generally aware
Imagine that you are driving your car through a rural scene. You are participation in the liturgy.
We are then able to return to the road. Many times we seem to avoid this kind of awareness, finding it boring. We turn on the radio, play a podcast, or do other things that, in one manner or another, distract us. This same habit often carries over into our prayers or worship.

Having said all that, I would put us back into the driver’s seat – the place of prayer and noetic awareness. Ideally, the Liturgy is an extended exercise in noetic perception.

When we drive, we engage in perception. We are aware of many things, but not necessarily aware of them. If we were entirely aware of what was going on in a single thing, we are quite likely to lose the perception of everything else.

The nous is a bit like that. The harder you “look” for something in the act of veneration, the more likely you are to lose that perception – it is the nature of the beast.

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Indeed, if you turn your attention away from something and towards the attention itself, the whole process has a way of disappearing. Even the reality of consciousness completely baffles science as well as philosophy. It baffles them, even though every human being experiences consciousness all the time and though we can’t explain what consciousness is, when we use the word, everyone knows what we mean because everyone experiences consciousness.

The nous is a bit like that. The harder you “look” for it, the more likely you are to miss it – it is the nature of the beast. That makes the whole topic quite frustrating for most people. The truth is, we use many mental/thinking/perceiving terms in a very sloppy manner. When we are driving down the road, paying attention to our position in traffic, road signs, conditions, etc., we are not doing something irrational, but rather engaging in active reasoning.

When you first start driving and have little experience, you are quite likely to use active reasoning, and just as likely to have an accident because reasoning is too slow for the activity. When we drive, we engage in perception. We are aware of many things, but not necessarily aware of them.

Noetic perception has as its work actual participation in that to which it perceives. It does not seek to make distinctions, but to know by communion. Noetic participation is more akin to love than to objective knowledge. This participatory experience explains how it is that such knowledge seems fleeting. When we turn away from that participation and seek to watch or examine that participation, we have passed over to an objective exercise that removes us from that communion. We may have communion with God – but we do not watch our communion with him. It is not an object.

We “objectify” anything and anyone…except God. The only thing in the universe that cannot be objectified is God.

In our efforts to experience God, we often get frustrated by the ineffectiveness of the will. We “try” to see God, hear God, sense God, etc. Such thinking is like driving and keeping your mind on the road. To truly experience the awareness of God lies in the fact that He is not an object. Objects, whether living or not, are there to be observed regardless of what they might want. We can “objectify” anything and anyone…except God. The only objectification of God is the creation of a false idol. Even an icon cannot be objectified because we are not allowed to use it as a means of seeing God. The same is true for noetic experience.

Our “objective” knowledge seeks a mastery of a thing, or even a thing, we a
distract us. This same habit often carries over into our prayers or participation in the liturgy.

Imagine that you are driving your car through a rural scene. You are generally aware of the beauty of the countryside. Going around a turn, you begin entering a valley of Redwoods, tall, majestic, sublime. You continue in the same manner of driving, but, at a point, the beauty is simply overwhelming and you pull over to sit quietly in the car. This last experience is a version of a trip my wife and I had during a series of West-Coast speaking engagements. The experience of sublime beauty has a great affinity for the experience of God.

The word “apprehension” was invoked in a recent comment that offered a definition of the nous. I prefer Vladimir Lossky’s definition of faith as a way of approaching an understanding of God as an “organ of sight,” thus making it somewhat synonymous with the nous. His definition of faith is a “participatory adherence.” And here, I beg the reader’s patience.

“Objective” knowledge seeks a mastery of a thing, or even a concept outside of us. It is how we know objects. It is not participation nor is it adherence. We want to “use” the objects outside us (or gather information that is useful). Noetic perception has as its work actual participation in that to which it perceives. It does not seek to make distinctions, but to know by communion. Noetic participation is more akin to love than to objective knowledge. This participatory experience explains how it is that such knowledge seems fleeting. When we turn away from that participation and seek to watch or examine that participation, we have passed over to an objective exercise that removes us from that communion. We may have communion with God – but we do not watch our communion with him. It is not an object.

For the thief You opened the doors of paradise. For Myrrhbearers You changed weeping into joy. And You commanded Your disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that You are risen, granting the world great mercy.

Holy Hymns:
Tone 7 Troparion (Resurrection)
By Your Cross You destroyed death. To the thief You opened Paradise. For the Myrrhbearers You changed weeping into joy. And You commanded Your disciples, O Christ God, to proclaim that You are risen, granting the world great mercy.

Tone 1 Kontakion (from the Lament Triodion)
When You, O God, shall come to earth with glory, all things shall tremble, and the river of fire shall flow before Your judgment seat; the books shall be opened, and the hidden things disclosed; then deliver me from the uncontrollable fire, and make me worthy to stand at Your right hand, O Righteous Judge!
Great is our Lord, and abundant in power, His understanding is beyond measure. (Ps 146:14/15:7)

Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. (Ps 34:8)

Holy Scripture:
1 Corinthians 8:8-9 (Epistle)

But food does not commend us to God, for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. Am I not an apostle? A brother? A servant of Christ? Who has made me an apostle? Who has made me an apostle? A minister? A human? I speak according to theoperations of human wants. For if I by any means have a reason to boast in the flesh, yet not so much as that I am. But our boast is this, in ourselves the knowledge of God. And this we shall not be ashamed. For we have not, as it were, rested on the works of the law, but through the grace of God we are justified in Christ Jesus, that we might become heirs according to hope of eternal life. (Phil 3:5-11)

Holy Events:
“Knowing with my knower” – the Nous

Years ago, I had a parishioner whose spiritual life was quite rich and occasionally astounding. She cared for a handicapped husband for years with a gentleness and love that radiated joy to people around her. One of her phrases that has stuck with me was, “I know it with my knower.” It was what she said when she was trying to express a spiritual perception of something she knew to be true. There was no syllogism or reasoned argument: some things she “just knew.” My experiences with her made me pay attention when she “knew” something. I think there is something in her knowing that is related to what the tradition describes as “noetic” experience. “Noetic,” the adjective from the noun, “nous,” has a range of meaning that is difficult to express. For one, it means perceptual aspect of human perception that has been seriously neglected in our modern experience. You cannot read anything in the spiritual writings of the ancient fathers without encountering this word over and over. They wrote with ease about something that seems to have been common knowledge. Things have changed such that it now sounds esoteric. I am offering a reflection in this article on the meaning of “noetic” and the reality of the “nous,” for us beginners. I am not trying to give an exhaustive study, much less a definitive treatment. Instead, I want to offer some suggestions and observations that might de-mystify something that is as natural as breathing – only you might not know it yet. When we actually begin to ask questions about how we know what we know, it quickly becomes obvious that it is difficult to talk about.

UPCOMING
Today – Pancake and Sausage breakfast: Donations go toward the Missions team.
---Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and classes
Next Week - Great and Holy Lent begins. Orthodox Sunday is the celebration of the incarnation of Christ--so we bring icons (images of God) to process with during the Divine Liturgy.
---There will be an altar servers meeting following Divine Liturgy on March 10th.

Holy Services:
See Lenten Calendar

Holy Actions:
+ Missions Team will continue collecting for the “Victims of Human trafficking” sponsored by the Saxonburg monastery. Please check out the donation tree in the hall for ways to get involved in this important effort to help those suffering.
The Team will also continue to collect food pantry items for Edinboro University Food pantry. See Anna R. or Debbie K. for more details.
---Also, there are OCMC summer mission trip scholarships available for anyone interested. See board in hall for more information on trips or see www.ocmc.org

+Design Team will meet on Sunday, March 10th at 12:30pm

+ Hospitality Team will meet on Tuesday, March 5th at 6:00pm

+ Parish Council Meeting: Tuesday, March 5th - 12:1pm

+ Orthodox Education Team: Classes this week. This week the youth will help prepare and serve our traditional Pancake and Sausage Breakfast. Please plan to make a donation to the pancake breakfast, donations will go to our Church School and Out reach Teams

During Great Lent the Team will be sponsoring an Orthodox Art Event where artistic talents can be displayed.

Artists are asked to create an original piece of art in any style or medium. The theme will be “God’s Creation: Family”

+ Ladies Altar Society Meeting – to be announced
+ Quarterly Ministry Team Meeting – Sat. Mar. 6th

Holy Events:
+A new Parish Directory is being compiled. Please fill out the form and drop it in the basket in the vestibule. Next week it will be released, so if you have not filled out a form please do so today.

+ Youth and Young Adult 17-35 Lenten Retreat at Camp Nazareth MARCH 29th - 31st Cost: $75 (If you would like to sponsor someone to go please mark your donation in an envelope.)

+A Parish Family Lenten Retreat will be held on Saturday, April 6th – Divine Liturgy - 5am - Retreat to follow, confession will be available for families and youth following the retreat – Great Vespers will be at 4pm.