

GLIMPSE

Puzzling

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I was given a wooden ball recently composed of six pieces which are now lying here on my desk waiting for me to figure out how to reform them back into the original shape. I have tried, but they just don't cooperate with my good intentions. In an hour one of my Jesuit friends is going to come to my room to show me how it is done. I want to know and I don't, because when I do find out the secret, well, it won't be a secret anymore and so will lose its attractiveness to me. What will be left is my giving the ball to someone else to frustrate them and then my saving them by expertly showing them how to solve the mystery.

Every healthy relationship must have novelty, mystery and adventure or it will dissolve. The reach must always extend beyond the grasp. Here is the key human puzzle. We want the security of the grasp while also desiring the delight of the not-quite having. This not-having-in-hand is an insecurity which is awkward, but also inviting. In almost everything, what we eventually know is that there is always more to know. Over on my shelf is an even more complicated wooden puzzle sitting there all together waiting for me to take it apart so I can try to put all its pieces back together. I avoid it and yet it silently calls to my mind and fingers.

Adventure comes from the Latin word for "coming-to" or "what's coming to me next". Some of us were around when the first rockets sent John Glenn around the world three times and came back safely. He was celebrated nine days later with a ticker-tape parade in New York City. It is kind of a ho-hum thing now to send a something three billion miles out there which sends back pictures and information about something which is now attracting our minds and imaginations. It was a tremendous historical event when human beings took off and landed on the moon. Why don't we go there anymore? The answer is that we've been there and done that. It would be one giant step backwards for mankind to keep doing the unadventurous. "Ah", but you say, "It would be safer, sure-fire, not-so-insecure." What we know is always a definite invitation to our going beyond.

A long time ago, we learned in Education 101 about Herbart's Law of Apperception which stated that we learn the new on the basis of the old. That is good enough if education is what we're about. What if what is important is to learn that adventure is about learning that the new must stay new and not become old by squeezing it. It is about holding it as sacred and waiting for it to deepen us rather than broadening us. Knowledge is a good thing, but not the only thing. Wisdom seems to be rooted in wondering, in the reception of the beyond in everything and everyone. What's out there has its importance; what's in there invites us beyond our heads because there is always the more in there than can meet the eye.

Our Jewish ancestors were called out into the desert where there is always nothing around, or so it seemed to them. They complained of course, because there wasn't anything of the familiar or secure, such as bread, meat and water. What they found out there, in the desert, was what in there, in themselves which was more important, yet embarrassing and humbling. They were learning the new on the basis of the sacredness of the new.

The Spiritual Life enters us into this complication of wanting to have and yet wanting to keep growing beyond what we have. Jesus kept calling His disciples to their letting go of the familiar, the secure. God is not an idle idol. God created us not to idolatry nor to idleness where we just sit down in the comfort of knowing what life is, what God is, what we are all about and there's not anything more than what we know. Security can become an idol and fear how we worship that illusion. We are created for a restless peacefulness of knowing that we don't know, of having what we want more of and of holding while reaching at the same time. The Spiritual Life is our living beyond what I am writing. If this is complete, but not quite, then it is a good offering. Jesus came to save us not to solve us and not giving us the idea that we can solve ourselves, everybody else, and all of life's little wooden balls.

My Jesuit friend is coming in ten minutes now and I am going to give the ball one more shot, because I want to solve it myself and I don't want him to show me and

yet I do. It is only a glimpse, love the puzzles and don't squeeze the mysteries too much.