

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 13 of Turning to the Mystics, where we've been turning to St. Thérèse of Lisieux. And I'm here with Jim to reflect on the listener questions that have come in this season.

Jim Finley: Yes. They're really lovely questions, and looking forward to going through them together. Lovely.

Kirsten Oates: Before we get started with our listener questions, we have a little fun announcement. I'll hand that to you, Jim.

Jim Finley: Yes. Robert Ellsberg, who's editor-in-chief of Orbis Books who did my memoir, The Healing Path. He listens to these podcasts and so he's made a decision to publish each one of these mystical podcasts as a book. I'm delighted he's doing that so it'll be the whole series this way, because some people like to hold it in their hand and underline it and so on. And the first one's out on Thomas Merton. I'm so pleased. And Teresa's next, Teresa of Ávila is next. We just keep rolling them out. So I'm very pleased about it just to let you know that if you're interested, just know that it's there.

Kirsten Oates: So how fun is that? So it's Turning to the Mystics, Thomas Merton. And so each season of the podcast will get its own little book. And it is so wonderful to go back, Jim, and just have the opportunity to read your words because it's a different way of experiencing the depth through reading. I've loved reading the first book.

Jim Finley: When you're listening to the voice, it's like the oral tradition. It flows. It's like an event, you just listen. But when you read it, you can pause with a single sentence and sit with it as long as you want because it's very poetic. You know what I mean? You kind of slowly walk through and underline it and sit with it, internalizing the text.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I found it a wonderful opportunity to really slow down, to slow it way, way, way, way down. You take such small snippets of text at a time, and so it just gives you an opportunity to really sit with the depth of the text that you choose.

Jim Finley: There's another thing too, I think about the way I teach and why this is significant. I'm very aware poetically speaking that as I speak, the flow is very wide and very deep and we could literally stop at each point and consider it. I think there's a certain value, like the musicality of it, like this big sweeping poetic felt sense. And then to go back and sit with each phrase, each sentence.

Kirsten Oates: If you're interested in learning more about the Turning to the Mystics book series, there's details in the show notes. I wanted to thank everyone who sent in a question, a voicemail. We had poetry come in, we had drawings come in this season. Dorothy and Jim and I read and listen to everything that comes in, and we're so grateful to connect with you this way. And this season we decided to do two episodes of listener questions. So this is episode one.

Jim Finley: Yes. When I speak on the mystics on silent retreats, I'm always raised by the presence of the people sitting there, and also touched by the sincerity of their questions. But in my writing, sitting here alone writing, also in the podcast, it just goes out. So it's very lovely then to have it echoed back. Just I'm moved by the sincerity of your questions like the circle completes itself. Grace for you to be with me like this and it's grace for Kirsten and I to be with you. We're woven into this together.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Well, let's turn to our first question. First, we had quite a few people send in their feedback that I had been pronouncing Lisieux incorrectly. So I've been saying St. Thérèse of Lisieux and the actual pronunciation is more like Lisieux, and I'm sure that's still not quite correct, but I just wanted to thank people for sending in their feedback. You can tell how much people really care about St. Thérèse and making sure we honor her name and where she was from. And so I want to thank the community. I hope that you're hearing us respond is helpful.

Jim Finley: It is good to be sensitive to that. Juliana of Norwich too, we got people from North writing in and letting us know how to pronounce this word. My approach is different really, is I don't speak French. Feel free to use the Anglicized way would be pronounced in English as I read it speaking in English. And I'm more comfortable with that, but respectful of the importance of that historical specificity of the pronunciation of the French because she was French.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And I just love how people care so much. My favorite one was I've just never heard it said that way.

Jim Finley: Yeah. First time. You're so original, so creative.

Kirsten Oates: So Jim, let's turn to a question from Kristen and she writes, "In the last several years of my life, I have had an insatiable longing to better know Jesus. Jesus is the one in the Trinity with whom I often have the hardest time finding. I can connect with Jesus as I live out the way and I can connect with the mystical Christ. I struggle, however, connecting with Jesus proper, the Jesus who had a body. If Jesus has a body, where is he? I want to see him, hear him, sense him, but I spend most of my life not having a clue where he is. How do I talk to a body I can't see, feel, or hear? Am I trying too hard? To raise his relationship with Jesus seems so intimate, trusting and personal. Does Thérèse of Lisieux or the other mystics have any guidance for me on how to best find Jesus?"

Jim Finley: Some things that have helped me with this is that it's really difficult. If we think of the historical Jesus we're trying to connect with someone who lived 2000 years ago. And so something that helps me is this, is that the Jesus who lived 2000 years ago is the mystical Jesus and he lives. The mystical Jesus is embodied in the gospels. So in a way, the gospels themselves are the body of Jesus. And this is why when we read the gospels in a prayerful way, we can hear the deathless presence embodied in Jesus talking directly to us. Another way of looking at this too, the church itself are Christ's body. So at the last supper, at the Eucharist, when Jesus takes the bread and the wine and says, "This my body." In one sense, he's taking the bread saying, "This is my body." Another way, he's looking at the disciples who are there and saying, "This is my body," that we're Christ's body.

And also when we receive the Communion, that's the embodiment of Jesus, the deathless presence of Jesus. So there's different ways you can poetically and prayerfully kind of this whole mystery about the body of Jesus, the body of Christ. But those are some perspectives that prayerfully help me to see that the Jesus who had the body is the deathless mystical Jesus who is embodied and is given to us. And the spirit in our heart empowers us to see Jesus, to see the Lord. So those are some things that help me.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you, Jim.

Jim Finley: I would add one more thing too. I think we go back to the series on the way of a pilgrim, Lord [inaudible 00:07:58]. That's another very intimate way to know the deathless presence of the embodied Jesus. Yeah, through that prayer and the story of the pilgrim.

Kirsten Oates: Jim, I might add something too that I find reflecting on what Jesus went through in his life for me or people I'm working with, if they're going through something very similar to feel how Jesus went through that similar experience in his body, and either to bring up images of that or to read about that can be really helpful, I find.

Jim Finley: Another thing I think is very helpful. See, Jesus says in the gospels, "What you do to the least of ... you do to me." We might say this too. What we do to what's least in ourselves we do to Jesus, because our body is the embodied presence of Jesus. Another thing that helps me in prayer is if you're reading the gospels they have a picture of Jesus and light a candle in front of it. So there's a kind of a devotional sincerity of the embodied presence of Jesus. So there's different ways that you might find it helpful to consider these things.

Kirsten Oates: Moving on to a question from Wendy. "Jim reminded us that when Jesus was 12, he remained in Jerusalem after the Passover. Mary and Joseph searched for him for three days, and they found him in the temple. Jim said he thinks it's interesting that they searched for Jesus for three days and he was in the tomb for three days." Do you have any further thoughts on that, Jim?

Jim Finley: First of all, it was just kind of like an aside. It's interesting. It's incidental. This could be like a coincidence. There's another way when I thought about it, I know you can overdo this. What's very interesting is that when they were returning from Jerusalem from the Passover and Jesus was missing. But likewise, when Jesus died and was in the tomb for three days, Jesus was missing. And so although Jesus was missing for three days there and Jesus was missing in the tomb, the Jesus that was missing is never missing because that's the resurrected presence of Jesus. And sometimes I think in our own heart, Jesus is missing. We can't devotionally get a sense of God's oneness with us and the incarnate presence of Jesus. But even though it's missing from our inability to experience the presence of Jesus is never missing, is always one with us because we're the beloved.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way Jesus' life goes back and forward through history. He points back and forward in Jesus, like the whole of history is rewritten in a way.

Jim Finley: Yes. Another way I put it too that helps me. The annunciation of Mary, of Hail Mary full of grace, you're going to be the presence of Jesus, the enunciation. And then the birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the suffering of Jesus and the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus reveal us to ourself, because we can look at our own angelic visitations where God invited us to see that God's one with us incarnate in a new way and Jesus is born and new in our heart. Bethlehem 2000 years ago, but born new endlessly in our heart and Jesus reveals our own life to us because Jesus lived our life. He entered into our human life and Jesus on the cross entered into our suffering, and Jesus' death entered into our death and the light of Jesus' erection shines in our annunciation, shines in our birth, shines in our life.

So we kind of see this interplay I think of Jesus revealing us to ourself.

Kirsten Oates: Next question. Another question from Wendy. "In dialogue three, Thérèse talks about surrendering herself and her littleness and that she belongs to God. She also talks about knowing that in Jesus, God is surrendered to us and in Jesus, God belongs to us. There's a reciprocity in the surrender. I was shocked at the idea of God giving God's self to me, God surrendering to me. Is this to do with me being hung up on my understanding of the difference between giving and surrendering? Would it be possible for Jim to expand on the concept that God is surrendered to us?"

Jim Finley: I think you're onto something here because it depends on understanding what the word surrender means because it would be very strange if Jesus would come walking through the door and say, "I surrendered to you." But what surrender really means we surrender to Jesus, we surrender ourself in love to Jesus and we know that in Jesus, God freely chooses to surrender to us in love. And we also know on the cross, "See into your hands, I commend my spirit," and he died. So it really means a loving surrender of giving ourself over to Jesus. When giving ourself over to Jesus, we're giving ourself over to God who in Jesus

has given to us. So it has to do with the surrender, how love makes one, and it's meant in that sense.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, that's helpful. Yeah. That's what love is.

Jim Finley: That's what love is. And God is love.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for those questions, Wendy. Next question is from Nikki. "I was listening to your second podcast on Thérèse and I was shocked by how strongly I couldn't stand it. I felt it was sentimental and insensitive. As a child, I was not loved and was abused in various different ways. So the deep talk on how loving Thérèse was as a little child, et cetera, I found intolerable. It was only talking about my surprising response with a spiritual director that I had to look at my anger. Sadly, I realized I still, still, still, despite so much therapy, praying, delicate undoing, sadly in front of Jesus God, feel unlovable. It's easy for me to give love, but this receiving was in a tangle. In beginning to understand that and about time too, because I'm 82 years old, I feel as if I've released one step, one big step to being grounded and yet light up more at home, more accepted, even more lovable. So closer, closer. Thank you."

Jim Finley: Well, first of all, thanks for the vulnerability of the question, because I think a lot of people are holding things like this inside of them. And two things we have in common is I'm 82 and I was traumatized because I wasn't loved. So I have some thoughts. I say this to us as a therapist who work with trauma. One is to know that as a child, a little girl can't give herself the experience of her own preciousness. She has to see it mirrored in her parents' eyes. And when she looks into their eyes and no one looks back, she internalizes their inability to see her, and especially if it starts very young some of these feelings are preverbal. And sometimes if it goes very, very deep, there's a certain way it goes on and on and on, like a little piece of us.

So some things that I find helpful. One, to know that the shortcoming was in them and not in you because you were lovable, you weren't loved because they didn't love you, but you were lovable. Here's another big question. Are you learning to also appreciate the people through your life who do love you? The beloved, the friend, whoever it is. Another big one that has like with therapy, could the adult you with God's grace turn to the you that doesn't feel love and love her. I see you, dear one. I love you because if she keeps looking towards her parents, she'll never get the love because they're not going to give it. But if instead she can learn to look at you seeing and loving her, it could have really helped to heal this core feeling.

And my last thought is this, is that this deep, deep feeling that you have, you're not the only one who struggles with this, that all over the world there's people struggling with it. And so this feeling of not being loved in a way doesn't belong to you. In a way, you're woven into all these people who don't feel love. And so what it can do is to know that we belong to each other in our suffering,

belonging together in God who's infinitely in love with all of us in our suffering, and also kind of just where you are with God since God loves you. And toward the end of her life, Thérèse, she was dying of TB, she suffered so. She said, "I still know that God loves, but I can't feel it." She was in the dark night. She died in that right up to the last second. It was like an ecstatic moment. So those are some things that might be helpful. But again, thank you for the vulnerability of your question.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I want to thank you too, Nikki. It brought a tear to my eye reading that and I really appreciate the phrase "after all this spiritual direction and all the prayer and the therapy," because for those of us who have done therapy in spiritual direction and prayed a lot, it is always surprising when the next thing comes up, when you thought you've worked on everything and there's a little surprise hiding there. So I just really resonate how disappointing that can feel, and yet it's also the way God continues to reach us in our deepest places.

Jim Finley: Another way this often works and it happened to you too, that a triggering event is anything in the present that reminds you of the trauma. So when you were reading about how love she was, it was a triggering event and that's how it works. So what you could do in between times practice loving her, that is practice loving the little girl inside who doesn't believe she's loved. So little by little with God's grace, she can see in you and to know that when you get surprised, like blindsided by it, that's what it's like and then renew the prayer as an ongoing walk.

Kirsten Oates: And know Nikki, that we're with you in spirit loving that little girl who's perfect and precious just as she is. Okay. Thank you again, Nikki.

This question is from the Brewers, a family who listens to the podcast together. That's so fun. The question is, "If you're comfortable, could you please share a brief description of a contemplative moment you have experienced in the recent past? One of those quotidian spaces where you are, as Jim described in the second episode, accepting as a child and being ourselves, an act of acceptance. For me, it most often happens while I'm looking at my family in the in between times, or at a tree near my house or in the sun or rain or maybe during a class change as I am a teacher. I would really love to hear examples and I think the other listeners who are just hopping on this really beautiful train of discussion would like an image too."

Jim Finley: Yes. One, since Maureen has died, I'm 82 years old and I live alone here where she and I lived for 30 years, ocean's right outside the window. So there's a kind of atmospheric kind of consistency to this sense of God's presence and the rhythms as I go through the day a lot. Another big one for me is that when I'm preparing talks, like preparing the talks on Thérèse, I'm immersed in Thérèse. And as I immerse in Thérèse, I'm immersed with the guidance of Thérèse in the presence of God. Also, then when I'm giving the talks, I'm speaking out of the space inside and in a way like God speaking through me, kind of echoing

Thérèse. And I also sense that like now in the sincerity of your questions, I sense the presence of God in your communal sincerity. That's where these questions are coming from and I think that's God in you asking, guiding and inspiring you. So those will be some ways that I experience it.

Kirsten Oates:

Well, thank you so much for the question. I love getting this question and I love thinking about this family, the Brewers, listening to the podcast together. That's a lovely vision. As I read your question and your own examples, it reminded me of an experience I had with my sister who is a school teacher. And when she was just starting out as a teacher, I got to visit her classroom and she was teaching the very young class, grade one, I think. And I just remember how much the children just loved my sister, and how much my sister just loved those children. And thinking about it through this lens, it was a real act of acceptance because my sister had to accept this kind of hero worship from these children, knowing that she could mirror it back to them, that they were her little heroes. And so I think about that classroom as a reciprocal gateway into that childlike acceptance, and it was a real joy for me to experience that and be a part of that.

Okay. Jim, this question's from Bill. "Jim, you said that Thérèse loved the world in praying for people, and in the meditations you ask the saints to pray for us. How do you understand intercessory prayer? What does it mean to pray for people?"

Jim Finley:

First of all, Jesus invites us to intercessory prayer, "Seek and you will find, knock and it all be open to ask." And just different modes of intercessory prayer. I think when someone that we love is going through difficult times and we pray and we ask God to help them is that our love for the person is merging with God's love for the person, as kind of channeling a sense of efficacy or grace of how God touches people's lives. And in a way, I think it also in very sincerely asking, it blesses us in asking. There's another way to look at it too, is a communion of saints like the ancestors, that in the communion of saints all those who have crossed, including Thérèse, Thérèse is crossing over. And so in the communion of saints, we can ask her to help us and trust that Thérèse in a way we don't understand and we don't need to, that she hears us.

We hear it through her intercession. A great thing if you ever want to look it up is the Litany of the Saints. We used to chant it at the monastery. All you holy monks and hermits, all you pray for us. All you martyrs pray for us. All you disciples pray for us. And know that the living and the dead, those who have crossed over and those of us still on earth are in a common Communion with one another in God. So it's a very consoling how interwoven we are in life and death in the eternal love of God.

Kirsten Oates:

It really reminds me of Thérès' teaching in that she invites God to help her in her limitations to meet her and her limitations and her ordinariness. And in those moments when we feel so limited that the one we love is in pain and we would love to be able to fix it, but we're limited that we can turn to God in faith

knowing that God's with the person, God's with us. It's an expression of understanding our limits and understanding God's divinity.

Jim Finley: It's really true. And also another way that I understand the person who's suffering, especially if the loved one dies, for example, to know that God's unexplainable oneness with the person isn't explainable in terms of how it turns out, because it's the peace of God that surpasses understanding that sustains them. Even if everything slips away, the love of God immersed in them and them and God never slips away. So we know it anteriorly in faith.

Kirsten Oates: A question from Laura, "I was really struck by your comment that many saints speak more about their connection with God and don't mention Jesus often. Whereas some saints like Saint Thérèse feel very connected to Jesus. It made me wonder whether any saints connect most with the Holy Spirit, and it made me wonder why we don't seem to hear much about someone feeling a strong connection with the Holy Spirit. I'd love to hear your thoughts on this."

Jim Finley: And Paul and listen to the Romans, we don't know what to pray for, but the Holy Spirit within us with an utterable groanings, praise that we might deepen our experience of God's oneness with us in Jesus. So when you really read the mystics very closely, the Holy Spirit is the awakener of our hearts. In a way, they mention the Holy Spirit a lot because it's really to the power of the Holy Spirit that they're empowered to realize God's presence the way they've realized it. And you'll see them referring to that. So when you read it very closely, you'll kind of see that awakening. Another big thing in the tradition with the mystics and Jesus is that wherever we're focusing on one person of the Trinity, the other two are always there because God is one. And I think we quite naturally move back and forth in different texts of God, God is Father, Father Jesus, he who sees me sees the Father. The Spirit is awakening our heart.

And Pentecost, the whole event of Pentecost after Jesus' death, they were gathered together in the upper room, still frightened and the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them and they were awakened. They speak of it as tongues of fire like poetically. So we don't know what that is really, but we do know this, that in the light of Pentecost, which is the Holy Spirit, whoever met one of the disciples met Jesus. Since we celebrate Pentecost every year, we believe that whoever meets us with all of our frailties meets Jesus, and that's the Holy Spirit woven through us awakening us to God's presence in each other.

Kirsten Oates: I love that. That's beautiful. I guess in a way the Holy Spirit is built to point us to God or Jesus in a way and so never take center stage.

Jim Finley: That's true. That's a nice way to say yes.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you for that question, Laura.

Jim Finley: Oh, I might add one more thing.

Kirsten Oates: Oh, yeah.

Jim Finley: I was like this, the Theologian Raimon Panikkar. He says the Trinity is Christ's mind because Jesus says "Our Father who art in heaven." And then Jesus says "He who sees me sees the Father." And then Jesus says, "I want to send the spirit." So in a way the Trinity is Christ's mind and the Trinitarian mystery of how God's woven into our life, I like that insight, to see it that way.

Kirsten Oates: Excellent. So a question from Brian, "My question relates to a passage towards the end of session two where you read the story of Theresa's reaction to her father's comment regarding ending the tradition of filling her shoes with presence on Christmas Eve. After hearing the passage, I couldn't help but ask myself, 'What is God calling me to outgrow in this stage of my life?' For the last three years or so, I have hardly been able to do any surfing or practice centering prayer due to work responsibilities and family commitments. These are two things that were a very big part of my life and I still have a strong desire for both. My question is, how can I discern whether God is calling me to let go of some form of prayer or hobby, or if he is asking me to make the necessary sacrifices to recommit?"

Jim Finley: One always helps me. Where Thomas Merton says we should all get down on our knees right now and thank God we can't live the way we want to. He says you can't love and live on your own terms. You can't practice contemplative prayer as much or serve as much, and it's because you love your family. So God's given to you that like the richness of that. I have to also say in your work, Jesus was a carpenter. You have to assume that in the work that you're providing a product or you're providing a service that helps people in God's present and the commitment of your endeavor, like the integrity of your work ore et labora to pray and to work. I would also suggest something else, like a spiritual direction question to nuance it. It may be true that you don't have as much time to practice centering prayer, but instead of either or, I think it could likely be both.

For example, when you wake up in the morning, before you get out of bed, you could practice the Jesus prayer. You could practice the prayer of the horror centering prayer a little bit. On the way home from work, if you pass a church or a cemetery, you could stop for 15 minutes. Or when you're at home, you could say to your wife and children, "I'd like to be alone for 15 minutes," and practice centering prayer. It's also a great way to fall asleep at night. So I think it's woven throughout the whole day. In regard to surfing, it's nice to have something you like so much. I live at the ocean and I see people all surfing on their surf boards. I'll bet if you ask your wife, "Would it be okay if one Saturday afternoon a month I could surf?" She might say, "I'd like to come to and watch. Let's take the kids with it."

So I would suggest that you might find a way to integrate the surfing and the prayer into the family into work, and kind of see their different modes of God's oneness in your life. See where that takes you.

Kirsten Oates: That's beautiful. I love those kind of discernment questions because we'd love a black or white answer.

Jim Finley: Well, we do. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: And it's always very nuanced, isn't it?

Jim Finley: It is.

Kirsten Oates: You have to tease it out yourself. This question is from Scott. "I have been listening to Turning to the Mystics since season one. As Jim suggested, I've been reading the interior castle one paragraph at a time. Recently, I've added a paragraph at the same time from the way of a pilgrim and Brother Lawrence. I found it a great way to end the day with a sit and drift into sleep. Upon occasion, at odd times during the day, I'll get a sensation of awareness of the vastness of people praying across the world and throughout eternity In the moment, prayers of thanks, blessing, hardship, lament, anger, praise, all types of prayers, including prayers of contemplative silence. Today, while sitting in a meeting, I had a sense of awareness of the vastness of heaven. There is a sense of almost weightlessness that accompanies them. They don't interrupt my day or distract me. I'm just aware and then they're gone. I wonder if you might comment on these experiences. I never expected or imagined anything like this happening to me. If they never happen again, that's okay. I'm simply curious about them."

Jim Finley: Yeah, it's lovely. Very lovely. I would say this as well. It's so interesting how unique we each are on this path. I think everyone who's drawn to listen to the mystics, we all in different ways have these grace awakening. It's really wonderful when it starts taking on an underlying habitual state where keeps rising and falling in all kinds. I mean, what a grace. And you're also right, you don't know how long this will last because it could be the dark night ahead. And so it's not being attached to these experiences, but being grateful for all of them. And then knowing that if it does happen, that it ebbs and flows and you're not immersed in the experience to know that God's mysteriously there in the absence of the inability to experience it as the dark night. So we're always handing ourself over to the rhythms how providentially God's guiding us in our life, but you're being really blessed by these rhythms of grace, the ribbon through your day. It's wonderful, beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: I always think about how God is infinite. So there's an infinite number of ways God's oneness can be revealed-

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: ... revealed to us. And so it's nice to hear certain peoples register the way it shows up in them, but not for others to feel like it has to show up the same way.

Jim Finley: Because no matter how it's presently showing up, we have to realize how it's presently showing up now always wasn't this way. There are ways in the past it wasn't like this at all. And likewise, you need to be very open. It might not necessarily ... I like Karl Rahner says "It's really true that the distance between the infinite presence of God and us as a finite creature is an infinite distance. But since God's the author of that distance, that very distance is God and there's no such thing as the absence of God." So that somehow, this is a dark night. Sometime we'll act to sit very deeply with the absence of the ability to experience God that we know is somehow mysteriously present and the inability to experience it going deeper and deeper and deeper. So intimately mysterious.

Kirsten Oates: We had a couple of questions about Jim, your relationship with Jesus. And so let's listen to a voicemail from Amy, and then there's a question from Geneva.

Amy: Hi, this is Amy from Utah. I just had a question for Jim. He mentioned that throughout most of his life the kind of north star or figurehead has been a focus on God, but in the last five years it's shifted to a focus more on Jesus. I was just curious about that, if he could speak to that for a moment and maybe why that is in this, his third half of life. Thank you again.

Kirsten Oates: And the question is, "Jim, you mentioned in one of the sessions that you did not relate to Jesus at first, but in later years you have more connection with him. To whom are you relating to at first and what is different now?"

Jim Finley: I think when I was at home in the trauma before I went to the monastery, when I went to high school, I think I felt very connected to Jesus because of the suffering of Jesus and receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, because I saw Jesus in his suffering let me know that I wasn't alone in my suffering. And when I went to the monastery, in a way it shifted more. I used to, I think, be more aware of the infinite presence of God surrounding me. And I used to sit in the back of this great big church of the monastery, and I used to try to sit so still and be so quiet that I could hear God speaking me into being so I would sit very, very still. But even though I was more in that sense of God, I was still very involved with Jesus, the sacred heart of Jesus, the Eucharist.

I read the gospels every day. So there's always kind of a momentary emphasis that always includes presence of God, presence of Jesus, presence of the Spirit. We just need to stay open to the rhythms of the flow of how it's given to us, I think.

Kirsten Oates: Beautiful. And Jim, do you feel in this part of your life you'll become more connected through Jesus, maybe through Thérèse?

Jim Finley: I would say this is through Thérèse, she reminds me how deeply connected with Jesus I am. And notice also with her, it's so Jesus. It's Jesus in an all enveloping, unexplainable, intimate way that is the presence of God, the Father and God's presence in her life.

Kirsten Oates: I love where you shared with us that Jesus in the scripture, it says, "Jesus is the invisible face of God."

Jim Finley: That's right.

Kirsten Oates: We have a couple of questions on Theresa's orientation towards suffering and I'll start with the one from Karina. "I wanted to ask about wanting to suffer. Something in me doesn't like this idea. I find the book, *The Story of a Soul*, very beautiful and intend to reread it, but this idea of asking to suffer, I struggle with. I think we get just the right amount of suffering we need for our journey to make us stronger. So I don't like asking for more than I am able to handle. I feel like these people are so holy that they are willing to take more to help the rest of the world. Are they in a higher state of consciousness?" And now I'll read the question from Theresa and I hope I'm pronouncing your name correctly. She raises concerns about a quote from Thérèse where she says that she was pleased in her frailty that she was able to observe the rigors of lent with extra fasting and so on the time of penance.

This extreme severity, especially in the face of her illness, seems out of sync with the profusely loving relationships that she had with her family of birth, and it seems out of sync with the profusely loving relationship that she has had with Jesus. Would we even see it as anorexia in our age? The other direction of the quote that stays with me is in my own efforts to see myself as beloved by God, by Jesus. I am truly ordinary, but who could possibly compete with ordinary as Thérèse understands it?

Jim Finley: It's funny. It's good. It's really true. She knows she's dying. She has TB, but she was able to observe the fast of Lent, the Pentecost to realize something, but she didn't experience it as harsh because it was her vocation. Likewise, when I was in the monastery, we got up at 2:30 in the morning, slept on a straw mattress on boards in a common dormitory. This way, lived in complete silence, didn't talk, but I didn't experience it as harsh because I think it was my vocation. I think that's true. Another big thing for her, don't forget, her older sisters are right there in the same monastery. They just loved her to pieces. That's why they asked her to write the book. They thought she was a saint, just loved and she loved them. All that was there this way.

Also, anorexia nervosa. It isn't impossible you could become a saint, have anorexia, just like you'd have a saint, have major depression or anything, but I don't think so because she shows no evidence of any issues around food. She doesn't report that or they don't report that about it. Those are some things that helped me how I would understand that phrase about her being grateful.

Kirsten Oates: I love that, that was her vocation. Makes a lot of sense. Yeah.

Jim Finley: I say this a lot in therapy with myself. We can be going through the midst of very difficult things for different reasons, but if we feel it's providential what we're going through, then God's present in the difficulties that we're living with day by day. And I think it's really true because we're always in a situation. So how am I being sustained and how am I learning from God how God's sustaining me in this situation? I also do think that when we're really struggling in a situation and we move into a brighter place, one would hope so. Not always, but if one does. It's so important to never forget what you learned in the dark, not just because there's lessons there about being sustained in difficulty, but knowing all over the world how many of your brothers and sisters are struggling in difficulty. See, we all belong to each other and we're woven into each other.

So I think those kind of insights, they help me with this concern that you're raising.

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. And thank you for that question. The next question is from Estella and she's reflecting on the episode we did with Richard, which was so wonderful to have him on the podcast. And Estella wrote, "Father Richard's comments about his oneness on the Enneagram made me wonder about Thérèse. Was she a four? And if so, how did her fourness impact the expression of her spirituality and her path to holiness? She was tremendously artistic and creative. How did this shape her image of God, her connection with nature and other aspects of her personality?"

Jim Finley: Kirsten, I've been working on a book on the mystical dimensions of the Enneagram. Faith Touches Science and so forth. And I'm going to hand this over to Kirsten. Then I want to add a little piece to the end about Richard. What would you say about Thérèse on the Enneagram?

Kirsten Oates: Thank you, Jim. Well, let's start with what the Enneagram is. For those of you who haven't heard of it's a personality typing tool that describes nine distinct personality types and it helps us see ourselves more clearly, not just our gifts and strengths, but the deeper motivations underneath. The modern form of the Enneagram came into the West in the '70s through Claudio Naranjo, a Chilean psychiatrist building on work he learned from Oscar Ichazo. Richard learned the Enneagram from a Jesuit priest who had learned it from Naranjo and fell in love with the system, and he later wrote a book about it, bringing in a Christian perspective. So it's called The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective. He loves to talk about the Enneagram. It's hard to get through a conversation without Richard bringing something up about the Enneagram. He types himself as a one as you heard, the perfectionist and they're focused on being good and always doing the right thing, and they carry very high standards for themselves to meet.

So how about Thérèse? Well, the first thing to say about the Enneagram is that your type has got to be determined from the inside out. It's not always behavior that's obvious from the outside, it's about the internal motivation. So that means only the person themselves can really confirm their type. And so anything we say is just a hypothesis. So turning to Thérèse, I can see why you suggested the four, which is often called the romantic. And these types feel their emotions very, very deeply and they like to express themselves very authentically, and connect to others authentically in their deepest emotions. They're drawn to beauty and sharing the depth of emotional experience through creativity. So Thérèse had a lot of that.

When I sat with Thérèse's story, I found myself drawn to the nine for her and the nine is the peacemaker, and the peacemaker is a person that just everyone feels comfortable all around. They're the person that everyone gets on with, and they like to create harmony among people. So they're the person in the family that everyone likes. When they have the family gathering, everyone comes and they create this harmony among people that might not otherwise get on and that's their priority. That's how they create a sense of belonging for themselves. After Thérèse's mother died, she became a central focus of her family and everyone babied her, and that was a harmonizing force after a great tragedy and she let that go on for many years. She talks about letting people baby her well beyond her years of being a baby. And so that could be a nine strategy of maintaining that sense of harmony, kind of self-forgetting a little bit that she should be growing up and rebelling. And so that's characteristic of a nine. Also, she loved to daydream, disappear into her imagination.

This is also a characteristic of a nine, merging into other stories in their imagination. When I think about Thérèse this way, what I love about her little way is it's the transcendence of that wound. It's handing her whole self over to God just as she is, but instead of keeping the peace by vanishing, she hands her whole self over to God and allows God to come through her. So her little way is like the opposite of the nine strategy. She surrenders her whole self, God rises up through her littleness and illuminates everything she does.

Jim Finley:

That's very good. By the way, I want to go back and touch on something on the previous question about Thérèse and fasting. I just want to touch on something. I love this phrase. You said, "I am truly ordinary, but who could possibly compete with being an ordinary as Thérèse?" And I can't get over like, "Oh darn, I'm not as ordinary as you are. I'm working on it. I just can't get that ordinary." That's pretty good. The ego is always setting something up for itself that it can't do and think it's trying to close the gap. I think it's so good. We all do that in different ways. But you know about Richard, in the Enneagram too, there's the unredeemed and the redeemed.

So the unredeemed, this is where it touches therapy is you're looking at distortions of your personality type that are holding the psychological symptoms that you're holding about yourself, the internalized trauma, internalized

abandonments, internalized all the rest of it. So by the healing of the distortions of the personality type, it then leads to the wholeness of the personality type and especially here's a lumen by grace. I think Richard Dore, he talks about himself as the one, but then he says he always looks forward to being humiliated I think at least three times a day. I think it's three. That's very good. See, that's-

Kirsten Oates: At least once a day.

Jim Finley: At least once a day. That's redemption. So you literally use the tripping place as a place where you keep falling into God's arms. So the very place instead of being the liability, it's a configuration of how you're transformed by grace this way.

I think that's a nice insight.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. And that was very much Thérèse's insight, isn't it? That her ordinariness, her littleness, she handed that over to God.

Jim Finley: She really did. I loved how she says, I talk about this with Richard too in the talk where she says, "I want to be a saint, but I'm so aware of my endless limitations." She said "and therefore," and this kind of thing that she says, she's 23 years old. She says, "Therefore, because I can't reach it, you're going to have to be my sanctity." That's good. And then she says, "And you've given me your sanctity and that's Jesus, because you're woven into the humanity of me. Your presence is incarnate in my ordinariness." So you can kind of see how she transcends that.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. So for anyone out there who loves the Enneagram, we've woven some in there. Look forward to your feedback.

And with that, we've come to the end of part one of our listener questions. We look forward to seeing you for part two. 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 [podcast@cac.org](mailto:podcast@cac.org) or send us a voicemail. All this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.