

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Personal Knowledge of God Third Week of Advent Monday, December 14, 2015
8:15 AM Nm 24:2-7, 15-17a; Mt 21:23-27 **St. John of the Cross** (You have to plumb the depths of God yourself. We have to enter into the thicket of suffering.)

Today we have the memorial of the great **St. John of the Cross**, one of the great teachers and doctors in the history of the Church. His subject was the personal knowledge of God insofar as human beings can have that on earth. So we have to keep this in mind; this is what **he is talking about: the mystery of Christ insofar as we can have a share of it on earth**. Some people call this **mysticism**.

One of the first things that he marks or says about this kind of knowledge, if you want to call it knowledge—it's a knowledge of a sort; it's a knowledge of a spiritual, divine kind of knowledge. It is very different from knowledge of the world. And the biggest difference is this: **knowledge of the world is transferable**. If someone discovers something about gravity, that can eventually spread to everybody; everyone can understand this new understanding of gravity or insight about gravity. It's transferable. **That's the very nature of science**. That's why there are journals. New discoveries are vetted and shared and studied and questioned, and so on; and gradually, piece by piece, we learn about nature, about the world.

Not so when it comes to God. **Knowledge of God is not transferable**. I hate to put it so boldly, but you're on your own. **You have to plumb the depths of God yourself**. You can't get it from somebody else. **The Holy Spirit will come to you, and the Holy Spirit will be your teacher**. **It** doesn't mean we don't learn from others, but we don't get what they have, that is, **their understanding doesn't become our understanding, because understanding itself is so personal**. God deals with each person specifically in accord with that person's need and nature. That's the first thing we have to note.

Secondly, **we will not even begin the quest for understanding God unless God already**

leads us to it, what John calls blessings of the senses and the intellect. What does he mean? He means that **we have to experience something** that doesn't fit into the consensus of what the world tells us is so. Now this was true in the sixteenth century when the consensus of the world involved a whole very large spiritual dimension. Today it's even more true because the consensus of the world doesn't involve any spiritual dimension. So **God graces us with experiences that cause us to ponder: well, what is the meaning of that? What is that supposed to be about? How does that fit into my life?** And this can be **either experiences, which he calls blessings of the senses, or it could be some sort of understanding that comes, as it were, out of the blue.** These are graces. These are blessings. **These are the works of the Holy Spirit. And that's what leads us into this quest for knowledge of God.**

But then he goes on to say that **we will never make any progress unless we are willing to enter into the thicket of suffering.** That's why he is called John of the Cross. Now is this universally true or just true for him? Well, I don't know. He believed it was a general truth, that **if we want to grow in knowledge of God, we have to grow in knowledge of God through Jesus and specifically through his suffering.** And that's how we learn. And I think he has a good point because if you look at the world, what you see all the time is all this enormous suffering. Well, **the suffering itself must be part of the meaning of the world.** It can't be something extraneous that doesn't belong here. That's his point. Use that, through the Cross of Christ, **to find your purpose and your meaning,** and thereby grow in understanding who God is and what God is calling us to.