

Indeed, if you turn your attention away from something and towards the attention itself, the whole process has a way of disappearing. Even the simple 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 quite say 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 not to find it – it will keep disappearing. That fact 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 neither are we 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 entirely aware that we are aware. As soon as we focus on a single thing, we are quite likely to lose the perception of everything else.

There is also the strange experience of memory. It isn't unusual to be stuck in an effort to remember something. We stop the effort and turn our attention to something else, only to have the memory suddenly pop up by itself. It is, at best, a delayed reaction rather than a "willed" action. It is the action of the will within perception that is worth thinking about.

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., and come up empty. A great difficulty in the experience 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 seen objectively – at least, not as an icon. As a painting or print, it can be viewed objectively, but that is not an iconic manner of existence. It is the icon's ability to make present what it represents that makes it iconic. An icon is only *seen* in the act of veneration.

This ineffectiveness of our *willed* perception gives rise to statements that would emphasize what noetic perception is not. We simply cannot make God be still so that we can look at Him and know Him in some sort of masterful manner. Neither is our noetic perception something that we do for our own sake. We cannot see God or know God in a manner that "makes Him mine."

Having said all that, I would put us back into the driver's seat and our attention on the world as our car moves along. This is a situation in which we frequently find ourselves paying attention though not mastering. We become aware and the awareness is simply there. Frequently, this larger awareness is interrupted as we give close attention to a necessary detail. 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 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 just 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 "apperception" 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 the nous. He describes faith 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.

Our "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 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 knowledge 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 God. It is not an object.

One faculty that is quite helpful in noetic perception is music, most particularly, singing. The angels are inherently noetic in character, and could be described as noetic creatures. It is not without note that they are most commonly described as singing (ceaselessly). In my experience, singing frequently places us in the place of communion. Ideally, the Liturgy is an extended exercise in noetic perception.

It is a property of our critical consciousness (observation) to question and examine objects and ideas. This is a useful and essential gift. It can also be ruthless and destructive. It is possible, for example, to so examine and observe the love we hold for someone (or them for us), that doubts enter in and crush it. Love does not exist for examination but for loving. The same is true for noetic experience. We may know God. We can also overthink such knowledge into oblivion.

In summary, I would suggest to anyone struggling with "knowing" God, not to overthink the problem. Sing more, think less. Sing from the heart. Sing in the presence of the icons. If at all possible, join in the singing in the services of the Church (I know this is not possible everywhere). St. Paul says:

...be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord in your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In prayer, work to be present where you are and don't engage in thinking and observation during that time. Do not watch yourself praying! The Fathers speak of "nepsis," or "watching." It is not an *active* watching (observation) but a guarding against intrusive thoughts and distractions. God called to the child Samuel. The child responded, "Here I am!" That is the place of prayer and noetic awareness. +Fr. Stephen Freeman

Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church

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Lord's Day – 3-3-2019 Parish phone: 814-734-3801

Find us on the Web at: www.orthodoxcrossingville.org

GLORY TO JESUS CHRIST! GLORY BE FOREVER!

SUNDAY OF MEATFARE — Tone 7. Sunday of the Last Judgment. Martyr Eutropius of Amasea, and with him Martyrs Cleonicus and Basiliscus (ca. 308). St. Piama, Virgin (337). Ss. Zeno and Zoilus.

PLEASE INCLUDE THESE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN YOUR DAILY PRAYERS: Those in need – Fr. Samuel, Fr. Andrew, Fr. David, Fr. Anthony, Mat. Gail, Mat. Donna, Mat. Pirsilla, George, Paul, Pearl, William, Mary B., Rich A., Karen, John, Mary, Stavros, Theona, Nickolas, Timothy, Theresa, Judy, Delani, Jeremiah, Megan, Mary, Timothy The Homebound...Ann, Tanya, Richard, Helen, Ruth, William, Claudia... Travelers.- Dankos, Rachoockis, Deminenkos, ... Catechumens and Inquirers – Grace and Christian, Bill and Kathy ... Military servers...Greg ...Newly Departed – Rodney Senyo, Josephine Olnvik – Marilyn Filipos, Irene Hoovler,.. . . Departed Orthodox Catherine, John B., John S., Nickoli, Ann, Katherine, Vernon, Paul, James, Andrew, Peter, Paul, Margaret, Michael Mary Ann, Timothy... Special requests... Gilbert, Anthony, Ian, Paul, Daleen, James, Sean, Liam, Susan, James, Joel, Jen, Roger, Jasmine, Cassandra, Raquel, Zera, Kim, Jim, Margaret, Loren, Nick, Russell

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 Lenten 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 unquenchable fire,//

and make me worthy to stand at Your right hand, O Righteous Judge!

Tone 3 Prokeimenon

Great is our Lord, and abundant in power, His understanding is beyond measure. (Ps 146/147:5)

v: Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God! (Ps 146/147:1)

Tone 8

Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

v: Come, let us rejoice in the Lord! Let us make a joyful noise to God our Savior! (Ps 94/95:1)

v: Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise. (Ps 94/95:2)

Holy Scripture:

1 Corinthians 8:8-9:2 (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? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? Are you not my work in the Lord? If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.

Matthew 25:31-46 (Gospel)

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also

will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

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. Orthodoxy 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 - 12-1pm

+Parish Council Meeting: Tuesday, March 5th - 6:00pm

+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. 9th

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 Coat: 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 - 9am -Retreat to follow, confession will be available for families and youth following the retreat – Great Vespers will be at 4pm.

Holy Words: "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 them. 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 refers to an 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.