A close up of a sign

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**The Journey School**

**“Playing with God”**

**Excerpted from**

***God Is Love: The Heart of All Creation***

**Fr. Thomas Keating**

*I was his delight day by day,*

*playing before him all the while,*

*playing over the whole of the earth,*

*having my delight with human beings.*

*Now, children, listen to me:*

*Happy are they who keep my ways. ...*

*Happy the one who listens to me,*

*attending daily at my gates,*

*keeping watch at my doorposts;*

*for whoever finds me finds life.*

Proverbs 8:30-35

We might ask the question: Well, is this journey of life and this evolutionary process that we are immersed in, is it always so serious a situation? In other words, maybe we take it too seriously. And it is serious – heavens! Being created out of nothing is ... I don’t know what you’d do without some kind of guidance or help. But it seems that God has created everything with a certain tenderness and humor and playfulness. Even in the Book of Wisdom we hear that God delighted to be living with men and playing with them.

Well, this raises the question: What games does he play? So, let’s take a look at some of the games. Certainly “Hide and Seek” is a favorite game; that is to say, God hides and we keep seeking! And once in a while he pokes out or tosses out some sign of his presence. You don’t get the whole of God, I guess, because that would complete the game. That’s the end-game – that’s permanent union.

But while living in this world, God can only share or spoon-feed us or even use a kind of eye-dropper to give us just a little bit of God because, if he presented himself as he is, especially in his essence, we would just disappear into a grease spot. It would be too much, too bright a light – we would be blinded by it. And even when he does, in states of purification, turn-up the lights, they are so bright that the soul experiences darkness and absence rather than the Presence.

I remember in one retreat, the retreat master spoke of what it would be for us if we were able to create a little clay person and this person started bawling us out for what we did or didn’t do that he approved of. Well, having created out of nothing, I guess, most humans would just take one slap and knock this clay figure to smithereens. But God doesn’t do that. He allows himself to be insulted and criticized and denied and all that. And at the same time, the ridiculous character of this clay man must strike him as funny. Certainly, we see this humorous side in Jesus. Some of the parables are deliberately kind of ridiculous – like a camel going through the eye of a needle. Or, the way he sometimes deals with the disciples, taking their foibles into account and not blaming them, but inviting them to ever more integrated and fully human kinds of action.

Meanwhile, God is seeing whether we want to play. And if we’re too stuffy or staid or so on, he chooses games that are more in line with our tastes; otherwise, we wouldn’t play.

So obviously God is careful not to get too rough, otherwise we would get sick or die or something. So it has to be adapted to each one’s capacity or understanding. But

to realize that there’s a playful side to creation and the spiritual journey – it might be helpful not to think that it’s always serious or so serious that we can never smile or relax or challenge God to certain gestures that we might introduce into the game.

So it’s this marvelous psychological and spiritual, but realistic kind of interaction that relationship, when we look at it in the full possibilities of this concept, implies that we can relate to God in this intimate, close partnership, while at the same time confiding and depending and trusting God in everything we do – and recognizing our nothingness. Perhaps the sense of God’s playfulness would help us to realize that the spiritual journey is mostly God’s work. And so we don’t have to conform to some particular pattern of discipline but can choose whatever is most effective for our needs, as far as we can see it.

And obviously those practices will continue to change as our relationship deepens and we see how God functions. I think I’ve said earlier that we might think of a new role for God in our time as our psychiatrist or our psychoanalyst, if you will. Because he knows us through and through, and all the obstacles to our spiritual progress, and all the conditions that have limited our partial freedom at least, to make a choice that is really our own in circumstances. And this enables God to lead us ever so gently.

And you can’t expect to know what the result is – whether you’re winning or losing. Because sometimes one feels you’ve lost everything – you just can’t handle this particular game, and it doesn’t seem like a game anymore but a terrible chore, and so on. But the goodness of God is never questionable. And so when we start wanting to win the game, that’s the end of the game because it’s meant to be fun. The purpose of a game is to have fun.

So people even pray to win and I think they miss the point; because who’s the judge?

And the game has its own rules and God sometimes is the referee, you might say. But most of the time he plays the game too. And so God doesn’t have to know what he’s doing; whatever he does is God. So, he has the freedom to do anything. Or, not to do anything. Or, the freedom to be identified with each of us or not to be. So, let God play.