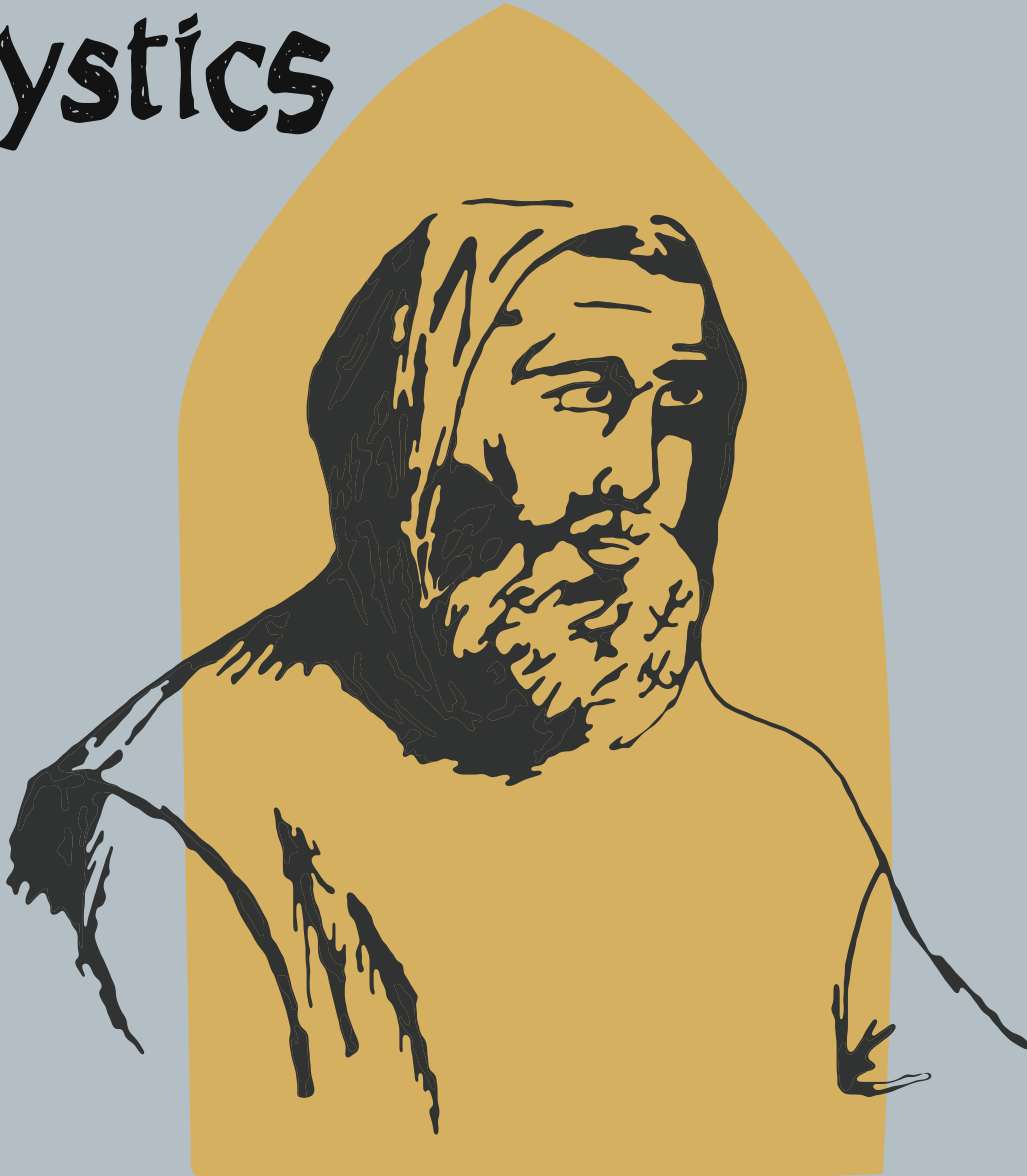


Turning to the Mystics



Guigo II

Session 2
with James Finley

- James Finley: Greetings, I'm Jim Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. Greetings everyone, and welcome to our time here together. Turning for guidance to the Christian mystic, Guigo II, that he offers us in his classic work, A Ladder of Monks. In the previous introductory session with Kirsten and then the following session, I was sharing with you that I think it was particularly helpful for us here in our reflections in this series of podcasts. Is that Guigo gives very practical experiential guidance in the practice of Lectio Divina, discursive reflective meditation, and prayer. As an actual experience, something like guidelines and how do we actually engage in these modes of seeking to deepen our experience of God's presence in our life.
- James Finley: We saw how he presents these teachings in the metaphorical image of a ladder to heaven, reaching from earth to heaven. So each rung of the ladder is a gray state of consciousness. And by stabilizing ourselves in the first state of consciousness, Lectio, how that evolves in a great state into a meditatio, a kind of a grace dialogue with God. Which evolves in this prayer which comes from the heart center this desire for deeper union with God. In this session then, we're going to turn to the fourth rung of the ladder which is contemplation.
- James Finley: And contemplation is significant here and distinct from the previous sessions in that by contemplation Guigo means infused contemplation or the point at which this deepening experiential awareness of God's presence in our life starts to become mystical in this infused contemplative state. And here a clarification, I think, is helpful. Is that in the first three rungs of the ladder, there are contemplative dimensions that are always present. Contemplation meaning what's always present in the Lectio is instinctively pause in taking in the beauty of a word heard, that God's speaking personally to us and we pause to contemplate that.
- James Finley: That is to quietly ponder it or to sit in the presence of that. And so too with meditation. In this loving exchange with God and this reflective consciousness, there's a natural contemplative pausing to let it soak in, to rest in it. And so too with prayer. Likewise, in each of these three states there are mystical awarenesses or true awarenesses of God's oneness with us. Mystical in this unexplainable sense of God's oneness with us in our body, God's oneness with us in our emotions, God's oneness with us in our senses, God's oneness with us in looking up to see the moon at night and so on.
- James Finley: But these states of contemplative mystical sensitivities in the first three rungs of the ladder, we think of as the awareness of God's oneness with us. But here what the mystics are concerned about is first they assume the importance of that. That we do our homework in that and we work on that. But what they're concerned about is knowing that it's not just that we become transformed in surrendering ourselves over to God's oneness with us. But we realize our destiny or our deepest identity is so not simply in God's oneness with us, but the sense in which we're one with God in God.
- James Finley: That is when we die and pass through the veil of death, we'll pass beyond these mediations or incarnations of God's infinite presence. Illumining our finite understanding, illumining our finite emotions, illumining are finite... And will we'll cross over into an infinite union with the infinite union with God as our destiny. And so what we're really talking about now with infused contemplation, the mystical state, is the grace awareness that God's with us is not waiting until we're dead to begin granting us this awareness of our oneness with God in God.

- James Finley: That is, God accesses us and grants us a taste or a sense of God's knowledge of God or a deepening experience of God's knowledge of who we are in God hidden with Christ in God before the origins of the universe. And it's this mystical union of the masters that is at the heart of all of these mystics that we're studying. For what they're doing is they're offering us guidance in how to discern this is starting to happen to us. Because we may think it comes with some lofty thing like a vision or a voice, and it is lofty. But what they're trying to help us to see it's lofty and it's disarming nearness. It's lofty in the surprising simplicity of it.
- James Finley: And how do we calibrate our heart to a fine enough scale to begin to pick up the subtlety of this infused state of a union with God in the senses transcending the senses? In the emotions transcending the emotions? And so on. The subtlety of it. And so each mystic that you see has his or her own way of helping us to see this based on their own experience. And the people that they saw in spiritual direction and are trying to offer this direction to us in their writings. And so Guigo is now offering his. And he's also offering it to us, as I pointed out in previous time with Kristen, is he was living as a hermit in solitude. That was his vocation.
- James Finley: We're called to experience it out here in the world in the midst of the daily work, in the midst of our relationships, in the midst of our challenges. How do we in the sincerity of our seeking begin to pick up this taste, this oneness of the mystical? And how do we in discerning it learn to cooperate with it? So this is how this is Guigo's teaching then on this. He begins to get at this. We have to back up a little bit and go back to prayer. So we're in the Lectio Divina like we were exploring earlier, and then there's the meditation and the prayer. In the prayer we might see is the sincerity, is devotional sincerity with God that is in this prayer.
- James Finley: Thomas Merton says, "Our prayer begins by simply accepting that we belong to God. And in belonging to God we sincerely seek to become more consciously aware of how deeply we belong to God. And we pray from our heart for this deepening realization of this union of God's oneness with us." "That in prayer," Guigo writes, this is section six, "I seek by reading and meditating what is true purity of heart and how it may have been had so that with its help I may know you if only a little, Lord. For long have I meditated in my heart seeking to see your face. It is the sight of you Lord that I have sought. And all the while in my meditation, the fire of longing, the desire to know you more fully has increased."
- James Finley: And so here he chooses as his passage for his letter. The passage, fear not for I'm with you always and whatever the passage we may choose. But his passage are the words of Jesus in the Beatitudes, blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God. And so he takes that in his Lectio, reflects upon it and so his prayer is, Lord, heal me from all that hinders me from having a pure heart. For as you promise me if my heart is pure I'll see you. That is if my heart is pure, I'll be free of what hinders me from realizing your infinite oneness with me in all things.
- James Finley: And I long for this purity of heart. I long to be so transformed by you into this purity in which is deep oneness between us, unexplainable eternal boundless might be realized. And it's in the longing. So Guigo gets that here then. Is a certain kind of quiet longing for this union. And here I want to give an example to see if this doesn't help to bring this home to where we get echoes of this in our daily life. Is it not true that in any transformational process, say in married love, being a mother or a father, being an artist or a poet or a

musician, or being drawn to surrender ourselves over to the beauty and art. Or to the cadence of the ineffable in poetry or in music to be moved by music.

James Finley: Or in a deep commitment to aloneness, to solitude, to be a solitary wander or to be one with the earth. Is it not true that our fidelity to these transformational things, the deeper we go the more we start to approach a certain realm of a depth? There's a certain realm of a certain kindness, subtle graciousness that we intuit, we viscerally sense that is boundlessly vast. And it's calling us to itself where it's we're being lured to surrender more deeply and to be evermore one with it. And there's that sincere longing to pass beyond our present level of oneness into a yet deeper level of oneness.

James Finley: And so it's our unconsummated longings for ever deeper oneness with the mystery as accessing us in the child, in the spouse, in the solitude, in the art, in the poetry, in service to the community is something that won't let us live on our own terms. And we seek to go deeper. And he's talking about how the echoes of that union he speaks of can happen in all those modes for us. But he's also saying it takes place in our daily rendezvous with God. Not how that's happening in our marriage or lack thereof or in our health or lack thereof or in our art or lack thereof or poetry or lack thereof, but how's it happening in the sincerity of our rendezvous with God?

James Finley: Sitting on it like an unlearned child like, "Here I am Lord." And in that sincerity there begins to open up in us this longing that's so subtle that's very... So it isn't lofty as in visions or inner locus, those things can happen. It's not that those don't happen. But really the essence of the matter is it's lofty in the depth of the nearness of it. It's inner most. And we have to maintain an inner attentiveness to this and stay long enough to begin to let it have its way with us. This is what he's talking about. And I think that's a gift for that.

James Finley: So we would find the place in our life where it's the most present, where it shimmers and shines here and there. And see if there isn't a certain kind of when we're there in that space and fidelity to it is in a way of praying, risen away. And then also then when we bring ourselves to prayer how it's continuous with that. So how are we then as we see this presence of God shining out intimations here and there? It's our life. So then when our daily rendezvous with God and sitting in the silent attentiveness, we see that those reverberations are reverberating in this very stillness where we sit empty handed in the presence of God created me.

James Finley: I desire this pure heart, Lord. Create in me this heart. For in the heart the deep oneness is deeper, ever deeper than my present level of oneness. I can just see it. Where I see you there calling me into this oneness. It's kind of like that. And this is why I think it's always so deeply personal. It's very, very personal, it's hard to talk about. And that's why these mystics are so important as you can feel in the cadence of the words. That as we listen to the rhythm of the beauty of their words our awakening heart knows of which they speak.

James Finley: And I used to feel this way when I was with Thomas Merton, I saw him as a lineage holder in this tradition just being with him. And what he was always teaching me to do in silence is listen to myself, to be present to myself, to be present. And so we're

always circling back around to this heartfelt sincerity then staying there with this. So the effects of contemplation. So then he says, “Well how are we then to know that this deepening longing in prayer, this unconsummated longing,” for this kind of sense of seeking this infinite union with the infinite mystery of God, “how do we know that we’re in the neighborhood? How do we know?” Article seven.

James Finley: And again this is language that he uses which today by us sounds flowery. However, this is his way of speaking. “So the soul by such burning words inflames its own desire, makes known its state, and by such spells it seeks to call its spouse. But the Lord whose eyes are up on the just and whose ears hear and catch not only the words but the very meaning of their words” That is to say, as God’s listening to us express these longings. God just doesn’t simply hear what we’re able to hear in the words that we’re saying, but God hears within the depths of our words, the depths of longing that we ourselves are incapable of hearing. See.

James Finley: Where God interiorly sees in the depths of our longing. Depths of longing within us and beyond us that we’re not yet capable of seeing but God sees it. But God sees it. And this is what he’s saying. And so he’s saying here is at this point that the event occurs, the turning. And the turning Guigo expresses it this way, “With the Lord whose eyes are upon the just and whose ears can catch not only the words but the very meaning of their prayers, does not wait until the longing soul has said all it has to say. But breaks in upon the middle of its prayer, runs to meet it in all haste.”

James Finley: In other words, God’s listening to us like this, it’s like an ongoing cry of longing, goes in and out the subtle longing in our prayer for this purity of heart in which God’s heart and our heart is realized to be one heart. We long for this. And God listens and listens and listens. But God knows the sense our grace longings for this infinite union we can never reach it because it’s finite. It’s a grace finite longings for the infinite, it’s infinitely beyond what our finite longings are capable of reaching. That’s the dilemma that God’s quickened us with the desire that by our own finite efforts can not be consummated like this.

James Finley: And God listens and listens and listens. And then mid-sentence, that is to say I think what happens we don’t see it coming. There’s a boundary crossing and God acts. The contemplation, this is mystical contemplation or it’s infused contemplation. Because it’s God coming to meet us, not mediated in our thoughts, not mediated in our beliefs, not mediated in our emotions. Now all that’s important, that’s God in us. All that is and remains important. But rather now comes to us unmediated. That is God comes to us and accesses us and gives us a taste or a sharing in God’s knowledge of God.

James Finley: Where God gives us a taste of God’s knowledge of us knowing who we are in God before the origins of the universe hidden with Christ in God forever. Since everything in God is God, it’s a taste of the divinity of ourselves and our nothings without God. That’s it right there. In principle. Like that’s the poetic distilled purity of the event. Each mystic has their own words for this. So for Teresa, for example, remember in the beginning of the fourth mansion she says, “You’re sitting there in prayer,” and she says how she puts it, “you realize that your heart’s being enlarged to divine proportions,”

she says, “without effort.”

James Finley: Like it's happening to you because it's an act of God as God coming to you in the sincerity of your simplicity. “This event,” he says, “well how do we know this has happened?” And here's what we're trying to get at. Sometimes this can be very intense. I mean seriously it can come with, there can be visions and these things happen to people. But he's saying it's usually not like that, it's really recalibrating our heart to discern something very subtle that's happening to us. And he goes down a litany of observations about what we can discern and look for.

James Finley: First is that He restores the weary soul. And again I think what makes Guigo so challenging is he doesn't elaborate on anything. This is what makes some of the other mystics more accessible, they kind of flesh it in with examples and so on and he just says it in a few words. And so God we know restores the weary soul. And so here for me what this is, and you could see maybe your sense of what this is too, is it we're wearied by the seemingly endless longing that seems so endlessly unconsummated. How could the likes of me even dare to long for such a thing that I don't even understand?

James Finley: And I'm wearied by the effort in which I keenly sense are not capable of bringing about what my efforts are seeking. That all of a sudden you're wearied soul finds rest and then at some unexplainable way it's like quietly resting in God, resting in you unexplainably. It's a kind of a homecoming that it surprises you in a way. And you're sitting out here in reflective consciousness nothing is happening. You're just sitting there in your room with a candle burning or out walking, whatever, wherever you're doing, then all of a sudden a spacious arrival in a homecoming in the end of effort, because you discern that nothing is missing.

James Finley: See I think that's the thing. He, the second, he slacks its thirst. And here he's using the longing is there's more than the deer, in the Psalms, more than the deer longs for running streams oh God do I long for you. And so this longing is pictured as a kind of a thirst. Notice how bodily thirsty is, this a kind of physiological love longing in your body and your thirst is quenched. And really don't forget when we see this lady when we look at Julian of Norwich. This thirst, Jesus on the cross, I thirst. See. That your thirst is an incarnate echo of God's infinite thirst for you. And so it's a consummation of the thirst like we in God drink deeply of each other in a way that is the end of thirst.

James Finley: And I missed the very first one back. He says he anoints it with the most precious perfumes. It was the first thing on his little litany that helps us to get what we're talking about. And if you imagine here smelling of blood red rose and you give your scent such a primordial sense, the smell of sunlight, the odor of sanctity. And so there's an aromatic kind of it's like so sensual in an infinitely delicate way as in the scent of something. You know, when I was very little I stayed with my grandmother, my father was in the army at the time, World War II, and I would stay with her and she was widowed and I loved staying with her.

James Finley: And I would go with her down in her basement, she had an old wringer washing machine. And she would hang up rags to dry near this coal furnace. And those drying rags was a certain smell about her furnace with those drying rags in the furnace in the basement. And when I was in the monastery, partly I did janitorial work in the guest house, and up on the top floor there were heat pipes would come up through a closet where we used to store mops

and so on. And when I would open the door, those mops were drying out from the heat coming up from those up to the furnace down to the basement through... It was like my grandmother's basement.

James Finley: And I can remember sometimes on purpose I would walk by and just open the door to smell that. And so that's that primordial sense. It's like we're dropping down into this room of sense. We're dropping down into this realm of the end of weariness, like a resting. We're dropping down into the end of thirst, it's satisfied. And He feeds the hunger. And here that says connotations of the Eucharist as connotations of this hunger for God, this deep, deep hunger for God. It was just an echo of God's hunger for us, and the hunger ceases. And He makes us all forget all earthly things.

James Finley: And how so? It's not, it's just so subtle, it's not that the earthly things, especially for us out here say that in marriage or with our children or in our daily work or our friends and our ministry, whatever, it isn't as if we're dismissive of all that. Like the outcome of effort and fluctuating circumstances, we're right in the midst of it that's where we are to live our life. But all that, however satisfying it may be to reach our goal, however satisfying and good it is to have these lovely moments of groundedness in life experience.

James Finley: All the compared, compared to this ever so subtle touch, it compared to that. It's so unexplainably is in the background, this is something an overflowing plenitude and barely discernible richness is that's a subtle thing. And I also think, and it's true of all these mystics, that when we are able to see the nothingness of all those things, the passing pleasures and pains of life, and see their nothingness compared to this, we're able to see God shining out from those very things. That the very simplicity of things realize how they're nothing without God.

James Finley: We see God shining out from them in their nothingness, whether it's drinking a hot cup of tea or looking out the window or reading a child a good night's story, or reading a poem. Just the uncomprehensible statures of the simplicity of things. And He makes us all forget all earthly things and He makes it die to itself. Sometimes in deep love, and deep love for some people you can love somebody so deeply that it's like dying of love. That you die of love and that you die to yourself as being in any way capable of being fulfilled unless it's in the oneness with the beloved.

James Finley: In Martin Buber's language, in the presence of the thou. He says that thou is the one who fills the entire horizon of your being. And in the presence of the thou, you die to yourself as being enough in any way apart from the thou to what you surrender and give yourself in the communion with the thou. And likewise, when then the real grace is when the one in whom you experience is thou returns the favor by letting you know that you're the thou that they see. And in the mutual of that you see the mystical dimensions of intimacy like that.

James Finley: But this can also happen with a classroom of students, it can also happen with the people we work with committed to a common cause, it can also happen to being alone in a deep commitment to the depths of our solitude, it can also happen the thou dimension of the concreteness can shine forth like this. And he gives it new life in a wonderful way by making it drunk. And really this is mystical sobriety, that really we're kind of inebriated by this unexplainable and unexpected nearness of this overwhelming divinity. Like in the inner most

depths, too deep to see too deep to feel. It doesn't mean it doesn't spill over into feelings, but you realize it's the washing over of what lies beyond feeling.

James Finley: It isn't the insights on arise from it, the insights are his book. This is the scriptures. It flows over into words, the bear witness to it. The answer in the words, I love you. Two people say to each other, it spills over into the word. But you see that it's the overflow from a source that lies ever within, ever inner most, and it grounds you unexplainably in it. See. And so he says then he wants to help us, "But how further can we," and this is now an article eight and I'll end with this. "But how are we to know then, you see but this is occurring in an ongoing way?"

James Finley: There's right now he's looked at like there's a moment like the boundary crossing, like the event. And then the moment passes. It's memory lingers on within us we get back to it to our life. But then when we compare the way we were in the grace moment of unexplainable communion, to the way we are in the awareness of it mediated to insights with thought. And sometimes when we lose it altogether, because you know what life is like, we get caught up in the matters at hand. And we should. And then there's a certain desire then to abide in the depths of [inaudible 00:31:38].

James Finley: "And if the desire to abide then," he says, "how this begins to emerge as a path. But Lord, how are we to know when you do this? What will be the sign of your coming? How do we know this is real? Can it be that the heralds and witnesses of this constellation are the joy and joys are size and tears?" If it is so then, the word constellation is being used in a completely new sense. The reverse of its ordinary connotation. When what has constellation in common was size, joys with tears. If indeed there are to be called tears, but rather an abundance of spiritual dew pouring out from above and overflowing and outward purification of a sign of inward cleansing.

James Finley: And so Jesus says, "Blessed are those who weep for they shall rejoice." When you weep oh my soul, recognize your spouse, embrace him whom you long for. Make yourself drunk with the torrents of delight. There's this rewarding comfort in the sobbing. So I'd like to end on this subtle note. See it's true that we don't go around in the fullness of the awakening event. And it is also true that having tasted the oneness, we see out here how we all get caught up in things, life. And in the longing to abide in the oneness, because it tugs at our heart, there's a kind of..

James Finley: Sometimes the tears might be physical tears, but it's an inner weeping like a sighing or an inner longing. And we learn not to drown it out by addictive escapes, that's what often happens if you turn on the TV or get another brownie or have a beer or some dancing. So we learn not to drown it out. But in the midst of the day there is within us this weeping or this tear. And then when we sit in prayer the weeping "deepens" like this, urgh, like this. And then we begin to realize something, that God is the infinity of your tears. That God's presence within you is being given to you as your perceived absence of God's presence. And therefore you find it consoling that you are so unconsolated.

James Finley: It's like when Maureen died, I like so unconsolable like unconsolable. But then I thought to myself, it dawned on me as I kept growing into all of this, I find it so consoling that I'm unconsolable. See. There's a sadness, but I would find it sadder if I weren't sad. What if I

would say, “Well, I’m done with that. I’m moving on.” But what if I can’t move on? So what if the sadness has a certain delicate sense of her deathless presence in my life as the sadness and the delicate presence in her life is the deathless presence of God in me. So I’m going to end here then on this note. So I hope you can see then that the Guigo helps us to see that in order... We have to take all of this and bring it to our Lectio.

James Finley: That is we need to let ourselves sit and be accessed by the music or by the delicacy and let it sink in. And that the very fact we recognize that it’s beautiful, it’s already giving witness that we ourselves already in the midst of what Guigo is speaking of. Like that, see? And so here we are, that’s the grace of it. And so then let’s end with this sitting. Yeah.

James Finley: I should just sit straight and fold your hands and bow. Repeating after me, be still and know I am God. Be still and know I am. Be still and know. Be still. Be.

James Finley: (silence)

James Finley: So we’ll say the Lord’s Prayer together. Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, now and forever. Amen. Mary mother of contemplatives, pray for us. Guigo II, pray for us. Saint Therese the Little Flower, pray for us. Blessings Thomas.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for listening to this episode of Turning to the Mystics, a podcast created by the Center for Action and Contemplation. We’re planning to do episodes that answer your questions. So if you have a question, please email us at podcasts@cac.org, or send us a voicemail at cac.org/voicemails. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We’ll see you again soon.

