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Knowing

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Knowing

Many of us enjoy solving cross-word puzzles that come in varying degrees of difficulty. Others delight in reading mystery stories in which clues are provided as to the perpetrators of a crime. While we do not all find the same kinds of problems to be recreational, hardly any of us do not at some time take pleasure in struggling to achieve an understanding of an event, a design, or a reality that is not readily apparent. From infancy onward, our minds thrive on the process of coming to comprehend what we had not previously known.

Trying to understand God is a unique exercise, open to frustration as well as to extraordinary experiences. If we attempt to consider God directly with our familiar categories of space and time, we come immediately into contact with our powerlessness to conceptualize. For some of us, attempting to make sense out of ideas that do not match our own experience is at the same time both upsetting and exciting, like standing at the edge of the Grand Canyon and looking down. Trying to think about God as having no beginning and no end can be far more troubling to our minds than looking up at the stars while considering that many of the points of light we can see are entire galaxies of stars that are moving away from us at speeds approaching that of light itself.

If we are willing to accept analogies, theories, or descriptions of God, as do scientists when they study events or materials that are incapable of direct observation, we can gain some satisfaction. But, again like good scientists, we especially yearn to know ever more fully those things that seem beyond us. More than curiosity is at work in us, when we try to know more about our universe and more about God, just as we also seek to more completely understand the persons we love, including even ourselves. We are attracted, drawn, and invited to open our minds, and also our hearts, to realities that are far beyond our immediate needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

We are capable of more than one way of knowing, especially when we acknowledge our desires to understand God or any transcendent reality. We can stay at the level of intellectual reasoning, or we can open ourselves to the ways in which we know other persons through a variety of experiences that are far more than the sum of all our thoughts about them. Hopes, fears, aspirations, and desires, name only a fraction of the kinds of things involved in knowing even one acquaintance, not to mention an individual with whom we have been

close for years. Our knowledge of persons is direct, and always incomplete; satisfying or disappointing, but always changing.

We will have particular experiences when we quietly ponder one or other attribute of God that challenges our normal ways of thinking. We do not want to set ourselves up for a headache, but thinking about God as creating the one universe that we are able to partially observe, and doing so out of no pre-existing material, with no effort and no planning or construction time, is difficult to grasp. Add to those thoughts, that the same act also creates time itself, as well as space; that thinking, free-willed persons are included. Continue to imagine that, from our perspective, God has in the one creative act the entire breadth of human history as well as geological history, and all takes place as a choice of God that it shall exist.

For another excursion from the ordinary thoughts that normally occupy our minds when we are not at some particular task, think about love as an all-encompassing reality; that God is love, and that God created us as capable of love. We might not be able to understand, but we will be positively affected by such considerations.

Attempts to know God, as well as to know other persons, is an ongoing delight and challenge that makes us who we are.