



*Fr. Richard Rohr | Daily E-mail | Week Four*

## Knowing and Not Knowing

### **A Hidden Wholeness**

Sunday, January 26, 2020

Alongside all our knowing must be the equal and honest “knowing that I do not know.” That’s why the classic schools of prayer spoke of both *kataphatic* knowing—through images and words—and *apophatic* knowing—through silence and symbols. *Apophatic* knowing allows God to fill in all the gaps in an “unspeakable” way, beyond words and within the empty spaces between them. The apophatic way of knowing was largely lost to Western Christianity during the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, and we have suffered because of it. As the churches wanted to match the new rationalism of the Enlightenment with what felt like solid knowing, they took on the secular mind instead of what Paul calls “knowing

spiritual things in a spiritual way” (1 Corinthians 2:13). We dismissed the unique, interior access point of the mystics, poets, artists, and saints.

Strangely enough, this unknowing offers us a new kind of understanding, though we have an old word for it: *faith*. Faith is a kind of knowing that doesn't need to know for certain and yet doesn't dismiss knowledge either. With faith, we don't need to obtain or hold all knowledge because we know that we are being held inside a Much Larger Frame and Perspective. As Paul puts it, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known myself” (1 Corinthians 13:12). It is a knowing *by participation with*—instead of an *observation of* from a position of separation. It is knowing subject to subject instead of subject to object.

It took me years to understand this, even though it is straight from the Franciscan school of philosophy. *Love must always precede knowledge*. The mind alone cannot get us there, which is the great arrogance of most Western religion. Prayer in my later years has become letting myself be nakedly known, exactly as I am, in all my ordinariness and shadow, face to face, without any masks or religious makeup. Such nakedness is a falling into the unified field underneath reality, what Thomas Merton (1915–1968) called “a hidden wholeness,” [1] where we know in a different way and from a different source. This is the contemplative's unique access point: knowing by union with a thing, where we can enjoy an intuitive grasp of wholeness, a truth beyond words, beyond any need or capacity to prove anything right or wrong. This is the contemplative mind which Christianity should have directly taught, but which it largely lost with tragic results for history and religion.

### **Gateway to Action & Contemplation:**

*What word or phrase resonates with or challenges me? What sensations do I notice in my body? What is mine to do?*

### **Prayer for Our Community:**

*O Great Love, thank you for living and loving in us and through us. May all that we do flow from our deep connection with you and all beings. Help us become a community that vulnerably shares each other's burdens and the weight of glory. Listen to our hearts' longings for the healing of our world. [Please add your own intentions.] . . . Knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God, amen.*