire, which rested on the disciples. They started speaking in many different languages. But notice this was not the Tower of Babel (or Babel) where no one could understand what another was saying. This was just the opposite; everyone understood everyone else but heard in their native language, no matter what language the speaker was using. Everyone could understand perfectly.

The Holy Spirit brings us understanding in many different ways: through Scripture and other writings, through pictorial representation, and through our own personal experience. In the second lesson Paul describes some of the ways the Holy Spirit can manifest to us and through us. The understanding that we gain is our personal revelation and also the foundation of our faith. Unless the words we hear or the picture we see connect to us in some way, they remain only an outer distraction. The same is true of the liturgy; unless we participate fully with our hearts and minds and voices, it is only a set piece walked through by other people. To experience revelation, to achieve understanding, we need to open ourselves to the action of the Holy Spirit. We can't force the Spirit to move to us and through us, but we can block the action of the Spirit. We block it by being caught up in our own agenda, and not leaving enough room for the Spirit to speak. This is our free will at work. An important component of faith is knowing that if we are open, receptive, and asking that the Spirit will respond in some way. Not necessarily in the way we want or expect, but there will be a response.

I brought this fire painting today to illustrate this point. When I lived in Santa Fe, I studied art. I had seen some of the work of Irene Delka<sup>1</sup> and was trying a painting in her style. The painting was not going well; the subject matter was a poor choice and I was trying to be someone else. Alex Shundi, my teacher,<sup>2</sup> came by and made some derogatory comments, the midst of which was, "It looks like a 60s album cover painted by Irene Delka on a bad day. Be yourself!" At least I had made a recognizable attempt at her style, but it wasn't me. I was painting only from my head, not my heart. Wiping off what I had done, I started to pray for inspiration. I picked up some black and purple paint on the rag and started covering what was left. A few traces of the first idea can still be seen in the lower right corner.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.delkamccray.com/Home.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.alexandershundi.com/>

I entered the darkness in prayer and turned off my mind as much as I could. In a trance-like state I turned to my tubes of paint. The cadmiums jumped out at me: powerful yellows, oranges, and reds. Then my eye fell on the cobalt violet, a beautiful color, but with almost no tinctorial strength. When it is mixed with other colors it is quickly overwhelmed. I picked up a wad of the violet on my palette knife and made a sweeping gesture in the center of the canvas. That seemed to unlock the inspiration. The dark background was wet, so the paint needed to be laid on with a light touch. I picked up colors with the knife and laid them on top of the darkness. My heart sang. I kept picking up colors and laying them on, following the energy I felt moving through my arm. I never stopped to consider or to plan; I just kept going. Suddenly the flow of inspiration stopped, the painting was done, my palette was empty.

This was a personal revelation, a manifestation of the fire of the Holy Spirit. We are all capable of this kind of inspiration, maybe not in oil paint, but as Paul told us, there are many gifts of the Spirit. The important point is that we need to learn how to be open to the gifts of the Spirit. The angels pictured in this icon bring us many gifts of the Spirit. It is our responsibility to keep ourselves in a position to receive them. Maybe not all the time – much of our lives deal with practical matters and responsibilities. But we also need to take time to set these responsibilities aside and be in communication with God. Some people have this ability from the beginning, but most of us have to learn. We start with prayer, but remember that prayer is a two-way street; it is not only talking to God, but also listening. The more we listen the easier it is for the Holy Spirit to get our attention. Or it may be an angel, or another person that brings us a message or a moment of enlightenment.



Synaxis of the Archangels

Expose yourself to words and pictures that inspire your imagination and open yourself to the Holy Spirit. Then you may experience a personal revelation, an intimate experience of God. Then you may manifest one of the gifts of the Spirit.

And now to Him whose Power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever.<sup>3</sup> Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Ephesians 3:20-21