

GLIMPSE

Know Thyself

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A few weeks ago I was offering a presentation at a Catholic parish and at the end of one of the evenings a woman asked, "How do you know when you know yourself?" Now that did stop me in my verbal tracks. So I stopped her right back, in order to figure out an adequate answer, "Why do you want to know yourself. Why do you want to know at what point is enough self-knowledge, enough knowing?"

I was glad it was near the end of the evening, for that is a deep question and the answer is quite an open-ended one. I enticed her and others to come back the next evening for a definite and clear answer. I wasn't sure where I was going to get it, but the delay might help. They all came back with notebooks ready. I began my prepared (kind-of) talk not referring at all to the previous-night's big question. I was just wondering when someone was going to interrupt and it didn't take long. "Father, Father, are you going to tell us what you promised last night?"

I pretended I had forgotten, but they laughed and then returned to semi-rapt attention. So I began by how I continue now.

Self-awareness is at best a partial collection of the very small parts of our mysteries. I am personally aware that I am a very good story-teller. I know that and could spend many Glimpses just writing stories about myself, some of which would be true. The question remains, of how great a percentage of my totality, my identity, is that one aspect? Could I be better, know more stories, use more picturesque words and phrases? I don't know that. I do know that there is more to me than telling stories. (did I ever tell you the one about...) Shakespeare wrote that knowledge maketh a bloody entrance. Self-knowledge can be even bloodier, because it has to break through years-in-the-making easily-fashioned walls and a pretense of false self-names, self-images, self-presentations. So maybe the first task is to wrestle with the who that I am afraid that someone or someones will find out, unmask. Ouch! What other people think of us is none of their business. What we think, is our prayer-business. We do not achieve ourselves, accumulate enough

facts to say, "There, that's who I am!" We would never have enough to be enoughly satisfied and so we would continually say, "I can get more of me, pile up trophies, own something which says that I have arrived." As soon as that happens, be assured, you don't have much of knowing who you are, you just have ways of telling others a lie.

So here is a stab at an answer. I think I know myself when I vulnerably give of what I know is me. You cannot give away, as a gift, something you do not like yourself. To know ourselves partially is to know ourselves as best we can and you know what, we do not like the partial, fractions, we like whole numbers, the facts man and all the facts. Hold ourselves back until we know ourselves more totally deprives us then of discovering even more of the mystery by sailing right into it. We do not know ourselves as a result of hiding or speculating. We receive ourselves and knowledge about the self, by the process of action, reflection, reception and generous, vulnerable and grateful auctioning again. It is a cycle and we are riding on it through it and into knowing ourselves enough to be a real human mystery. It is just a glimpse from one mystery to another.