

Turning to the Mystics



Dialogue: The Fourth Mansion

Jim Finley: [music] Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. [bell]

Kirsten Oates: Hello, everyone, and welcome to Turning to the Mystics. In this season, we're turning to the mystic St. Teresa of Ávila and looking at her wonderful book the Interior Castle. I'm here with Jim, and we're excited to be talking about mansion four. I'm so excited to be talking to you today about the fourth mansion. As I was preparing, the questions were just flowing. And I'm just so excited to enter into this dialogue with you and learn more. It's a beautiful mansion, and it's full of content, lots of different ideas and things to learn. So, I wanted to start where she starts in chapter one, where she says, "Now is when we enter the realm of the supernatural." And I just wanted to start there and ask you, what does she mean by that? What's she talking about?

Jim Finley: Yes. I think for her what she means is that in the first three mansions, our experience is still an experience of our self in ego consciousness illumined by faith. And so, it's through faith that we are able to first hear that God's present in our life in a way that experientially becomes real to us, and we enter the mansion of our own soul. There are all those struggles. The struggle deepens and gets more pure in the second mansion, these traumatic bondings we have to keep releasing from. And then it matures in the third mansion, psychological spiritual maturity. So that's mediated grace concretized in the human experience on this earth, which is efficacious unto holiness.

So, there is this faith. The fullness of faith is love, and it's filled with hope that when we die and pass through the veil of death, we'll pass into unmediated, infinite union with the infinite life of God. We're destined to share in God's own life as perfectly as God shares in it in our nothingness without God. So what the supernatural then is, is that God doesn't wait until we're dead to begin to give us tastes of an unmediated divinity flowing into the substance of our soul. And so, this is not something then mediated through insight, belief, meditation, and reflection. This is an unexpected intimate influx of the unexplainable presence of God poured into the very substance of our subjectivity. And she's calling that supernatural.

Kirsten Oates: Wow. I need to sit with that for a minute. There's a lot in there.

Jim Finley: Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: So, this is a taste of what we might experience on the other side of death, which will be an infinite union?

Jim Finley: That's exactly right. It's a foretaste of paradise. It's a foretaste of paradise. And don't forget this is how she began her book, that if we understand heaven as where God lives, God lives in the seventh interior mansion of your soul, your soul is God's heaven. But it's hidden through these layers of attachments, and so on, see? And so, as these layers get purified in the first three, then what happens in the fourth is the layer of finiteness itself becomes translucent to the divine. So instead of finite consciousness of the Infinite One with us, there is this influx where our subjectivity becomes translucent to this divine influx of communion

with us as the very reality of our life, and it comes as an intimate surprise that happens to you while you're praying.

And so, what she's writing for is because she knows this can be confusing, and because it's often subtle, it can go on for quite some time even before you understand what's happening. And so, to understand what's happening and how to cooperate with it so you can go deeper still. This is her, this is Teresa then as turning to the mystics for guidance. This is now the mystic teacher who's teaching us as we enter into this crossing over into these more unitive phases of the journey.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And this is really the expertise of the mystic, this dimension of our existence.

Jim Finley: It is. I think for many people—and she would say this, too—I think for many people graced in this way, they don't talk about it with anybody. They find their way through prayer, and through the Scriptures, and their life. They just quietly are this way. But Teresa's one of these people who's also called then to help others find their way. And so, we're listening. She's speaking out of her own experience because she knows because this is what happened to her. And as a contemplative spiritual director, she's helped people find their way. And so, she's writing this down so she can help us find our way. And that's our link into the lineage, the mystical lineage, through Teresa.

Kirsten Oates: And just hearing you describe where we're at in her journey, this turning to the supernatural, it's really, this is at the heart of the mystery of who we are and what it means to be a human being. And we're right on that tipping point of the mystery of ourselves.

Jim Finley: That's true. I want to say it now in a way that she tends not to say it. I want to say it poetically to make the point, that who we are, the mystery of who we are does not begin with our emergence on the earthly plane on this earth. Rather, who we ultimately are is who we are hidden with Christ in God before the origins of the universe, that God is father, God is mother, God is origin. It's expressing himself, expressing himself as the Word, contemplates himself in the Word, and then contemplates you in the Word as a capacity for God, as the capacity, and that's your identity. So, in a way, you're starting to join God in knowing who God knows you to be before the origins of the universe as the actualization of fulfillment, like this. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. So, I am a capacity for God in one way, and that's what we'll be learning about—

Jim Finley: Exactly, that's our destiny.

Kirsten Oates: --in this mansion.

Jim Finley: We're a capax Dei. The way Dan Walsh said it at the monastery is that following Duns Scotus who said, "Imagine you have a glass, and you fill it up with water. And you keep pouring the water, and the water's overflowing. There's no more water in there. It's overflowing." Likewise, there's no capacity for love in God, because God is love. So God creates the capacity to receive the infinite love that God is in you. God creates a capax Dei. And you experience it in the first three mansions mediated through inspirations, through

consolations, through aspirations. And now, this is the first string of unmediated flow of this love transforming us into itself. And this is what's starting to happen in the fourth mansion. And then, she starts giving very practical, experiential ways to discern that this is happening to us and how to cooperate with it.

Kirsten Oates: In chapter one, she talks about the poisonous creatures that she mentioned in the previous mansions. And she says, "Poisonous creatures rarely enter these dwellings." But then she goes on to say, "[. . .] it is helpful to have some of them around launching a few battles in the soul. If there were no temptations, the spirit of evil could more easily slip in and deceive the soul about the spiritual delights she is being given by God."

Jim Finley: Here's a good example, and she's going to do this all the way through the fourth, all the way through. This is her pastoral wisdom. Let's say, again, these reptiles—what does she call them here—poisonous creatures?

Kirsten Oates: Poisonous creatures.

Jim Finley: Let's say that the internalized forces that compromise and violate our destiny in love. So, in the first mansion, a lot of that goes on. The second mansion, it gets deeper. You meet it in its origins. You work it through. And in the third mansion, it kind of stabilizes. It's less so. You're more grounded in the love and the commitment, walking the walk kind of thing. So when you start crossing over into this state, there's even less of it around. Because the love, this state of sustained attentiveness infused with love, this communion in love, becomes so atmospherically present there are even less of those things roaming around.

But she's saying it wouldn't be good for us if there weren't any because we would rest on our laurels, and also, we'd be satisfied there like we thought we had arrived. But we're only in the fourth mansion. We have several more to go. It's eternal. And, therefore, these struggles that we have, we get upset or lose our temper, we get discouraged, we get overwhelmed. These are good for us, because they remind us we're just a human being, and we're not exempt from the human condition. And there's a humility, the willingness to walk with our limitations and stress. And everyone's working with some darn thing. But if we let it, they become our teachers. They help us hand it over to God, accept ourselves as we are, that kind of thing.

Kirsten Oates: We learn to do for ourselves what we hope to do for others.

Jim Finley: Yeah. We learn to do for ourselves with God's grace who empowers, and God does it for us by transforming us in this love, that there's heightened capacities to be spaciouly present in love that's qualitatively richer than what we were capable of before. And we can see that change is happening, and we can be more that way with others.

Kirsten Oates: She says, "Although generally a person must have lingered long in the previous dwellings before entering this one, there are no rules about that."

Jim Finley: Yes, I think, like with me, for example, when I went to the monastery, it was in the

monastery, I was nineteen years old, is when I got my first massive experience of this. And I was eighteen. So, sometimes, when quite young, we're granted a gift we spend the rest of our life learning to be faithful to. But if you're given the gift when you're still young, when you still have unfinished business, then in the taste of that gift, you still have to do your homework to bring your physiology and psychology into alignment with the love that awakened you.

And so, it comes as it comes. It's given to whom it's given. And so, this is where we are. And to some degree then, you and I and everyone listening to this, insofar as this rings true to us at all bears witness that in some degree, we've already been given it. Because if we haven't been given it, we wouldn't be drawn to it. And Thomas Merton says somewhere, "The very fact you're seeking God means you've already found God. Or deeper still, God has already found you, or you wouldn't be seeking God." And so, it's in that tone, I think. We're on this path, and here we are listening to Teresa help us get our bearings, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). She talks about the difference between spiritual sweetness and consolations in prayer. And when she talks about spiritual sweetness, Jim, is this the shift she's talking about, the ways?

Jim Finley: Yeah, this is the first shift. So, she's starting to say how do we move this into experiential terms? Because she's talking about, really, discerning the nature of what's happening to you when you pray, and sometimes it happens to you when you're not praying. But let's say it happens in prayer, and this is the first thing, she's saying. And different translations use different words—consolations, sweetness. Say sweetness refers in the first three mansions to the experience of an inner warmth of the presence of God. Like there's a certain sweetness in the beauty of our faith, in the beauty of Christ, in the beauty of love, there's a sweetness. But, really, it's kind of a graced illumination of our nature.

She even says that a lot of it is the effect of our own virtue. It's the effect of our own God-given virtue, and it's like that. She says but what starts to happen with consolation is you're sitting there, and this influx of God's love starts flowing into you. And she says that you realize your heart is being enlarged to divine proportions. Later, she's going to use the imagery of water. And she says just imagine a basin filling up with water, and it overflows. That's the first three mansions. But what if your heart is the basin flowing with water? And instead of overflowing, the basin keeps getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. And so, you realize the infinite love flowing into you is transforming your heart into the infinite proportions of itself. And so, your very subjectivity is being metamorphosized in love, and that's the intimacy of the experience.

Kirsten Oates: I want to read this section. She says, "What I'm trying to say is that earthly satisfactions spring from our own nature and end in God; spiritual sweetness begins in God and makes its way into our human nature where we delight in it far more than we enjoy the worldly kind of gratification."

Jim Finley: That's right. Let's say ultimately everything is from God. But then assuming that

everything is from God, here we are in our nature. And so, the purest translation uses sweetness for these psychological experiences and consolations for the mystical. I think Mirabai Starr—

Kirsten Oates: I see.

Jim Finley: --uses sweetness for the mystical.

Kirsten Oates: Which is what I'm using.

Jim Finley: And—

Kirsten Oates: Yes, okay. Good. I was getting confused there.

Jim Finley: --another translation uses another translation of how they use these words. So, I'm going to use Peers' word for sweetness, her consolations—

Kirsten Oates: Okay, yeah.

Jim Finley: --is that the sweetness that I feel in prayer and the sweetness that I feel in loving and being loved by others is a sweetness that begins in me in my desire to live in fidelity to love. All things considered, what's the most loving thing I can do right now for myself, this person, this community, this form of service that I'm called to? What's the most loving way? And so, it begins in me and reaches out to God. I aspire and I strive to God by moving along this path. But this consolation begins in God. It flows into us. It has a certain boundaryless quality about it that overflows the banks of anything that I could be attributed to as its cause, hence the feeling of amazement. It's like something amazing is happening to this influx of this love.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for clarifying that. And I should say, I am using Mirabai's version of *The Interior Castle*, and you've got Peers'.

Jim Finley: And Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, they have their own translation. And if you're going to say like doing serious Bible study, you could lay out all three translations-- If you don't know the Spanish. --and do text comparisons where you could kind of-- But I think each one of them in their own way is internally consistent with how they use it, and that's why it works. It's fine. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: They're consistent about what's happening, but they're using it differently?

Jim Finley: Yeah. In other words, what's happening here—and this is the beginning of the mystical—what's happening is something amazing is happening to me, and it's not coming from me nor is it anything that I could possibly explain in terms of my efforts to reach it. And even though I could no way be the one who's making this happen, it's happening anyway. So, something's happening to me that doesn't have its origins in my efforts and desires. It's like that, I'm being overtaken, a coup d'état in love in a way.

Kirsten Oates: She talks about an instance of that happening to her, and she says, "It was driving me crazy to see the faculties of my soul calmly absorbed in remembrance of God while my thoughts,

on the other hand, were wildly agitated.”

Jim Finley: This is the next distinction that she makes. And don't forget, at the fourth mansion here, we're still at the cusp between two worlds. We're still in the third mansion where we're crossing over into the mystical. So, she says what happens, which is characteristic of this mansion, she says thought tends to move very fast; understanding comes very slow. As a matter of fact, she uses the word meek. It's very meek.

Furthermore, she talks about a deeper way to understand what it means to understand because the understanding is grounded in love. So at one level, you're sitting there quietly resting in this influx of this love pouring into you, and at the same time appearing in your thoughts, one translation says like a clanking mill—clickety-clack, clickety-clack. Your thoughts are going on up here, but you don't let that pull you away. You notice that it's happening, but the essence of what's happening isn't found in that. It's found in the quietness of an understanding, in this deepened understanding what it means to understand in this love that's flowing into you like that. So, that's the experience.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, the thoughts don't completely stop? It is not necessary that the thoughts completely stop to have this experience.

Jim Finley: That's right. Now, later on, they will stop. With the fifth mansion, they stop. And even here, they momentarily stop. There's like a hiatus in thinking. You're just resting. She says that the time comes to think less and love more. She says we need to know more than we think, and we need to know what's given in the understanding established in love. So, this is the language where she starts shifting qualitatively into this mode. But then, her very writing shows then you can think about that, because that's her book.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah.

Jim Finley: See. It has a certain pastoral order to it. There's a certain pragmatic guidance that you can recognize patterns, how to be faithful to it, how to move. It's the artistry of it all. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: This is reminding me of something I did want to ask you at the beginning because she says as she writes the fourth mansion that she pauses to surrender herself again to the Holy Spirit, that from this point on, he can take over and speak for me. And it made me wonder, Jim, just how you get into a space of being able to talk about these things.

Jim Finley: Well, first of all, I want to draw an example where I think everyone has a taste of it. The example that I use is imagine there's someone you care about a lot, and imagine they're struggling with something. They're really at their wit's end, and as they struggle, out of your love for them, you say something. And what you say helps, and you don't know how you knew how to say that. It's very much like that. See, it's almost like something given out of love and it was more flowing through you than from you, and you were channeling mercy, like this. So for me, how I feel it when I talk like this, I feel it's kind of an openness to, how I feel it is, it's like getting out of the way and an openness to a flow of words that just come flowing out all by themselves. It's what it feels like to me.

But I also feel that they flow all by themselves. But as I'm watching it, I'm discerning that they're true to the spirit of the tradition itself, that it's in fidelity to the lineage being

embodied in the exchange but it just happens by itself. And what helps me do it is the sincerity of the one asking the question, like the questions you're asking me. It's your presence and representative of the people listening to these questions that then makes it a channeling into the sincerity of the question, which also is the very fact the seeker is asking such a question is itself a gift from God because without God's grace, we're not able to ask questions like this. [music]

Kirsten Oates: Jim, thank you for sharing your own personal experience. That's really helpful. And I'm sure we'll come back to that. I wanted to ask you, there are a couple of terms used in the book, and I just wanted you to help us understand them. So, Teresa talks about two types of prayer in the fourth mansion. She talks about the prayer of recollection that comes before the prayer of quiet.

Jim Finley: Yeah, here's the sense of it, I think. That in the first three mansions, when we pray—and, again, the different translations use different words for it, but this is the meaning of that word—in the first three mansions, we begin with *Lectio Divina*, we take a text which God speaks to us, say a word of Jesus in the Gospel, then we engage in a loving dialogue with God. And she says if God speaks to you and that speaks to your heart, then when you talk to God, imagine you're leaning in real close and whispering in God's ear, and God's infinitely interested in everything you say, and understands it infinitely more than you do. Then you listen, and then God speaks to you again out of that exchange, which gives rise, also, to this deepening of this desire and the will to deepen this union. And that takes place through the faculties of the soul where you're thinking, reflecting, and desiring transformed by grace.

She's saying as you pray that way and then live that way, the prayer of quiet is what can start to happen to you in the midst of praying that way. And instead of you then sitting there with, in the fourth mansion, she says, comparing God's grace to water, whereas before, it seems you were crying out to God from afar, like, "Help me," and it required effort, namely effort in meditation practice, it takes an effort to do it. She says now what starts to happen in the quiet is the flow of grace comes without effort, there's no effort. And, also, it's not coming from afar, but from some sudden place, hidden place, inside of you.

And it's coming from some sudden place inside of you without effort that's metamorphosing your soul to the divine proportions of this grace flowing into you. And in that, you're quieted, like the reins fall from your hands. In a matter of fact, she says if you're in the middle of a meditation and this influx of love starts, always give priority to the influx of love. Don't tell God, "I'll get to you as soon as I finish my deep insight," like you're journaling or something. She says, as soon as it arises, learn to be supple or learn to be open to the fluctuations of this influx and go with it. Then when it subsides again, return to your meditation. She says you're always going back and forth, that kind of thing.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, wow. I have so many questions. The first one she says, the way we might know if that's happening to us, the prayer of quiet, the way you will know if you are humble is that you will not, that when the Beloved grants this blessing "remember humility! Humility! This is how the Beloved allows himself to be conquered and will do anything you want. The way you will know if you are humble is that you will not believe that you have earned these mercies and blessings from the Beloved nor that you will ever have them in your whole life." So, there's something just aligned to what you were saying about this is done to us without

efforts, the—

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: --and more out of humility. Is that—

Jim Finley: I want to use an example on human love.

Kirsten Oates: --a good contrast?

Jim Finley: Let's say what happens to someone who realizes they're beginning to fall deeply in love with someone who's falling in love with them, and they didn't see it coming. They didn't see it coming. And they feel amazed by it, grateful, and they're humbled. And then, they know it can't be explained in terms of their efforts to have fabricated it or have made it happen. It's a humble acceptance of a grace transformative experience in love. And so, you're humbled in that, in the midst of all your limitations and all the rest of it, that this is actually starting to happen to you. And then, it's in humility that we conquer God. God freely allows himself to be conquered by our humility. So then when we assent to God's advances in love in that humility of surrendering our self over like I'm not in charge here, this love flowing into me, transforming me is taking me to places I've not known before. And I think that's the feeling of it, I think.

Kirsten Oates: I can feel the tension inside myself around what you're saying because I long for that kind of experience with God. And yet, I'm being told the way to get to it is to not strive, to not put in effort.

Jim Finley: No, I think that's exactly right. But see, this is why. This is the way she talks. We're really at a point of spiritual direction. Let's say in hearing this, we're drawn to it because it's beautiful, like, "I want this," which is a gift. But then she's telling us not to strive. And I think what she's really saying is what you're doing is tempering your tendencies that somehow you can make this happen. That is, you've been touched by something without which you know your life will be forever incomplete, and by your own powers, you're powerless to consummate it. And this is where you sit in the presence of God. See? You sit because God's the author of this desire. And this desire for God is an echo of God's infinite desire for you. And so, you're sitting there in this place of a reverential, humble boldness of being openly attentive to what's happening to you. And then, it goes in the rhythms of that.

Kirsten Oates: And really, this is faith.

Jim Finley: This is—

Kirsten Oates: What you're describing, it sounds to me like faith that's--

Jim Finley: Yes, it's caritas; it's charity too. In other words, it is a knowing in faith but also the faith is a knowing of this love. It's understanding the science of love, and then the artistry of love. See, I'm learning here the first principles of this love. But what's the artistry in which it can be actualized in me in my prayers? So, if she were talking to us in spiritual direction, she would have us talk a little more about what this is like for us. And she would listen to us, and dialogue with us, and like that, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). There are a couple of things she says here that I'd love you to expand on, Jim. One is, she says, "The trouble is that since we think all we have to do is concentrate our thoughts on you, we can't even conceive of how to ask the ones who know the truth about this or comprehend how to frame the question in the first place."

Jim Finley: Yeah. Here's how I would put it. Back in the good old days when we were so holy, it was so clear. But now, not only do I not know the answer, I don't even know how to put the question. I'm beyond myself here, and precisely because it's so subtle, you know, it's so delicate, and I'm right in the midst of it. So, how do we tell God I need your help to help me find my way along? And then she is helping us to cooperate with God in this. It's an attitudinal stance in surrendering and being transformed in this love. And don't forget, this is personal, this fourth mansion. This fourth mansion might go on for several years. It's a way of life.

You don't click this off: "Let's get onto the fifth one. I'm busy. I have other things to get to." You can spend your whole life in the fourth mansion and live an amazing life. It's a gift. So, what we're really talking about is what happens when we sit and get very attentive and our heart opens up, and then we notice this starts. And then, it starts spilling over. She says some people, suddenly they're in the fourth mansion and they don't even know that got into it. Like, you're out in the middle of doing chores, and you're in fourth mansion consciousness of the chores. This is all love, this is all, so it's more along those lines, I think, yeah. To me, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And we can take comfort in those experiences that we have had that were the gifts. I know you've used examples. This might happen out in nature—

Jim Finley: Anywhere. That's what I was—

Kirsten Oates: --when we're with our children and with—

Jim Finley: It comes as it comes. Exactly, all these are modalities or outside of prayer. This will come later in the sixth mansion, too, the things that start to happen in prayer start happening to us when we wake up in the morning, or it starts happening to us when someone stops to ask us a question. It starts becoming more pervasively atmospheric through everything. So, we can look back to these little moments where there were little touchstones, and some of them didn't start in prayer at all. Like she said first mansion that you started in, you fall in love, or you lose love, or you struggle, and something serendipitously started sending you in this direction, and you learn to be grateful for that because now you know that God knows where all this was headed. And at the time, you didn't know that, and how mysterious God's ways are, that kind of thing.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). She says, "We suffer terrible trials because--" This was following on from we don't know how to ask the question. And then, she says, "We suffer terrible trials because we do not understand ourselves. We worry about things that we think are bad, but which are actually good things."

Jim Finley: It's like this. This is what I think it means. Let's say first of all, there are things which happen that we think are bad and they are bad because they're destructive, and they're hurtful, and they're threatening. But sometimes what happens is that we think something's bad because

we're stuck. We think something's bad because a certain habit we're trying to get past is still there, or something's bad because this person said something to us in a way. And really, maybe it isn't bad. Maybe you're being invited, like, despair or go deeper, despair or go deeper. And it wasn't bad, it was an invitational opening into a deeper place.

And the inverse is true, she says somewhere else. You can think something's good because it matches up with your wishes. But if your wishes keep getting fulfilled, it cuts short what we're talking about. So, this is this new kind of habituated way that we discern things in the light of this, we discern the events of our life in the light of this love and not by the criteria of how we perceive it in ego consciousness, but how we're being transformed in love's ways and how do we conduct our self?

Kirsten Oates: There's a beautiful section where she talks about the shepherd's call growing powerful, that the ties that had bound the faculties to external things and estrange them from him unravel, and they enter the castle.

Jim Finley: Yes. I want to give an image of this. That is a beautiful thing, like the shepherd's whistle, the shepherd's call. And the sheep know the call. They recognize the shepherd, the good shepherd. Imagine someone is deeply in love with someone. And imagine that the beloved, they imagine is somewhere far off. But imagine the beloved, the person who's deeply in love with, imagine here that the beloved's actually right there, and the beloved whispers your name and you know the beloved's voice.

So, you're sitting there in prayer, and it isn't just that God's speaking to you through the text, but you're actually hearing the tonal quality of God's voice personally talking to your heart, see? It's like that. It's like a new intimacy with the unmediated sense of the beloved's voice starting to address you. And something in your heart quickens, something in you. You recognize it. And yet when you turn to grasp it, you can't grasp it. And that's the quiet. See, that's where the quiet comes in. You can't. It's not for the having.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, just trying to get a sense of this in myself. So, in the first three mansions, I have faith in God. I pray to God. I talk to God. I hear God in the Scripture. I hear God in other people's words. You're at church, and the sermon sounded like it was meant for you. You hear something for you from the sermon. But when you were describing the shepherd, there's something much more personal. And in a way, it's the confirmation of my faith. There's a moment of confirmation that God is real, with me—

Jim Finley: Yes.

Kirsten Oates: --attentive to me. Is it like that?

Jim Finley: I think it is like that. That's one way to put it, is that I'm going along in these modalities and all of a sudden, there's an unexpected sense of the infinite love of God that is personally speaking in my heart that allows me to experience the tonal quality of God's own voice being revealed to me in love, in the interiority of my heart like an echo or a taste of something. So, when it's actually happening, it's too self-evident to doubt, and it's too deep to comprehend. And this is what she's really saying. Thomas Merton is saying this, too, it's not to play the cynic, not to doubt this, but to have kind of a childlike acceptance of what your own awakening heart knows is true, but it can't explain. Like that, yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And what you're also describing about that is it's almost like a deepening of our own interior experience of ourselves and God, like a place where we meet that we didn't necessarily have access to or—

Jim Finley: Yes. Because what it does, I think, here's a kind of thing she looks at. Let's look on this moment of union as being somehow incandescent with an unseen light. I want to use that image. And that moment illumines every detail of your life. That is as you start to see every aspect of your life in this unseen light of this union, or you hear the intonations of God's voice speaking to you in the rhythms and cadences of the people who are interacting with you, you start to see everything within the context of this divine voice, these fluctuating and these mediated presences. But now you're in the primal purity of the voice of God speaking unmediated way, too, but mediated through all those things, if that makes sense. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Is this what you meant earlier when you were saying there's a new way of understanding that—

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: --what it means to understand?

Jim Finley: Exactly right. So, let's say there's this thought. Then let's say there's this touch. You hear the master's voice. The master's voice produces a sense of quiet; that is, all of a sudden you pause because you don't want to make any noise that would disrupt the quietness of the voice. And then, in that quiet, which is really the cessation of the faculties of the soul, so the thought falls into the background, questions fall into the background. All that falls into the background. And then, in that attentiveness, she says, then, is a state of absorption.

And absorption is a state of quiet fascination like you're mesmerized. It's almost like what happens when you're in the midst of a beautiful sunset, or when you see people in an art museum before a work of art. You're kind of poised in an attentiveness, which she says, which isn't union, but it's a heightened accessibility of God to your heart. She said we need to be very careful not to seek absorption on purpose because you can get attached to it, because it could be a refined sense of ego. But to see really, it's a harbinger of an accessibility to a yet deeper influx of transformation that's to occur in the fifth mansion.

Kirsten Oates: So, Jim, how does she guide us in this fourth mansion? What is she telling us that we should do differently, or we could do differently in our day-to-day lives?

Jim Finley: Well, I think if she was with us here, I think she would listen to us first about who we are. Don't forget that she was a cloistered nun in the 16th century. She didn't live in Marina del Rey, California, you know. She wasn't out in the middle of leaf blowers out in the yard, or her cell phone rang.

Kirsten Oates: COVID-19.

Jim Finley: So, we have to adapt on how she'd listen to us first, and she would help us tune into how this is happening. And I'd put it this way. These are some ways with this. I think she would assume—it happens in other contexts, too; other, all traditions—it happens through our life. But in her sense, that in our faith, we're drawn to a daily quiet time like a rendezvous with

God. And in that rendezvous with God, we're sincere, and we're humble, and we're attentive in the hearing of the word, the dialogue, the desire, like this. And when the prayer ends, you ask God for the grace not to break the thread of that attentiveness as you go through the day.

You come back the next day, you reestablish the rendezvous. And then, what'll happen when you're sitting there like that, she says what starts to happen to some people is this starts to happen, that all of a sudden in reading where Jesus says, "Fear not," all of a sudden, it just isn't the deathless presence of Jesus speaking to you in the words in the Scripture, "Fear not," but in some way, you can understand the deathless presence of Jesus is telling you not to be afraid directly. It's the Lord's voice put inside of you. And she says I'm talking about these subtle transformations.

So, the prayer then isn't a method. The method is a kind of an obediential fidelity to these subtle stirrings of learning how to surrender to them, discern them, lean into them, walk with them, and see what God has in mind, like that. So, when you read her text, one, she reveals to us what's possible. She says this really does happen. And it helps you to discern that maybe, without recognizing it, it's already started to happen to you, and how can I learn to have faith in it, learn to live by it, and walk by it? And I would think that it's like that.

Kirsten Oates: Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, Jim, I'm just wondering, for those of us that are drawn to this and listening to what you say, that we want to go deeper into these mansions. And we're being told it's about surrender, it's about not making an effort. And I can feel my own human tendency to make a lot of effort to not make an effort, or to want to surrender, really make an effort to surrender so that I might attain this. And how do we handle that?

Jim Finley: Just like there's a deeper way to understand what it means to understand, there's also a deeper way to understand the nature of effort. And we'll use an example, too, as the way I'd put it. So, just as lovers cannot make their moments of oceanic oneness happen, they can assume the inner stance that offers the least resistance to oceanic oneness of love happening. Just as the poet cannot make the poem happen, the poet can assume the stance that offers the least resistance to the gift of poetry occurring. Just as the artist cannot make the beauty come out on the paper, whatever, but the artist can assume that stance that allows it. So, actually, another way of looking at it, this takes great effort. Buddhists would call it right effort, meaning effective effort.

It's the paradoxical effort of a kind of unforced determination to be faithful with all your heart to what's touched you. It matters very, very much, but you can't make it happen. And when you find yourself slipping and the zeal kicks in, like, "I'm going to get this," I think Teresa would say this. It's like, I'll be God talking, you catch yourself doing this: "You know, I'm really impressed by your zeal. Really, it touches me actually. But as you well know, zeal and that frequency being finite, doesn't access the infinite union you're seeking. And, therefore, you know that. You know that it doesn't hurt anything. I mean, go for it because the zeal will wind down all by itself. There's something sincere about it, but it keeps settling back into the humility. You don't have to try so hard because now we're talking about what I'm achieving in you, which is myself, not what you can achieve because what you can achieve by your own efforts is just more of yourself."

"But we all know how that works. So, if you give yourself to me so that I can achieve in

you, and so your zeal is unimportant because in this love that's growing between us, your very zeal is being metamorphosized all by itself. You don't have to worry about it. You just, whenever you catch yourself, take a deep breath, lean back into the surrender. And that's kind of a paradoxical activity of a certain-- "He's looked on his servant in her nothingness, henceforth all generations will call me blessed." That's the way, I think, because there's nothing half-hearted about her. You get the feeling if you'd sit with her, she's really talking about something that she's committed her whole life to. She's ardent. And so, to me, those kinds of distinctions help me about zeal and the refinement of zeal through love.

Kirsten Oates: Well, Jim, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom on the fourth mansion with us. It's very inspiring—

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: --and beautiful, and it's been a pleasure to talk about it.

Jim Finley: This reminds me again, this whole Turning to the Mystics, how grateful we are that God raises up people like this [music] and over the centuries, they still speak to us. Do you know what I mean? And now it's our turn to respond to this. It's amazing. Good.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. Please consider rating it, writing a review, or sharing it with a friend who might be interested in learning and practicing with this online community. To learn more about the work of James Finley, please visit jamesfinley.org. We'll see you again soon.