

Turning
to the
Mystics



The Way of a Pilgrim

Coaching Session
with James Finley and Kirsan Oates

Jim Finley: Greetings. I'm Jim Finley.

Kirsten Oates: And I'm Kirsten Oates.

Jim Finley: Welcome to Turning to the Mystics.

Kirsten Oates: Welcome, everyone, to season nine of Turning to the Mystics where we've been turning to The Way of a Pilgrim by an anonymous author. I'm here with Jim, and today, we're going to go have our coaching session talking about how we might apply lessons learned from The Way of a Pilgrim. So, Jim, welcome.

Jim Finley: Thank you. I always look forward to these coaching sessions. It helps people experientially find their way in the actual practice and walk through the unfolding of things and their fidelity to it. So, I'm looking forward to our time together.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes, me too, very much. In today's session, we're going to do three things. Firstly, Jim is going to give some coaching on how to approach the text. Then I'll lead a meditation that Jim and I have put together using words from the book. Finally, Jim will act as my spiritual director as I share my experience of trying the prayer in the hopes it might help anyone else who's trying the prayer on this season. So, now I'll hand over to you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes. I want to share with you how it helps me to sit with this text and really to sit with all the texts that we've been studying [inaudible 00:01:36] this way. Because for me, what it is, is to be in the presence of the words of a mystic is a way of learning to be in the presence of God. So, it's like a moment of communion with God, embodied in the graced awakening power of the words of this awakened mystic that guides us this way. So, I'd like to reflect on it and how it helps me and see how this might also help you sit with the texts and all the texts. First of all, it's worth noting that the pilgrim's story begins in the midst of his day-by-day life and devotional sincerity. He's living his life. We're living our life this way.

For him, it's reduced to its simplest terms because he has some dried bread on his back, which sustains his bodily existence from birth to death. Over his heart is the Bible. So, he is led by God in the midst of his day-by-day life. It just like with us, we have our earthly belongings to sustain our bodily being from birth to death. Over our heart, we have the sincerity of our desire for God and gratitude to God's presence in our life and so on. To see too that the story reveals us to ourselves. Because if the pilgrim would not have been awakened as he is going to be awakened mystically, 19th century Russia, he would've lived his life of devotional sincerity. He died. He'd be with God in heaven right now.

Just like all of us in our devotional sincerity, someday we'll all be dead and we'll all be in heaven with God right now. It's more than enough really this way. In this sense then, anyone can say the Jesus prayer in our devotional sincerity. It's a very lovely touching prayer really. It's mysterious because see, Lord Jesus Christ had mercy on me. We're asking for the mercy that's already there because God is all-merciful and permeates us with this oceanic mercy. So, really we're asking for God to have mercy on us and to help us in the ways we tend not to live in the mercy of God that's always there and have mercy. So, there's a mysterious intimacy to the prayer itself that's so consoling that we can say throughout the day or wake up in the middle of the night or throughout the day.

It's a gift in itself. But the turning point for the pilgrim, and really it's for all these mystics we've been studying, is he's in the midst of his life of devotional sincerity. He's at liturgy, 21st Sunday after Pentecost, and he's hearing the Scriptures being read, the customary patterns of his life. He hears the text to pray always. He's heard the text before because every year the 21st Sunday after Pentecost, they read that text. I don't know if it's true in the Roman Rite, but in the Orthodox Rite, the 21st Sunday, I don't know what the reading is in the Roman Rite. So, there's that. Also, it's in the midst of this then that there's an awakening event for him, like a quickening, which is an enhanced enrichment of his devotional sincerity.

This event is not the hearing of the Scriptures because everyone in the church heard it, nor is the event that he's perplexed by it. How can we pray always? Because we're often perplexed by the things of God. There's many things we don't understand. We sit with it and see guidance and read the Scriptures and so on. The event for him is he's unexpectedly accessed by God in the way that the question, he says, forced itself upon his mind. So, from this point on, his pilgrimage through his days is taken an unexpected turn for the pilgrimage is seeking a resolution of this question of the presence of God that comes to him and being perplexed by something unfigurable, but somehow there's the inner imperative of his awakened heart this way. So, the shift happens in many ways.

We talk about them in these talks. It happens as an intimacy with another person, love found, but also in love lost, in solitude and silence, in patience and long-suffering, in creativity, the deepening of God's presence and service to the community, the ordinariness of life itself, the sun moving across the sky. It comes as it comes as quickening. I think for us here, that in so far as we're moved by the depth and beauty of these teachings is an indication of being accessed by God. That we know not what to make of it, but we know there's something about it that matters very much that graces our life. Therefore, the pilgrim by fidelity to his path is drawing us into the way we're experiencing. We're on the same path with the pilgrim by following the pilgrim this way.

Also, notice too, I think that this awakening, which happens a lot of different ways through our lives, sometimes it's very intense, but often it's extremely delicate. Notice the stirring that happened to the pilgrim. No one sees it. He's just sitting there. He's walking up the road. No one sees this. You can't explain it to anybody because he doesn't understand it himself, but it quietly burns within him like a quiet, gentle, inner imperative of his heart. Therefore, he teaches us to listen to the stirrings of our own awakening heart, not to run roughshod over the gift of our longings this way. He's then led to realize this longing is the path because the longing embodies and echoes God's infinite longing for him, God's infinite longing for us.

When he finds the teacher, that is when he finds someone who's been transformed in the consummation of that very longing, this starts, which comes to us, the presence of a teacher or the reading of a pilgrim or through life of prayer, however it comes. He realizes that he can't figure it out because it's unfigurable, that is as long as we're still living in our head trying to comprehend it. See, it's not comprehensible, but it is realizable this way. So, the whole journey is in a journey of being led out beyond the boundaries of conceptual conclusions and answers and questions and opinion and so on into the boundaryless realm of the heart.

The realm of the heart is that place within us and beyond us where the infinite presence of God and the interior depths of our own presence merge and our merging in an

unexplainable communion that is that once the reality of God and the reality of us in our nothingness without God. So, we're finding our way then to this realm, and the prayer embodies the path of being let out beyond the confines of thought into this realm of the heart. When we really look at it, when we really look at the prayer then, in the light not of devotional sincerity, but now it's the light of this conveyance, of this transformative deepening of this way that what we're really doing then when we sit in the prayer with our whole heart, that's our anchoring place.

For when we say the Jesus prayer around the edges, we experience thoughts arising and falling away, memories arising and falling away, emotions arising and falling away. But you do your very best with God's grace not to think about the thoughts that are arising, because if you think about the thoughts that are arising, you're in your head again. So, we're really doing then through the prayer, it embodies an anchoring place in the presence of God that intimately and unexplainably transcends conceptual conclusions this way. So, the whole journey of the pilgrim then is the deepening of that. He walks us through these realms and these spaces and I find it encouraging to look at it this way. One last thought with this, this has to do with the coaching session.

It isn't as if we're sitting here like, "I'm going to practice the Jesus prayer and I'm going to reach the realm of the heart by Thursday." It's not like that. This goes on for months or years this way. But what matters, Thomas Merton said, "With God, a little sincerity goes a long, long way." It's the utter patient sincerity of the prayer with the realm of the heart that little by little and unexpectedly the realm of the heart starts welling up and permeating and transcending his thoughts, so on. So, it isn't just one, the daily rendezvous with God. There has to be a way that you sit for it. There's no agenda, but there's deepening into the step.

But also notice at the end of each meditation, prayer of the heart, you ask God for the grace not to break the thread of that longing and notice what happens to the pilgrim. It starts showing up throughout his whole life, walking along the roads. It shows up and seeing the oceanic mercy of God shining off from everyone he meets, everything that happens to him. So, this is the way, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. Beautiful, so helpful to see the whole story that you've shared in this context. Yeah. So, what we thought we might do next is offer a way for us to meditate together or practice this prayer together as a community. So, we've developed a meditation based on the staretz teaching from the book, and I'm going to lead people through that meditation. Well, let's begin the meditation. Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can sit undisturbed. Settle into this space, feeling the support of your chair, your cushion, or the ground beneath you. Notice how you're breathing without changing or judging your breath. Breathe gently, just noticing your breath flowing in and out of your body. Thank God for your desire to pray.

It is a call from God into deeper communion. Take a moment to open yourself to the constant loving presence of Jesus. Envision his constant presence within you and all around you, affirming his grace and mercy in your daily life. Let the ever-present mercy of his care for you envelop you. Now gently lower your head and gaze into

your heart. In your intention, imagine that you're gazing into the realm of the heart where you and Jesus are eternally one. In this prayer, it's the grace that carries you into that realm. Let this be an anchor for your prayer. Now carry your thoughts from your head down to your heart. Let your intention continue to gravitate towards the realm of your heart where you and Jesus are eternally one.

In a moment, I'll invite everyone listening into a rhythm of breathing, calling upon the divine presence of Jesus with the lips in the spirit and in the heart. As you do this, try and take no notice of any other thoughts, however much they might assail you. When you breathe in, imagine you are breathing in Jesus's constant mercy, loving you through and through just as you are in this moment. As you exhale, gently move your lips and join me in saying the words, Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. We will say it quietly and without hurry. The faculty of pronouncing words lies in the throat. Listen to the words, putting all thoughts aside, and let the rhythm and vibration of the words resonate within your heart.

Recognize that a cloud of all sorts of other thoughts, memories, emotions, or sensations may close around you, attempting to pull you away from the prayer. When that happens, stay calm, stay patient, call again on the mercy of Jesus knowing that God will help you. We'll go through a cycle of saying the prayer out loud together, and then there will be a time to say it in silence. We'll go through that whole cycle twice. Let's begin. Breathe in the eternal present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathe out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathe in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathe out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathing in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.

Breathe in the eternally loving presence of Jesus. Breathe out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathe in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathe out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Continue in the silence. Just as a machine needs oil to run smoothly, your spiritual practice is supported by moments of reinvigoration. Let's join one more time to try as faithfully as possible to carry out the prayer. Breathing in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathing in the eternal, loving presence of Jesus. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathing in, Jesus loving you through and through. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.

Breathing in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Breathing in the eternally present love and mercy of Jesus. Breathing out. Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Continue in the silence. As you prepare to end this time of prayer, slowly bring your awareness back to your surroundings. Take a moment to offer gratitude for this time of meditation. Please join me in asking God that this prayer might continue to voice itself in you, drawing you ever closer to the realm of the heart. I pray that you'll notice with gratitude the ways in which this deepening communion with God, that the prayer embodies begins to show up here and there as you go through your daily life. Amen.

Well, we hope that's a little helpful meditation for people. Beautiful.

Jim Finley: Yeah, beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, such beautiful words from the starets. If you would like to practice that meditation again, Corey has made it available as a download and you can find a link to it in the show notes. So, now in this final section, Jim is going to be my spiritual director as I process my experience of trying this prayer. Just to begin with, I just wanted to share that I felt an inspiration to try the prayer. I wasn't forcing myself to try it. I don't necessarily take on every prayer we do in every season, but this time, I really felt like a surge of energy inside my chest and in my mind to commit to doing this prayer in my quiet time every morning. I wonder what you make of that.

Jim Finley: Two things, it's interesting in *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the starets tells the pilgrim to say the prayer so many times a day. Then he says, "Report back to me what happens." Because what happens is the intimacy with which you shared your own experience. You're truly drawn to practice it. So, you're not proposing something you read out of a book or it's not a theory. It's your actual experience of being drawn to practice this prayer. Likewise, for me, when I listen to you, I am listening to you, but I'm listening to you in a way that embodies fidelity to the lineage of the prayer of the heart.

So, I'm not responding with my opinion. It isn't my opinion, but how can I respond in a way that embodies fidelity to this path that you're on in your own experience that you're sharing with me? This is where the exchange takes place and contemplate the spiritual direction as we learn to move with the flow of the unfoldings of our own heart in the sincerity of being in the presence of God embodied in this prayer.

Kirsten Oates: When I first started the prayer, when I was first trying on the prayer, I found it very hard to find an image of Jesus because the way the starets guides the pilgrim is to bring to mind the presence of Jesus. So, when I was trying to do that, I had flashing images of Jesus on the cross, Jesus walking down the road, Jesus healing someone, Jesus standing up and teaching. I couldn't just settle into the presence of Jesus. It took me a little while, and then one day, I just felt Jesus's presence almost like when they talk about him after the resurrection where he was like this light, vibrant presence. So, I just felt like a bright golden light surrounding me and all through my body. That's eventually how I felt the presence of Jesus.

Jim Finley: Yes, I noticed that the wording is very precise here about the starets. Hold in your mind the image of the presence of Jesus. So, it's not an image like you see on an icon or a holy card or something, but it's having an interior image of the presence of Jesus. I want to give an example that helps me to understand this. When we love someone very much and we can interiorly be aware of the image of their presence as we know their presence. The philosopher that I like very much, Gabriel Marcel, his mother died when he was very young and she had a profound effect on him, on his life. He says, "It's amazing how present a dead person can be."

Because their presence is deathless, just like your presence is deathless. So, again, it's moving beyond a concrete image, which parallels moving beyond thought to moving beyond the image of presence. So, your presence and the presence of Jesus in this co-mingling of oneness and presence. So, that's my sense of this. It helps me.

Kirsten Oates: Next, I wanted to share that prior to trying this prayer, what I would do in my quiet time in the morning was follow the instructions from the cloud of unknowing. So, I would sit in silence, opening my heart to God's presence, asking God to be present with me in my quiet time. Then I would sit in the cloud of unknowing, not thinking my thoughts or experiencing my emotions and sensations. When I got caught up in any of those things, I would use the word to bring me back into the cloud of unknowing. So, that has been my practice for quite a long time. What was really fascinating to me was with this prayer, you're saying the words constantly, but the experience happens in exactly the same way.

Whether I was sitting in silence or saying the words constantly, at some point in time. I'm caught up in my thoughts. For me, generally my thoughts, I'm caught up in my thoughts, I notice it. Then with the cloud of unknowing, I use my word to bring me back. With this prayer, I use Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me and start saying that constantly. It feels very similar inside of me. What happens? There's the sensation of committing to God's presence and then being caught up in thought and having something to anchor me back to God's presence. That feels very similar.

Jim Finley: Yes, this is my sense of this. My sense of it is what matters is we find a way that sits well with the natural inclinations of our heart and the sincerity. So, you're exactly right, the cloud of unknowing, which is the other mystic that offers a method this way through the use of a word. Notice in the cloud of unknowing, you don't say it constantly. You take the word and you use it as needed. An example I use in my mind, I look out at the ocean here where sometimes you'll see birds. Some of them, they ride the thermals. They don't flap their wings, and then every so often, they lose altitude and they flap their wings a few times. So, if your word is Jesus, distractions are Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, then you just sit again this way.

But in this prayer, which is also the Desert Fathers, Desert Mothers, it's the constancy. I compared to the experience of chanting the Psalms when I was in the monastery. So, it's the constancy of the rhythm of the chant this way, but it's a flowing constancy. It's not forced. You're carried along by the constancy of God's presence this way. So, I think it's really a matter of being true to yourself. Also notice that in real life you're always listening to how your heart's being moved this way. So, for example, you may be saying the Jesus prayer, and all of a sudden, the words disappear this way.

So, you don't mechanistically decide to conjure up the words again and do violence to the subtly because of the realm of the heart is the depth of presence beyond words. So, you learn to go with the flow of the unfolding of things as it unfolds in you. I think that's the essence of authenticity in the practice. Otherwise, it's a contrived, a priori, locked-in should. Then it does violence to this realm of inner freedom in this union with God.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Another surprising thing for me in taking on this prayer, there's something about it's really helping me deepen into a sense of the constancy of God that I feel like I can just reach out my hands at any time and that mercy is right there when I need it. So, that's showing up much more throughout my day, that sensation of I'm swimming in the mercy, I'm breathing in the mercy like it's always here. That's a new experience for me.

Jim Finley: Yes, this is a major thing really, I think. When I was in the monastery, one of Merton's phrasings, he said, "To realize that in the beginning, what God said in the beginning, let

there be light. So, God's speaking light into being. Let there be stones and trees and stars." He said, "It's very important to know that God just didn't simply set the whole world and the universe beyond into motion and then go off to leave us to get along as best we can." He said, "Creation is going on all the time. The creation is God's self-donating presence, giving itself away in and as the gift and the miracle of our presence, the presence of others and of all things in our shared nothingness without God."

So we know that from God's side then, because the way I put it too, I think one of the talks too is that so if God would cease loving us into existence as we're having this conversation at the count of three, at the count of three, we would disappear because we're nothing, absolutely nothing outside of God's self-donating presence, presenting itself as the gift of our presence that are nothingness without God. All the people listening to this right now, if at the count of three God would cease loving them into the present moment as they listen to this, they would disappear. The world would disappear.

So, that's the great thing is the thread breaks many times from our end because we're often not aware, but it's often not aware. But it never breaks from God's end. Throughout all eternity, it never will because we're eternal. So, we're entering into the stream of eternal fidelity or the constancy of God. It carries us along and that's a deep insight.

Kirsten Oates: One other thing I love about this prayer is the somatic nature of it, that encouragement to listen to the words as a way of having the mind listen to the body versus the other way round. So, one thing I wanted to share was I do the prayer by looking into my heart and imagining I'm in the realm of the heart. But what I noticed is when I get caught up in thoughts, my head has risen up without me realizing. So, I love the body showing me something as well. So, then I'm able to drop my head back down and maybe say the words out loud to help me bring myself back more deeply into my body. So, that's been quite an unexpected but very helpful tool that this prayer's offered me.

Jim Finley: This is my sense of this, another way experiential self-knowledge to the prayer, and I want to compare it to psychotherapy working with trauma, is that when a person is in the process of their healing, in the very midst of the shared vulnerability of the sharing, their voice and their whole demeanor of their body has a certain tonal quality to it this way. Then you can feel when they back off to explain something, there's like a shift away from it. It doesn't betray it, but it just steps away from it and steps back in. So, I think it's very good to be aware of that and also notice that in the beginning, as you suggest, when you return to thinking in your head, your head goes up because you're in your head.

Somatically, you're literally in your head. You go back down and also notice that something else happens. As this becomes habituated, the pilgrim doesn't walk along the road looking down into his own heart, stumbling over things and running into people. He's looking outward into the realm of the heart incarnate in everyone that he meets in life itself. So, in the beginning, there is that somatic distinction and we keep returning to the heart, returning to the heart, but eventually, it atmospherically permeates a habitual state. Someone once said the image of a mandala, like a sacred image, like the cross, whatever it is.

He said, "The thing about a mandala is the longer you gaze at it, the less obvious it gets." So everyone you meet the patterns of the day are like God's mandala. So, it's the constancy of

the seeing this way. I think that's at the heart of the teaching. That's why at the end he tells him, "You can now say the prayer as often as you want," because you're surrendered over into the constancy of God's loving mercy for you.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Well, on that note, I do find myself saying the prayer throughout the day, if I have a moment of feeling anxious or I notice I'm in a thought pattern that I don't like or that's not helpful to me, I go to the prayer. I say it last thing before I fall asleep. If I wake up in the middle of the night, I say it. I say it first thing in the morning before I get out of bed and then I say it again with my practice, but it's showing up throughout the day and night in my life.

Jim Finley: Yes, I think this is another intimate depth of this prayer is we're going through the day, we get anxious or upset, whatever. We can just say the prayer sincerely. It gets regrounded again, this anchoring place. To my mind, what helps me with this is when Jesus says, "Do not be afraid. I'm with you always." So he doesn't say, "Don't be afraid because I'll personally see to it that nothing painful ever happens to you. Look at the cross." Rather, don't be afraid because no matter what happens to you, I'm with you always in the midst of what's happening to you on up to the moment of your death and beyond. So, the simple sincerity of returning to the prayer grounds us. The invincibility of God's loving mercy with us, sustaining us in the wavering ways of the day. That itself is a grace to see that.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah, it really is. It really is. Well, I haven't had the experience of the pilgrim where the prayer woke me up, but what I did have that was interesting was a few times I've gone to engage in the prayer. So, I've lowered my head and in my practice in the morning gotten ready and I can't remember the words. I say them all the time, but I can't remember the words. So, it's almost like I've dropped out of thinking to the point where the words don't come to mind. So, I just often say, when that happens, just mercy, mercy, mercy. Eventually, the words flow in, but yeah, I found that quite interesting.

Jim Finley: Yes. Here's my sense of this too. When we say the prayer, we're in the stream of this path, and there are certain moments such as... It comes in different ways. For example, you can't remember the words. So, in the moment, you sit there in silence. You can't say the prayer because you don't know the words. We might say that in that moment, you're a momentary mystic because in that moment you're resting wordlessly in the mercy of God beyond words. So, then when the words return, I think they return in a new way. They don't return in a way that disrupts the oneness or rather the very rhythm of the words embodies the oneness beyond words. I think that's another example of these larynx of subtle grace shifts that happen inside of us when we follow this path.

Because being that momentary mystic that is finding our way to the realm of the heart, where we in God mutually disappear as dualistically other than each other. It starts showing up atmospherically throughout the day in subtle or not so subtle ways like all pervasively present. So, even when we're not aware of it, as we go through the day, we know in the depths of ourself that the realm of the heart is wholly permeating the mystery of awareness. The Buddhists say, "Don't grow a second head. Don't try to grow this thing you're supposed to keep doing." Rather to fall into the rhythm of the divinity, of the immediacy of the moment as it's unfolding as holy and ultimately divine. I think this is actually what happens to the pilgrim.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. Yeah. Well, last thing to share, I went to church on Sunday and I have a friend who's going through significant crisis in her life. I've been doing my best to help her, but it's hard to see her suffering. In the church service, she came into my mind and I felt like all I could do for her is just say the prayer for her. So, Jesus Christ, have mercy. Tears just flowed, but the tears were filled with that sense of comfort and mercy and I guess grace for the fact that I'm doing my best. As much as I long to fix everything, we can't always do that.

Jim Finley: That's very good. Two things that helped me with this. One, Merton once said, talking to the monks in the monastery, he says, "Sometimes you're sitting in this contemplative silence and a loved one or someone comes into mind. You might think of it as a distraction, but maybe God brought that person to your mind because you're being invited by God to pray for that person." There's another piece of it too, I think, this lovely image I have where Thomas Merton in the monastery, he suffered from insomnia. So, he is lying there in the dark middle of the night and he says, "Suddenly, the bed becomes an altar. In a distant city somewhere, someone is suddenly able to pray." That we're woven into each other in our suffering, permeated the ways God's interwoven with us.

See, that's precious. So, when the tears come, it's like the breath and the prayer. It's the body praying. It's tears, and you're moved by this stuff. That love that moved you to tears is the infinite mercy of Jesus incarnate as your tears. So, it's another graced moment, I think, another example of the transformative blessings that occurred to us as we acclimate ourselves to this habitual state of God's presence in each moment just as it is.

Kirsten Oates: Well, they were all my points that I wanted to share, but I wonder if you have any closing words of encouragement for me or for anyone else who's trying this prayer alongside us here.

Jim Finley: Well, I would say this comes to me now this way. I often think of this actually. So, here we are together. You and I are having this talk and Corey's listening. Everyone listening is listening in his or her own unique way that are drawn by this. So, we ask ourselves, "How has it come to pass that we've become the man or woman who's even capable of being attentive to such things and the intimacy with which we're now capable? Is it not so that it wasn't always like this with us?" See, is it not so there was a first awakening for us?

Little by little by little, these grace awakenings, you connect the dots as it has formed a path. It has led us right up to this moment we're at right now, and we're not dead yet. It's not over. There's more ahead. So, we're in the midst of a path, not of our own making, and yet somehow we're freely choosing to move with the path not of our own making this way, which is this path of discipleship, and these teachings embody that and help ground us in it. That's the gift of this for me, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah, it's a gift for all of us, Jim. So, thank you so much for bringing this gift to life through your teaching and the podcast. Yeah, so that's our coaching session for this season.

Jim Finley: Yeah. I wanted add one more thing. People have commented on this too, thanking you for your attentiveness to it, that lead you to ask questions that are the kinds of questions that sincere seekers ask. When I used to teach high school religion Christology and things to seniors in this Jesuit high school, often since in spirituality, that the stellar students weren't necessarily the ones that knew the answer. They were the ones that raised their hand and ask

the depth of a question that. The question itself is a reverberation of the way this way. So, I think that's the gift of how we pass this on and share this path with each other.

Kirsten Oates: Yes, yes. Well, it's a real gift to have the seat of being the one being able to ask the questions. What a gift for me today to have the seat of leading a meditation like that. I really enjoy leading practices like that and I can hold in my heart. Hopefully, that's helpful for some people. When I do that again, I can experience seeing them all listening.

Jim Finley: Exactly. As a matter of fact, one last note, see, there was the practice, but the point is then we have this dialogue. So, we dare not get stuck in how insightful the dialogue is. We're always circling back around to the practice. Thomas Merton once said, "We don't need more people to write more books on prayer. We need people to have the courage to close the book and pray." So there you go. Practice, the word became flesh and dwelt among us. It's the immediacy of experience.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. On that note, just a reminder for anyone who would like to download the practice, Corey is making it available through a link in the show notes. Thank you so much for today, Jim, and yes, again for this beautiful season. We're looking forward to getting the stories and questions from people who have been listening.

Jim Finley: Me too.

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.