Columns
Spirituality



"When you are fire," a 2024 illustration by Sr. Helga Leija made as a tribute to Sr. Joan Sauro (Helga Leija)



by Joan Sauro

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There are angels in our backyard. They hover in the silence of the large maple tree, with now and then, a slight stir, just to say, *we're here*. Angels in our backyard tree.

Our next-door neighbor, Francie, is trimming potted plants, hanging on her clothesline. Flowers float all over the neighborhood.

Next, she sets a large ladder against the side of her garage and climbs onto the roof and over to the maple leaves that have dropped and scattered. The fallen leaves are like prayers for my brother, Joe.

But Francie does not know that. Nor does she know my brother. She herself is an angel of a different sort, *yes*. If you need a ride, even if it's 40 miles away from town. And that's just for starters.

Even as I watch her, my heart flies across town where my brother lay in bed. Angels hovered over him as well, as he, himself, hovered between this life and the next. It has been six months, but the missing goes on, the fallen spirits and broken hearts.

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And now it's Pentecost, the end of Easter, or its culmination, if you prefer.

The wind in the trees is the breath of God. Tongues of fire hover over our heads.

What do we do when we know we're fire — torch everything we touch?

Keep moving so we set small fires and no large conflagration?

Take our spirits to an arctic place where we will do less damage and maybe some good?

Do we make ourselves into blowtorches — fine, steady, undeviating flames to solder together the broken pieces of our world? I have dear friends who do just that, day in and day out.

Or do we just bank the coals and pray God we go down in the night with the whole bundle of matches struck at once, illuminating the darkness, if only for an instant?

We are a people with tongues of fire over our heads. What do we do when we know we are fire?