

Turning to the Mystics



The Way of a Pilgrim

Session 6

with James Finley and Kirsan Oates

James Finley: Greetings. I'm James Finley. Welcome to Turning to the Mystics. Greetings, everyone. Welcome to our time together turning for guidance to the teachings of the anonymous author of *The Way of a Pilgrim*. In our explorations of this first chapter of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, we've been following the pilgrim as he shares with us the grace transformations that are unfolding within him as he follows the guidance given by his starets, his mystically awakened guide in the prayer of Jesus. And we've seen how, in the following of this very decontemplative way to commit himself to this prayer, that this prayer embodies the path that leads to the realm of the heart. And then we see in the guidance that he's passing on to us, the guidance that helps us in our own contemplative practice, on the qualities of our practice. And although each mystic expresses these guidelines in his or her own unique way, there's universality that runs through the lineage itself. And so we can all take these to heart and apply it to our own particular way of experiencing this.

So the first guideline is that the pedagogy of the constancy of the prayer. To say it with constancy, is what's happening is he's learning to leave behind his dependency on thought, the thoughts around the edges. Because notice in the beginning, he's confused about the awakening on the 24th Sunday after Pentecost. He's mad because he doesn't know what to make of it. So what the prayer does is delivering him from the need to make anything out of it at all, and instead to lean into the unfigureoutable immediacy of this love. That's the pedagogy of the prayer through this love.

Also, another interesting little nuance here to the subtlety of this. In the Jesus prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me, a sinner," he's really asking God to make him more deeply aware of and one with the mercy of God revealed in Christ has already completely given. The mercy is already given. This oceanic mercy is already given. So by asking then for the mercy, we're asking for the grace that God be merciful towards us. Whereas it takes a while for us to figure out that it's not missing. So be merciful with us, this kind of thing.

So here's the thing then, another insight for us as we apply it to our life, a contemplative spiritual direction, that when we experience stirrings, a oneness with God, if we ignore them, just go on by as if nothing happened, then we missed it. But often the other hand, we're monitoring ourselves based on our ability to measure up to how well we're able to do this, we also miss it. So what we're to do really is to give ourselves over to a prayer in which we're learning from God how to realize that our shortcomings and how slow we are and half-hearted we are, you have your issues, I have mine, pale in significance to the infinite oceanic depth of God's mercy on us that permeates our limitations. And it's the seeing of that and the acceptance of that experiential salvation, that's the realm of the heart we're trying to find this way.

Also notice in the guidance from moving from his head to his throat, the guidance is it's somatic. That is, instead of being in his head is dropping down into our body, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us. So now the mind is listening to the body, say the prayer this way. And also notice that when he used to sit very still to lower his head, imagine he's looking into his own heart, as a kind of a deep yoga, as a kind of deep state. Really, it's a state of graced absorption in the mercy of God, embodied in the rhythm and cadence of the prayer. He just sits completely given over into this absorbed state. And really, another way of looking at it too, I think what's happening here is that he's really learning from God how to die of love until nothing's left of him but love, and to see that all of his shortcomings

are been taken into, completely absorbed in the infinite mercy of God on us as the beloved infinitely precious in the midst of our shortcomings this way.

And also another note here, I think for us. Again, we're to apply it to us. So for the cloud of unknowing, they also uses a word, but you only use the word as needed. So you sit in the quiet, and then when the mind drifts here or there, you use it as needed. But here, following the tradition of the desert fathers and so on, the word is used with constancy. But I think constancy, he says be calm. And I think the constancy is similar like the monks chanting the psalms in the monastery. So it's a constancy of the chanting, but it's not a forced constancy, it's the rhythm of the constancy that actually moves you along through the love this way. And that's the subtle quality of how language is being used here.

So we've been following the pilgrim then in this arc of transformation that he's been going through as he's been following this from the very beginning, from the church to the progress of going through these stages that we just summarized here. And this is where we left off. And again, we're suggesting that the anonymous author by making this a narrative and this is the way it really is in real life too. T.S. Eliot: Four Quartets, we had the experience but missed the meaning. So it's an actual experience, but what matters is the meaning of the experience. It has symbolic sensitivity or symbolic meaning, and we're learning how to sensitize ourselves to these interior meanings, to the actual experiences of things and not get trapped on the external appearance of things but rather go into the depth that these events incarnate. So we move on here to this.

And he's been practicing the Jesus prayer. And also notice another insight when he starts with 3,000 times a day and 6,000 times a day. By keeping count, he's dying to his own will, don't deliberately do one more or less. But of course because he's human, he will do one more or less. And so every time he loses count to circle back around, that's the mercy which is the essence of the prayer. And also there's incremental realizations that the contemplative spiritual director is always listening to the pilgrim and seeing where he is at. So he's always very careful to find that way, to keep gently pushing the edge without pushing it too hard this way. So by going by three and six, it's incremental realizations of entering more deeply into this unexplainable because really he's dying to his ego self as having the final say in who we are. But it's in the ego self we're awakened to what transcends our ego self and how we surrender to that and go with that. And so that's where we are now. That's where we are.

The turning point is all the way along he faithfully keeps going to the starets for spiritual direction and a new phase. "My starets had not seen me for 10 days. On the 11th day he came to see me himself and I told him how things were going." And so I think the significance is this, is that when the pilgrim, he's going to the starets, it's the seeker going to the guide. When the guide, the teacher senses within the pilgrim that the pilgrim is settling in to the realm of the heart, there's a quiet equality between the two of them. They're becoming kindred spirits, and the pilgrim is being transformed in the first stages of the transformation in which the teacher was himself transformed this way. And so he's entering experientially into the ancient lineage of the way. The starets come to see him honoring this emergent equality in the realm of the heart.

This is not to say that both of pilgrim and the starets are keenly aware that the starets is much more well-seasoned in all of this, but rather there is nevertheless an underlying

immeasurable mutuality in the resonance of the heart between the teacher and the student this way. See to it that you preserve the habit. He listened and said, "Now that you've got used to the prayer," it's just become like breathing or your heart beating, "See that you preserve the habit and strengthen it. Waste no time therefore. But make up your mind by God's help from today to say the prayer of Jesus 12,000 times a day. Remain in your solitude. Get up early, go to bed late and come and ask for advice from me every fortnight."

And then he's going to share with him his experience. He's going to share with us what happened to him this way. Then we'll reflect on it. By the way, this is going to be coming up more and more and more. See, remaining in your solitude isn't just that he's alone, but the solitude is that he's less and less able to explain what's happening to him. Like Merton saying, "To be understood with God as soon as they were infinitely understood." So he's becoming increasingly incomprehensible to himself because the mercy of God that's transforming him into itself is boundaryless and cannot be comprehended this way.

"I did as he bade me. The first day I scarcely succeeded in finishing my task of saying 12,000 prayers by late evening. The second day I did it easily and contentedly. To begin with, the ceaseless saying of the prayer brought a certain amount of weariness. My tongue felt numbed. I had a stiff sort of feeling in my jaws. I had a feeling at first pleasant, but afterwards slightly painful in the roof of my mouth. The thumb of my left hand with which I counted my beads hurt a little. I felt a slight inflammation in the hole of that wrist even up to the elbow, which was not unpleasant." So it's like mystical carpal tunnel syndrome he has and his whole arm is swollen up, but he says, "It hurts, but it wasn't unpleasant like ow, ow, ow, ow this this weird."

"Moreover, all of this aroused me as it were and urged me onto the frequent saying of the prayer." Somehow he's energized by this. He's moving into a deeper place. "For five days I did my set number of 12,000 prayers. As I formed the habit, I found at the same time pleasure and satisfaction in it. Early one morning the prayer woke me up as it were." I'd like to reflect on this for a moment, like what sense to make of this observation for me, is that whenever we're called to any creative process that requires deep commitment to allowing ourselves to be transformed in the process to which we feel committed. It gets into stark places that we're brought to by our very fidelity to the place with which... In other words, it doesn't stay calm. It doesn't stay something casually observed. You can't have your valet carry the cross up the hill. That somehow you're being unraveled by infinite love transforming you into itself in this realm of the heart like this. I'd like to give some examples of this.

When I lived in South Bend, Indiana, near Notre-Dame University, there was a woman there who did portraits for Notre-Dame. Great pic, beautiful portraits. They were throughout the campus. So I approached her to have her do portraits of our two daughters, Kelly and Amy. I think my oldest daughter at the time was maybe 12, I don't know how old Kelly was, maybe 12. Then Amy would've been, she was younger. So the woman, her home, she had an art studio in the back of her house. It was all windows, it was all glass and she sat Kelly down near the window, took pictures of her and then had a big piece of blue chalk and just sat and looked at Kelly for about five

minutes, picked up the blue chalk, did this and Kelly's face came out on the page.

And so I thought for a minute, what if I would've stopped and asked her, "How do you do that?" Other than being bothered that I had interrupted her, she probably would say, "I don't know how I do that. It happens to me." But how does it happen? She paid the price of hours and hours and hours and hours of leaning into it in a solitary commitment and when she got beyond the edges of her own abilities, something came shining, not from her but through her onto the paper this way.

Rubinstein's recording the Chopin's Nocturnes. And Rubinstein in an interview, he said, "I felt it over and over again playing Chopin's Nocturnes in a crowded concert hall and I can feel everyone in the room waiting for the next note this way." How is it that Rubinstein came to such sensitivity? A lifetime, a surrendering over and fidelity to being transformed into this music which wasn't coming from him but through him in the way it touches us so the way it does.

T. S. Eliot was being interviewed, the poet. And he says, "Sometimes I wish I hadn't been a poet. The price was too high." And we thank our lucky stars he paid the price. And so is he because the beauty of his poetry doesn't come from him but through him and that he spent himself and came to the edges of what he was capable of, and it came shining through this way.

Rilke, the poet in the Duino Elegies came to a place where he was living all alone in this mansion on the edge of a cliff and he couldn't write poetry anymore. He thought it was over for him. And there was a little rickety wooden stairway that went down the cliff to the shore and he was walking along the shore in the stuck place and a violent storm came up all of a sudden. And he's climbing up this rickety wooden thing along the cliff and the wind's blowing in his face and the rain's beating down on him and all of a sudden he cried out. "If I were to cry out to the angelic choirs, who would hear me?" And he asked himself in the intensity of the angel's presence, if an angel would embrace him, would the intensity of the presence annihilate him?

And he says, "Is not beauty but a terror that deigns not to destroy us." And he sat down and out came either the Duino Elegies, just came rolling out of him. But it came out of his fidelity to this powerless. We don't expect that when we give ourselves like to art or poetry or service to a community or being a teacher or healing, this also applies. We don't expect too, that being married or having a child or living alone or caring for a dying loved one or enduring your own terminal illness, we don't expect to find ourself in places where our fidelity to these things take us. It's this mysterious realm between heaven and earth. It's right at the precipice of the realm of the heart this way, intimately this way.

So it might sound strange that he would do that, sitting there and summons all But it's not strange to him. It's not strange to him. Is that that which is essential comes unexplainably out of the heart that's awakened to it and it's a fidelity. And you don't blame other people for not understanding it because you don't understand it yourself. You only know there's no real option but to be faithful to this unraveling this way. So this comes to us in love found and love lost. It comes to us in near death

experiences, it comes to us. It's like a shimmer that comes shining through this and we're asked to be faithful to what's given to us this way, and I think that's where the pilgrim is now. And so we can look at our own way, then our own moments where we've had our own taste of this. Sometimes it's very intense like this where we are, but very often actually it's very subtle. It's very, very delicate like atmospherically delicate but real or to be attentive to it. And the prayer helps us to maintain the attentiveness.

“Early one morning the prayer woke me up as it were, and that's the rolling over place into the realm of the heart, okay? It woke me up. I started to say my usual morning prayers, but my tongue refused to say them easily or exactly. My whole desire was fixed on only one thing, to say the prayer of Jesus. As soon as I went on with it, I was filled with joy and relief. It was as though my lips and my tongue pronounced the words entirely of themselves, see it in his bodily being and urgings from me. I spent the whole day in a state of the greatest contentment. I felt as though I was cut off from everything else. I lived as though in another world and I easily finished my 12,000 prayers a day.”

And here's the thing, when we're given over to this, regardless of whatever mode it's in, whether it be solitude or silence or teaching or being with suffering, whatever, it's arch. In a way it distances us from the day-by-day, dealings of day-by-day people, okay? As our tolerance for small talk, our tolerance to get caught up and involve details of how this goes or how that goes. We can't hardly bear this way, because we're being carried over into these realms that are celestial beyond the darkness of this world, this way. But we're actually moving then beyond the darkness of this world as they're going to see later as it comes full circle, it's going to radicalize our presence in the world, which is really Christ consciousness, but we go through this phase of crossing over in a distance from ourselves, this way and from others into God alone.

“I lived as though in another world and I easily finished my 12,000 prayers by early evening. I felt very much like still going on with him, but I did not dare to go beyond the number my staret set for me, that's obedience. God's will, he doesn't dare go beyond because then that would be the ego asserting itself.” See, in this midst of dying to the ego is his base of operation. “Every day following, I went on in the same way with my calling on the name of Jesus Christ. That was such great readiness and liking. Then I went to see my staret and told him everything frankly and in detail. He heard me out and said, be thankful to God that this desire for the prayer and this faculty in it have manifested itself in you.”

His response is be thankful to God. Remember when he first met the staret in his travels and he tells the staret his story about what happened in the church and seeking this teaching. He can't find it, he can't find it, he can't find it as his long, and the staret says, “Be thankful to God for the unappeasable desire.” And now it's coming full circle, be thankful to God. See, that the unappeasable desire is being consummated in you into this realm of the hearts of the power of the Jesus prayer. It's like the coming of the circle of the gratitude to God.

Be thankful to God that this desire for the prayer and this faculty in it that is the skillfulness in it, the skillfulness of being habitually established in it or being known to let it establish itself in you has been manifested in you. It is a natural consequence which follows constant effort and spiritual achievement. So a machine to the spiritual wheel of which one gives a

drive works for a long while afterwards by itself. But if it is to go on working still longer, one must oil it and give it another drive. Now you see with what admirable gifts, God and his love for mankind as endowed, even the bodily nature of man. You see what feeling can be produced even outside a state of grace in a soul which is sinful and with passions unsubdued as you yourself have experienced. But how wonderful and how delightful and how consoling a thing it is when God is pleased to grant the gift of self-inquiring spiritual prayer to cleanse the soul from all sensuality.

I'd like to reflect on this. See when he says it is a natural consequence which follows constant effort and there's a saying that grace builds on nature, see? And so what happens is, so in a way he's saying, "Look, yes, you've been committing yourself to hours and hours of saying the Jesus prayer. No wonder." In other words, when you commit yourself like that to anything with all your heart for hours and hours and hours, something comes shining through the effort, and therefore it's a natural consequence of grace fidelity to an unappeasable desire. This could be the artist, the poet, the lover, the solitary, the serving of the poor, whatever form it takes when you give your whole being over to it, until you're unraveled by it and you're taken way beyond anything you're capable of, it tends to take up residence in you this way.

That's what it's like this way. But notice like turning a flywheel on a machine, you give it a spin. If it's well oiled it'll spin for a while. But so you have to give it another little, and this is what this prayer is like. It's self acting in the heart, but you have to keep every so often, you have to keep the momentum of the realm of the heart alive in your experiential awareness of this realm that's always there this way.

You see what feeling can be preached outside a state of grace. And here's the point, that even if you weren't in a state of grace and you give yourself over to a transforming act, you're transformed in your fidelity to the transforming act this way, which in a way is self is another way of understanding grace. See, the grace it's given to the nature when we give ourselves over to what carries us beyond our own abilities this way. But how wonderful and how delightful and consoling a thing it is when God is pleased to grant the gift of self-acting spiritual prayer that is it goes on by itself, because the self-acting prayer is actually the infinite mercy of God revealed in Jesus abiding in the habitual sensitivity to it in your heart this way. That's why it's self-acting.

And to cleanse the soul from all sensuality. Sensuality meaning, this is not the sensuality of the body but the sensuality of being tempted to be gratified by the pleasure in it. It's very sensual, but if you turn to be gratified by the sensual pleasure of it, you fall out of the spirituality of sensuality and it turns to another form of grasping at something. This is a very subtle insight into the spiritual roots of the origins of addiction, I think this grasping, this way then falling out of the richness of something. It is a condition which is impossible to describe and the discovery of this mystery is a prayer as a foretastes of heaven. It's impossible to describe because it's infinite, it's impossible to describe because it's not describable. It's impossible to explain because it's not explainable. That's why I say in one of my, I say that up, "To be a seeker is to be someone for whom a grace is engendered a riddle. The grace is it unexplainably arises of itself."

The riddle is I know not what to make of it this way. And so you're baffled in an unknowing

of what's incomprehensibly being realized in your heart this way, this way. And it's a foretastes on earth of the bliss of heaven. This is a key thing right here, really. When the pilgrim was living a life of devotional sincerity in which he walked about with some dried bread in it on his back and his zest pocket of Bible over his heart, and he was a church on 24th Sunday after Pentecost, he was living the devout Christian life who's living this life. And so this really is efficacious unto holiness, and so it's the presence of God experienced but experienced veiled through faith, through the powers of the soul. So it's veiled in our knowledge of our insight into the things of God in the prayerful reading of Scripture and so on, but it's veiled, graced, understanding in the mind, illumined by grace.

In our memory, it's veiled in our memory of how we were first awakened. How strange it is that we have been along this path, on this winding path. It has brought us so unforeseeably to this place. It's like the sacred history of the chosen people being lived out in microcosm in our heart this way like the trans-historical unfolding through history, through memory this way. And in our will, it's our inspirations and aspirations to respond to God's grace, to give ourselves to fidelity to God and inspirations and aspirations to follow the promptings of our heart, to do God's will in our life, it's veiled. But when we die and pass to the veil of death will pass forever in the unveiled infinite union with the infinite forever as destiny. What's happening here is that God sometimes is happening, is God doesn't wait until we're dead to give us a taste of unveil.

You're still on earth but you've already crossed over and died to everything less than love. And so it's unveiled even though you're still [inaudible 00:28:41], and it's a foretaste of heaven. But here's the thing, it's unveiled but it's unveiled in a hidden way. No one can see it and you can't either, okay? Is not an object that you turn to show somebody or explain to somebody. It's the unexplainable mystery of God be so mercifully dissolving you into itself this way that it's a foretaste of eternal life, but it's an obscure clarity in the depths of your heart. It's hidden in your heart, unveiled this way in a hidden way.

Such happiness is reserved for those who seek after God in the simplicity of a loving heart. There's no posing, there's no pretense, there's no posturing. You just utterly sincere. That's why I say the mystic isn't the person who says, "Listen to what I've experienced." The mystic is the one that says, "Look what love has done to me," see? That there's nothing left but love. And so it's revealed to those who have this simplicity. Merton says, "With God a little sincerity goes a long, long way." There's this grace naturalness of what's become of you through being transformed by this love into this love incarnating itself in the day-by-day unfoldings of your life, like go figure." There you go, this way.

Now I give you my permission to say your prayers as you wish and as often as you can. And here's another critical point. The staretz takes the trainer wheels off the bicycle, see? See, before I'm guiding you along, guiding you along, guiding you, but you come to the edge of the precipice and now that you've fallen off the precipice, you take the training wheels off. See, because you can't count it anymore. It becomes countless. See this way? Try to devote every moment you are awake to the prayer, call on the name of Jesus Christ without counting the number of times and submit yourself humbly to the will of God. You can't count the times because you can't in any way categorize in some manageable way the divinity that's unfolding itself and transforming you into itself. It's countless. It's like the eternity unfolding in time this way, unexplainably this way, boundarylessness.

Call on the name of Jesus Christ without counting the number of times and submit yourself humbly to the will of God. The only thing he want us to do, God's will, and what is God's will? Love. And what happens to love when love touches suffering? It turns the suffering turns love into mercy. This oath be all merciful because God's all merciful to you this way and live by this mercy. I am sure God will not forsake you and that God will lead you into right on the right path. See, you're being providentially guided without answers because you're listening in your heart to this merciful love that he has brought you up to this point. And what God has begun in you, God will bring it to completion unforceably. Don't forget, we're still in the first chapter of the book. He's just kidding, is a long road ahead for this person. "Under this guidance, I spent the whole summer in ceaseless oral prayer to Jesus Christ and I felt absolute peace in my soul. During sleep, I often dreamed that I was saying the prayer."

Merton once asking the monastery, "Does God seek us in our sleep?" So it's even finding its way into your dreams. And so the dream self and the awake self are merging just like the eternal self and the temporal self are merging just like the broken self and the broken self being transformed in the mercy of God are merging. And so it's a boundaryless state more and more in the ordinariness of himself. During sleep, I often dreamed that I was saying the prayer. And during the day if I happened to meet someone, all men without exception were as dear to me as if they've been my nearest relations. See, before it distanced him from everybody. And now in the solitude of being transformed by love, he's walking down the road and everyone he sees were is dear to him as his dearest loved one.

And I think this is how Jesus saw everyone he met. That's how Jesus sees us and that's how Jesus saw him and talked him through this, and brought him to this place. Really, it's this Christ's presence in the world. God so loved the world that he sent us only-begotten son and he walked through a world filled of infinitely loved, broken people, see, bringing into this experiential salvation. But I did not concern myself with them much. That is I love them and I saw them, but I didn't get caught up in the fuss of it. See, I was very careful to very politely stay at the edge and stay at the essence of everything they were about, but not myself to get caught up into a reactivity of approving or disapproving opinions and all of that.

"All my ideas were quite calm to their own accord. And I thought nothing whatsoever but my prayer, my mind tended to listen to it and my heart began itself to feel at times a certain warmth and pleasure. If I happened to go to church, the lengthy service of the monastery seemed short to me and no longer worried me as if I had in time passed. My lonely hut seemed like a splendid palace and I knew not how to thank God for having sent to me a lost sinner to such a wholesome guided master. In these traditions they say, you cannot adequately express your gratitude to the master. You can't express the gratitude of the one in whose presence, your own longings for God were awakened and deepened and guided this way like this. And so I think what we're suggesting for us, just like the staretz taught the pilgrim, the pilgrim is teaching us. So could we practice this prayer so that our own home where we live is palatial.

It takes on a palatial quality, because this is the place where the infinite love of God has so washed over me and transformed me into itself and my unending ordinariness that even when I wake up and go to sleep, watering the houseplants and looking out the window, it's just God in all directions, in the concreteness of things this way. "But I was not long to

enjoy the teaching of my staret who was so full of divine wisdom. He died at the end of the summer. Weeping freely, I bade him farewell and thanked him for the fatherly teaching he had given my wretched self. And as a blessing and keepsake, I begged for the rosary with which he said his prayer," Jesus prayer, so he was carrying around his little rosary. And so I was left alone, but what a strange aloneness it is.

See, isn't this mystery? This is where aloneness turns into solitude, never less alone than one alone because he is in the communal state in his solitary way. "Summer came to an end and the kitchen garden was cleared. I had no longer anywhere to live. The peasant sent me on my way, giving me my wages of two roubles and filling up my bag with dried bread for my journey. Again, I started off in my wanderings, but now I did not walk along as before filled with care. The calling upon the name of Jesus Christ gladdened my way. Everybody was kind to me. It was as though everyone loved me."

See, so really he's tapping into the love. And I think part of it is too, I think they sensed in him the transparency of his devout sincerity and he listened a love response from them too, I think is part of it. I'm going to summarize this next little phrase here. And really what the point is that life goes on is he had two roubles that he got paid at the end of the summer where he was living tending the garden. And so he thought what he would do is buy his own philokalia.

And so he goes to a store where he heard a place where he sells this bookstore and they had a philokalia there. But the person who had the philokalia there, he wanted three roubles. The pilgrim only had two. And here's the point. Once you come to this state, life is still just life. You mean crap. I'm just one rouble short and you won't give me that damn philokalia. And so really the ordinariness, the divinity of ordinariness being lived out this way.

And then the person tells him, and you see everything is providential this way. He says, "I know somebody who has one of these books. It's a very old copy and he might give it to you for two roubles." And so he goes to the person, he sees it and it's all torn up. It's a very old, but he does give it to him for two roubles. So he makes a new cover for it and he takes this old copy of the philokalia and puts it with his Bible in his pocket over his heart. So now he's walking down the road this way with the philokalia, the lineage. See, and the scriptures, Jesus walking his heart.

And this is how I go about now and ceaselessly repeat the prayer of Jesus, which is more precious and sweet to me than in the world. And really Jesus who's more precious to me than anything in the world, because I know I'm more precious to Jesus than words could ever explain. This way is the beloved, precious and brokenness this way. At times I do as much as 43 or 44 miles a day. And I do not feel I'm walking at all. I'm aware only of the fact that I'm saying my prayer when the bitter cold pierces me. And he goes on again to say how he's so transformed that he's still in the conditioned states of cold or heat or loneliness, but he no longer is reduced to subjective experience. It isn't subjective states of subjective conditions because he's in the divinity that transcends and permeates all conditioned states.

It isn't that he's not hot when it's hot, but rather he's grounded in the divinity of the heat. See, it isn't that he's not cold when it's cold, but he is aware of the presence of God transcending and permeating the cold and so on. So he's living in this graced state. If

anyone harms me, I only to think how sweet is the prayer of Jesus and so on.” The one thing I wish for is to be alone and all by myself to pray, to pray without ceasing.” And he only wants to be alone because that his vocation. See, not going to be ours, but it’s his vocation. But notice that although he’s alone, he’s with all of us because we’re reading his book. See, he’s sharing the solitude of us and years, years later, he’s still with us helping in this way. And doing this, I’m filled with joy. God knows what is happening to me. God knows what is happening to me, but I don’t and I don’t need to. See?

But I learned to live in the wisdom of God guiding me and sustaining me and permeating me through and through. Of course, all this is sensuous as my departed starets said, “An artificial state which follows naturally upon routine. But because of my unworthiness and stupidity, I dare not venture yet to go further and learn to make my own spiritual prayer within the depths of my heart.” This is a lovely statement. He said, “All this is sensuous.” He said, as amazing that all this is relative to the infinity of this mercy. I’m just getting started. I’m like a wizened beginner this way along this journey this way. “Within the depths of my heart, I awake God’s time in God’s good time. And when God’s ready, God will give me the next unfolding that God’s ready to give because I know God’s always with me just where am. God’s not with me with where I’m trying to get to this way, and it unfolds according to this love. And in the meantime, I rest my hope on the prayers of my departed starets.”

Because he knows the starets is eternal, like all of us, crossing over into God, and also in the communion of the saints. It not only is starets with God, but the starets with God is still guiding him in death. And so someone lives this way. The line between life and death becomes more ephemeral or more diaphanous for the living and the dead and time and eternity and time, so he is already... Because in a way he’s already crossed over into the celestial state even though he is still in time.

And so the starets who’s died, who’s in eternity, no longer in time is with him in time. And so he is woven into this interconnectedness with things. Thus, although I have not yet reached the ceaseless spiritual prayer, which is self-acting in the heart, yet I thank God I do understand the meaning of those words. I heard in the epistle, pray without ceasing. And one last thought, on the 24th Sunday after Pentecost, when he heard the text and he began to think, “How is this possible? See, I don’t understand what this means.” Right at that moment that he was perplexed, if he could have looked ahead and seen what he’s saying at the end of the chapter, that pilgrim who was perplexed of the 24th Sunday after Pentecost would faint.

Because it’s a deeper way to understand what it means to understand that the pilgrim even hadn’t yet begun to understand. And I think all life is like this for us when we’re on this path. So with that then, well, at the coming to the end of the chapter, we’ll end here with a prayer. So I invite you to sit straight, hold your hands and bow. And bow, we’ll slowly 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. And lead us not into temptation, but to deliver us from evil. Mary mother of contemplatives. Pray for us. Unanimous are through the cloud of unknowing. Pray for us. Unanimous are through the way a pilgrim. Pray for us. Blessings until next time.

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. All of this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.