

Faith as Unknowing

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 11, 2019

Fr. Tony Davis

It is assumed that faith brings with it a special kind of knowledge. If one has faith, one has access to know things that the average person wouldn't know. While it's true that faith does bring knowledge, that is only half of the picture. That is the half we like. But it is also true that faith brings unknowing as well. Oftentimes, faith gives us more questions than answers. So while we like knowing more, both knowing and unknowing are part of faith.

In our Second Reading from the *Letter to the Hebrews*, we hear about our 'father in faith,' Abraham. Abraham's faith was definitely a mixture of knowing and unknowing. On the one hand, through faith he knew God that would provide for him. That was why he was able to leave his relatives and set out for a new land. On the other hand, this very same faith would lead him into the unknown. As today's reading said, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go." Both knowing God would provide and not knowing exactly where to go were acts of his deep faith.

Then, our Gospel today from *Luke* calls direct attention to the part of faith we normally neglect: the unknowing. As Jesus said, "you too must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come." The whole point of the parable is that we are to always be ready because we do not know when Jesus will return. Truth be told, we don't need to know when the end will come. That is part of faith. Yet, whole groups of Christians (more fundamentalist) have wasted so much time and energy

into calculating the date and time that Jesus will come again. They do this because they think faith is just about knowing (often with a hint of arrogance) and cannot deal with unknowing.

Karen Armstrong, a religious historian, thinks that religion can't afford to lose the unknowing side of faith. Unknowing can be one of religion's greatest assets. She writes, "the pursuit of knowledge is exhilarating, and science, medicine, and technology have dramatically improved the lives of millions of people. But unknowing remains an essential part of the human condition. Religion is at its best when it helps us to ask questions and holds us in a state of wonder." (*Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, 118) In other words, faith and religion, like with Abraham, should take us into the places where we don't exactly know where we're going. That is where we encounter God, a God who is so much bigger than our comfortable thought patterns and routines.

Faith involves both knowing and unknowing.

Question: How comfortable am I with faith being about unknowing?

Having faith doesn't mean having all the answers. It means that we have enough trust that God will provide in spite of not knowing where we are going.