

Monastic Scribe VII: July 23, 2021

WHO AM I? WHO ARE YOU?

It is said that Saint Francis of Assisi would include these words in his final prayers of the day each night before going to bed. He would say, "God, who am I?" and "God, who are you?" This is a profound insight, one that has made me rethink some of my thoughts and beliefs in God and myself before this God. What I have come to realize is that the answer to these two questions is very much related and inter-twined. I cannot really know myself if I do not know God. And I cannot know God without knowing myself.

I do not mean knowing God in theological or abstract terms. God is a mystery and we cannot ever really know God. But we can experience God and actually do experience God daily but our antennae are often clogged from interference of other experiences. First of all, we need to clear out some of our poor images of God that we have been carrying around since childhood. God is not distant, apart from everyday life but is present in everyone and everything. God is the force of evolution driving our world forward to greater oneness and consciousness. In other words, God is Love, the energy of all creation. And even people who do not know much about God in religious terms can know God if they are immersed in love.

And where do I fit in and my search to know who I am? This is where the hard work comes in - to really know myself, my true self, and accept this self is a life-long project. We are all at different places along the road to self-knowledge and self-acceptance. Some can put this work off by being immersed in distractions, in self-centered pursuit of external power, affirmations and false images of self.

Children need to be made to feel special, to have their ego built up. We all have to develop a strong ego to cope with our world. But this often, if not always, means developing a false self, one that is developed to please parents, teachers, the boss, even friends. Eventually, if we pay attention, we begin to know something more authentic is needed. This can bring about a midlife crisis, or a conversion.

Who am I? Can I see myself as others see me or do I deflect the insights they might bring to me through denial, wearing a mask, acting out roles to cover up

Monastic Scribe VII: July 23, 2021

who I really am? Can I see that my reactions to people who annoy or whom I dislike really should tell me something about myself? I can resist the call to honesty, freedom, authenticity of self. The stumbling block is often the need to be vulnerable. How we resist that! But being vulnerable and being free not to care what others think is a real break-through. It is what we admire in small children and often in elders who are content with their lives, despite any pain and suffering they might have endured.

There are some ways to know oneself better. Sharing what is inside with another person, putting into words what we are feeling, being very honest with another. This requires great trust – and vulnerability! A second help is in journaling. Writing what I feel is often revelatory – “I didn’t know I felt that way!” I often read my journal from a previous year and am surprised what I find. I may have written something which only now makes sense! A third help is to read about the Enneagram and the nine personality types. Most of us laugh when the propensities of our personality type are laid before me. Accepting them, along with the way my type finds healing and honesty really do help.

That brings us back to knowing God. When we honestly do know and accept ourselves, when we are comfortable with being a dependent creature like all the other creatures on this earth, when we can accept our mortality along with our defects and sins – then we can let God into our lives. And, finally, getting to know Jesus in his humanity leads us to his divinity and ours as well.

I have been humbled and grateful for the people who have responded to some of my former blogs. The honesty in sharing their struggles, doubts, uncertainties is very impressive. I am thankful to them. If you would like to share your thoughts with me, do drop me a line at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org I thank you!

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.