

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. Therese of Lisieux, and I'm here with Jim for part two of our listener questions. Okay, this question is from Diane. "I identify quite a bit with Therese as a little flower instead of all the gorgeous showy flowers out there. Perhaps this is why I let the dandelions bloom on my lawn, those bright little orbs of sunshine in spring, while my neighbor spends hours and effort poking them out one by one.

As a young hothead Christian, and a probable one on the Enneagram, I imagined myself as a mover and shaker, or at least aligning my talents with important movements for justice and change in the world. Reflecting back as a 70-year-old, I built a very small world, simply caring for the ones closest to me, and imperfectly, too. My son has intellectual disabilities and my daughter mental health issues.

Writing poetry has helped me immeasurably to process the life I live, and I am content and happy. Recently, I self-published a small book of poetry. Jim, you quoted Thomas Aquinas in the bonus episode with Richard Rohr, 'God is more a tree than a tree could ever possibly be.' That touched me deeply, as trees are very dear to me. I would be grateful to learn where you know that quote from and if you could provide the exact wording."

Jim Finley: A couple things struck me listening to what you were sharing here about yourself. See, back in the day when you were the firebrand out there fighting for social justice, that was your way of being holy then. But as we get older, we have to keep evolving into our present way. So taking care of someone who has special needs, writing poetry, the wisdom of the elders, like dropping down into the ordinariness of how you're providentially with God now.

In terms of, "God's more of a tree than a tree could ever possibly be," where I learned this is I had the opportunity to study medieval philosophical theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, at the monastery. Had a deep effect on me, really. St. Augustine and Duns Scotus and Bonaventure. Dan Walsh is quoting that saying that Thomas Aquinas said it that way. Whether he said it specifically, that's how Dan Walsh said it, "God is more tree than a..." But how he meant it was, and this is in the Summa Theologica, it was kind of a very poetic way of looking at this.

See, in the beginning, God said, "Let there be light. Let there be stones and trees and stars and so on." So when God created trees, God didn't have to think up what trees might be. God said, "Let's figure out how to do this one." Because from all eternity, "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,

and the Word was God, and all things were made through him. And without him, there has been nothing that has been made."

So from all of eternity, God the Father in contemplating the Word contemplates trees in Christ's mind, and that's the eternity of trees. So when God said, "Let there be trees." When we look out, these are trees. So in ego consciousness, we don't see this. We sit under it to have an apple or read a book, or cut it down or some darn thing.

But if we contemplate a tree, like the thing about Brother Lawrence, when we contemplate a tree or gaze into a fire, we can see the divinity of trees, like the holiness of trees this way. And that's always been a big thing for me, really, mystically. I think the mystics are so... Like the world is God's body. It is bodying forth the love that's uttering it into being this way, the mountains and the rivers and the darkness of the night.

So in the Summa Theologica, you can look this up, I think we'll give passages, but I want to say this, it's difficult. 'Cause unless you're trained to understand that, and someone to help you get inside that language. I'm going to be doing some of this in the podcast a little bit with Aquinas as a mystic, but it's challenging, unless you're trained in the use of metaphysical language. It might be just enough, more than enough, just have that lovely phrase, and just know that it's true. Carl Jung says, "How can we claim the years have taught us anything if we'd not listen to the secret that whispers in the brooks?" So anyway, that's where that came from.

Kirsten Oates: And I think, Jim, it's a Latin phrase in the Summa theological. So is it ipsum esse?

Jim Finley: Yeah, ipsum esse. See, esse is to be. Ipsum esse, "I am the infinite to be." Ipsum esse. And the trees are all this. And you know the poem, "Poems are made by fools like me, but only God can make a tree." That's a well known poem.

Kirsten Oates: That's very good.

Jim Finley: It's a lovely little poem. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: That was very good. This question is from Kathleen. "My question has to do with the pronoun He and Father being used for God most of the time. I get why writings of the past use it. What I don't get is why in 2026 that is how the two of you and Richard use it. I find Creator, Word and Spirit best for Trinity, and in my own life, nameless mystery rather than a human term. Appreciate your thoughts about this."

Jim Finley: Well, first of all, to your own self be true. If you're comfortable with it, then do that, 'cause God's present in that. That's why you're touched by these teachings. But the reason I use it, and Richard use it, is that Jesus used it. Abba, what do you pray Abba, Father?

And the connotation is this. There's not a generic God, but rather God is an infinite love that's intimately and personally in love with you. Abba, Father, Mother. And it's Abba instead of Amma, instead of the man, 'cause of the patriarchal nature of culture.

And Jesus said, "When you pray, say, 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" You know Jesus, I understand what you're saying, but I'm going to stick with Creator, "Our Creator who art in..." and I think Jesus would say, "Great. Call me whatever you want. Seriously."

But anyway, but a lot of people think this. What also gets is people get misguided 'cause they take it literally, this poetic metaphors. The divine presence of God is always the presence of someone. It's just not presence. And that someone is an infinite someone who is giving itself to you as who you are. It's personal in a boundaryless way, and that's why it's, "Our Father," in a classical sense.

Kirsten Oates: I love the way Jesus would say, "Use whichever word feels right to you."

Jim Finley: "Relax. I'm fine, seriously."

Kirsten Oates: And a lot of damage has been done under the sense of God as violent male aura, so I can understand why people don't like to continue to use that.

Jim Finley: The church doesn't have a good track record this way. It's always learning. Jesus never talked that way. It's so interesting. So it's an imposed kind of empire structuring things. We get so burned by that, we don't open the scriptures and listen to Jesus. He never talked that way.

Kirsten Oates: I loved the season we did on practicing the presence with Brother Lawrence, and how Carmen was trying different language for the Trinity and using they. And so I think in our day and age, it's wonderful to expand, 'cause as you say, God is infinite. So there's an infinite number of ways we can call on God. So thank you for that question, Kathleen.

And we're moving to a question from Trey. "I wanted to share a thought about the word confluence in relation to experiencing God, as it has been my experience, and that have sent Therese. When God has spoken to me, it has usually been at the confluence of woundedness with an opportunity for growth. The two recognitions of this that came together for me in today's podcast with ease: St. Therese experienced God in the confluence of her night of coughing up blood on Good Friday. She knew that she had grown closer in understanding God's love in her suffering, with that of Jesus' crucifixion.

The other confluence during the podcast came at the end when Jim and Richard started comparing notes on their first experience of St. Therese and the meaning she has on their respective lives. Starting in their respective

monasteries the same year, journeying on their different pathways to God, and now sitting together in the podcast, sharing their wisdom so meaningfully to so many. Saint Therese brought you two together in a confluence that deepened a friendship and strengthened the understanding of God's sustaining love, grace and mercy."

Jim Finley: Yeah, lovely. I love the word confluence. I looked it up and the etymology of the word is where two rivers merge into one river. And so what we have is a confluence of a flow, of God flowing into and merging into the oneness of who we are. And it's the confluence, with us in faith and prayer, of us flowing into God flowing into us.

Also, when we love one another, there's a confluence of how we flow into the presence of each other and our love for one another. It's also interesting, in the passage of time, in the flow each day, the light of the day in a flowing confluence flows into the darkness of the night. And every morning, the darkness of the night yields to the flow of giving us up to the day. So there's this constant rhythmic flowing of this way.

And also, I think for us also, is in our passage through time, our life is flowing into our death and our death is flowing into eternity. And so it's a great image. Teresa of Avila has this lovely image. She's thinking about her own soul. She said, "It's like a river flowing along, and it's raining and the rain coming down is the presence of God raining down into the river. And you can no longer tell the water and the rain from the water of the river, and I can't tell me and God apart from one another as divine union." So anyways, it's a lovely image. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: I also really appreciate the way Trey, at the beginning, talked about, "When God has spoken to me, it has usually been at the confluence of woundedness with an opportunity for growth."

And I think that relates beautifully to what you said about the two rivers, because when the two rivers come together, you form something bigger. As we allow our wounds to be healed by God, we grow in our capacity. We experience a sense of growth, and so-

Jim Finley: This is so big with ourself also as a therapist working with trauma, or a medicine and so on. When we're blessed in conditions of blessedness physically, mentally, emotionally, there's a confluence where it kind of yields to broken places, like symptoms in ourself or a loved one. And it's also true the broken places are broken places, the suffering. But it's also true as broken as they are, they're not just broken, 'cause there's the confluence of being unexplainably sustained.

And likewise, in times of a blessing, the blessings really are blessings, but they're not just blessings, 'cause when we actually get there, there's unexpected burdens waiting for us in the blessing. So this constant interplay back and forth between light and dark, and gain and loss. There's the Daoist, Chuang-tzu, the

Dao De Jing, the Dao, the flowing, divinity that runs through the depths of everything.

He said, "Imagine that there's been a rain, torrential rain for days. And it's rained so hard, when you stand on one side of the river, you can't even see to the other side. And the river floods the farmlands and houses on both sides. Then he personifies the river and the river rolls his eyes and said, 'Look at me, look what I can do. I'm really something.'" And then it says, "Until he gets to the ocean and he flows into the Dao, confluence like, "Whoops, no comment." I love that image in Zhuangzi.

Kirsten Oates: Well, thank you for that reflection, Trey. And we have a question from Angela. "I loved hearing Father Richard talk about how he was given the bone relic of St. Therese, but then we also said that her bones were all over the world. I'm confused, because when a person dies and is cremated, we are told all the ashes have to be buried together in sacred ground. What happens when relics are distributed everywhere?"

Jim Finley: I share with people, I have a chip of bone. I've Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor, the mystical theologian, and the primacy of love in God's personal creation, likewise of Therese. I'd also noticed that in every altar in a church, goes back to the catacombs and the martyrs, there's the bones of a martyr inside the altar stone.

And so you might say, "Gosh, well, what happens are all over?" But the thing is this, is that the place where all the bones are, the remains, is the earth. Furthermore, it's in the earth that's in God. So it isn't like in a literal kind of sense, like, "Oh no, I got to stay in my coffin, so when resurrection comes, I'll be scattered all over. Pieces of me will be trying to find me." It's not like that. And so that's how I see it. The place is the earth, and it's the earth that's in God of the remains. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Something else, another confluence, you and Richard both have the bones inside.

Jim Finley: We do. He also apologized to non-Catholics. He said, "I'm so sorry." He said, "I know you're not used to this one." I thought that was fun. That was good.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. Lovely. Thank you, Angela. And lovely. I really appreciate people who sent in names. So in this season, we reflected that Therese was able to choose her own name, and it came out of her childhood sense of love that she developed. And so we invited people to reflect on their lives and come up with a name.

So we have a few people that played along, and so Luanne, and she wrote, "I've contemplated on what my devotional name might be. What a great and fun question. It would be Luanne of the Ineffable Mystery and Divine Love. This name reflects my belief in the energy and unknown vastness of the universe,

the power of love, and the existence of something greater than myself. I am still a seeker."

Jim Finley: By the way, Luanne, if I would ever write you a letter, I'll address that on the envelope, "The inevitable mystery of divine love." And then I would say, "Dear divine mystery, divine love, comma, how are you?" That's a nice name. That is a nice... And it was St. Teresa of Avila, she chose her name and she was Teresa of Jesus. It's true, she was Teresa of the Child Jesus, of the Holy Face. So it is nice to have a devotional name.

Kirsten Oates: And then we have another one, this is from Darrell. "I have been a listener and devotee of Turning to the Mystics since season one. That being said, if one's devotional name is birthed from that which she, he feels a sense of devotion, perhaps I would be Darrell of Turning to the Mystics, which actually gives me another idea for a devotional name. I've thoroughly enjoyed the sessions and dialogues on Therese. Like all other seasons, I found myself going back and listening to the talk several times to allow the wisdom and insight shared to really feed my soul.

The name I felt drawn to, or the one that has resonated most is Darrell of the Pathless Path, An Anonymous Way. The first comes from my longtime interest in contemplative prayer and studying the work of Father Martin Laird. I heard him refer to contemplation as the pathless path. Second, my introduction to various mystics who have written about contemplation, I have felt a close connection to the cloud of unknowing and the way of a pilgrim, both by anonymous authors, Darrell of the Pathless Path and Anonymous Way.

Jim Finley: I would say the same thing. In this sense, it's been such a gift to me to be able to share how I've been so immersed by these mystics. So to be able to explain it, I would take that as my name too, James Finley, Turning to the Mystics.

And also, I love this pathless path, wayless way. There's a lovely image I have. It's in a book on Buddhism on the middle way, but it applies just as much to Christianity. He says, "The thing about mystical teachings is there increasing ambivalence between the path that you're on toward the goal of the infinite, and the infinite. 'Cause what you discover on the path at least to the infinite is the infinite that you're seeking is welling up beneath your feet on the path that leads to it in a kind of a non-distinction, the wayless way." So those are nice images.

Kirsten Oates: Maybe everyone who listens to the podcast we could have Turning to the Mystics as our middle name.

Jim Finley: We could. We could.

Kirsten Oates: This was a lovely comment from someone in Spotify, saying, "Kirsten of God's Children. Yes, ma'am. The child in me just delighted and ran to the door to greet you." So thank you so much for saying that.

Let's see. We've got a couple more. Carolyn writes, "Carolyn of God's Inner Pilgrims, Poets, Journalist and Bloggers, Joining With All God's Inner Pilgrims, Poets, Journalism Bloggers." I love that.

Jim Finley: I think it's something else too, I think that's often true. We can reach a place where there's a dimension of ourself that becomes so intimately abyss like it's our name. And so, every place has this potential. So it could be silence. It could be solitude. It could be giving yourself over and a self-donating love to a community of people.

It could be sitting at the deathbed of a dying loved one. Anything has this collapsing point of none distinction from God, incarnate in that dimension of who you are, and it becomes your name. I like Thomas Merton says, "When God creates us, he hands us a stone and on the stone is written that our name that only God knows. 'Dear God, teach me the name who I am in you.'" I like that image about the stone, about who God knows us to be.

Kirsten Oates: The last one is from Abby. "Thank you for a wonderful season. I reflected on what name I might choose from myself and wanted to share what arose for me. Abigail of the Divine Trickster. I have always been drawn to the ways that God turns expectations upside down, and I have felt this subverting and sometimes transforming powers of surprise, irony, absurdity, and laughter at work in my own path. We might cry one minute and laugh the next. Praise the Lord.

Jim Finley: Lovely.

Kirsten Oates: I love that.

Jim Finley: That's Lovely.

Kirsten Oates: That's so beautiful. I love the ways people, like you say, so uniquely connect to this presence and feel the way it illuminates their lives so clearly.

Jim Finley: I love this thing, too. It comes to me. Reiner Sherman, in his book on Eckhart, he said, "When Eckhart was at the University of Paris, his Latin works teaching scripture, a medieval understanding of scripture. So God is eternal, God is love, God is and so on." He said, "But in his sermons, his words are addressed directly to the heart in the midst of a great turning, unforeseeable self-metamorphosing depth that drops down into the depths of God welling up as you, the unforeseeableness of the quickening."

In medieval times, in the coronation of the king, they had the jester, and I love this a lot. So the jester at the coronation of the king was, when he was crowned

with the crown and all, is that the jester would approach the king holding a burning candle, kneel down in front of the king, blow out the candle and say, "Thus passes the glory of this world, that the king would never forget that he's to be true to what eternity calls us to be." I like that imagery about the jester and the candle.

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. So thank you, Abby, for sending in your name. We have one more person who shared their name, and she writes, "I don't even have to spend a second on this question 'cause my name is Therese and I would never change it. I love Therese and love that I was given that name to carry forever." So I how wonderful, to carry the name of such a beautiful saint. And one of our listeners left a voicemail for us sharing their chosen name. So this is from Elise.

Elise: Well, thank you so much, Jim and Kirsten. This is Elise, and I've been thinking about my name for quite a while, going back and forth. And I would love to be known as Elise of the God of Love and Music, and here's why.

Because just like with Jim, when I was in ninth grade, I went through a very traumatic time, and I found Therese more than anything during that time, her little way became everything to me. And for me, the most expressive love form has always been music. Thank you again, sending much love, many hugs and I am always, always grateful. God bless you.

Jim Finley: Nice. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Wonderful. Thank you, Elise of Love and Music. I love that.

Jim Finley: I love it too. You know what's interesting in a Catholic with baptism? When you were given a baptismal name, it was always to be the name of a saint. I'm saying I was James, one of the apostles.

So it isn't like today where you baptize a baby muffin. You know what I mean? You know what I mean? It's so different. It's so different. So, it was always to be the name of a saint for your baptism and your confirmation.

Kirsten Oates: Okay. This question is from Bob. "'Suffering, is of all the things God can give us, the best gift,' that's what Therese writes. Why is suffering required for us, or is that the belief any longer?

I realize how often significant change and grace follows deep pain and hurt, but I still wonder, is suffering required? Or maybe I don't want that to be true. And as Jim has said in the past, maybe this is only true for Therese, and it is her story and we are not necessarily being asked to do the same."

Jim Finley: Interesting question. First of all, I would say this, I think what Therese is saying, "Is the greatest gift isn't suffering. The greatest gift is love." But then he raises, and this is what she does say, is what this person's getting at, what she does say

is that, "It isn't that suffering's necessary. It's just that suffering is to live to be human. Suffering is woven into being human. And then how can we then experience God sustaining us in our suffering, and present in our suffering? Especially how can my suffering lead me to experience God's love sustaining me in my suffering, and inspiring me to be liberated from whatever I'm doing to contribute to my own suffering or the suffering of others?"

There's another layer where she says, she's very much like Julian of Norwich here, I think, "Is that Jesus on the cross. So Jesus on the cross sees us in our suffering. And seeing us in our suffering descends and joins us and merges with and becomes one with us as the beloved in our suffering. So He's present in the suffering, just as He emerges with and becomes one with us in our death. Through Jesus, the light of the resurrection is shining in our suffering, and it's also shining in our death."

There's also another kind of suffering which is key to Therese and all the saints, and it says, "It isn't the suffering that I have to endure and I'm trying to get past. It's the suffering that I experience in being unable to consummate a longing for an infinite union with infinite love that God places in my heart as an echo of God's longing for me." So that's another kind of longing. It's a longing I can't... Like an imperative of my awakened heart. I've been graced by this love, but by my own powers, I'm incapable of finding this love being infinite with my own power.

And it's an acceptance of that where she says, "You're going to have to be my sanctity." And so she sees this kind of longing. And then where do those two touch each other? Because in my longing not to be able to consummate this love, I realize unexplainably you're consummating it in me and my inability to consummate it. I can't attain it. I can't attain my infinite ones with you, but you're giving yourself and attaining me and my inability to attain it, which is the gift of tears, which is union, which is the quickening this way. So it's kind of rich with paradoxical implications about suffering.

Kirsten Oates: Earlier we talked about the reciprocity of love, and that God surrenders to us and we surrender to God in that reciprocity. And the way Therese talks about suffering reminds me of that reciprocity, that she feels the reciprocity of the suffering, that Jesus gave suffering for her and now she gives her suffering for Jesus in a way, to join Jesus in the reciprocity of suffering that is the reciprocity of love.

Jim Finley: I do think that. What's interesting about her also. For example, she talks about when her father died, but you always get this feeling that that suffering has been infused with God's love sustaining her, except at the very end of her life with TB, she was suffocating to death. And so she says at the very end, she says, "I still believe that God loves me, but I can't feel it anymore." And she was lost in suffering.

And except for the very few last seconds of her life, there was like an ecstasy and she died. So she's like also a patron saint of the dark night of the soul, like this utter loss. She's one with us in that law. It's just like with Jesus. So Jesus is hanging on the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus is one with us in that very inability. And the, "Into your hands, I commend my spirit." He handed himself over into the love of God he could no longer find. So I think Therese is so kind of rich with these sensitivities.

Kirsten Oates: Lovely. Thank you for that question. And we have a nice reflection here from Rex, and he says, "Therese's little way reminds me and comforts me, that even though I perceive myself as just a drop in the ocean so insignificant in comparison to the ocean, the wetness of the drop is both innate and complete, and really the same as the ocean itself.

In fact, the drop is totally saturated with wetness, otherwise it would not be a drop. In Therese's little way, it seems that rediscovering, reconnecting to, and stabilizing as the wetness is the real concern." Does that imagery resonate with you too or would you tweak it somehow?

Jim Finley: Thich Nhat Hanh, the Buddhist teacher, he said, "The wave looks and the seas is about ready to crash on the rocks." It goes, "Oh no." Then it remembers that it's water. And likewise, if it's just me like, "Oh no." So here's one way that helps me to see it, is that we're living in incremental realizations of infinite generosity. There's nothing incremental about it. Infinity is infinitely pouring itself out infinitely.

What's incremental is the degree to which we're aware of it. But here's the thing about the drop of water, is that even at the lowest possible, weakest level of just beginning to be aware of it, the infinite love of God is infinitely giving the infinity as at least level. It's a non-incremental richness of the incremental. And so this is so big on Therese about humility and about littleness, and the generosity of God shining in our littleness.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. I love that image. Thank you, Rex, for sharing it, that I can be a little drop, but I still have the full innate and infinite expression of God. And now we have a voicemail from Pam.

Pam: Jim, Kirsten, a huge thank you for what you're doing with these podcasts. This teaching, for me, is amazing. I'm gaining understanding and connection with my faith journey like I've never done before through listening to them. Kirsten, the way you dialogue with Jim, some of the things you say, the words could have come off my lips, and it's just so good, so, so feeding. Thank you so much. Be encouraged and thank you.

Kirsten Oates: We like that voicemail. Thank you.

Jim Finley: Yeah, beautiful.

Kirsten Oates: That's very kind.

Jim Finley: Yeah, it is kind.

Kirsten Oates: And now we have a voicemail question from Elizabeth.

Elizabeth: Hello. My name is Elizabeth and I have a question about James Finley's teaching on Therese. You gave the example of when she ran down at Christmas morning when she was 11 or 12 and put her slippers there and showed her delight, even though she had overheard her father say that, "This would be the last Christmas they would do this." So she stretched into her courage and sublimated her disappointment at hearing that.

I wondered about that dynamic as courage. I'm a older person. I'm 78 now. When I was injured at 17, I'm a paraplegic, I stopped focusing on myself and focused on my mother. And when I look back on that situation now, of taking care of my mother's feelings instead of myself, I think of it as not a healthy dynamic. I think of it as kind of the classic definition of codependency. So, I just wondered if you would talk about that.

At the time, I probably did feel like I was, "I can do this. I can stretch into taking care of my mom's feelings and being strong," not feeling my own feelings of whatever they were at becoming a paraplegic, devastation or grief. But when I heard you talk about Therese, I thought, "How do you know about focusing on the other person versus staying with yourself?" Which I try to do now in terms of feeling my feelings, which doesn't mean I ignore other people, but I do it differently. So if you can help me with that, I'd appreciate it.

Jim Finley: Yeah, that's a very big thing. This happens a lot, really. And what really happens, called being parentified, is you end up being the parent of the parent who can't be your parent. And sometimes we offer to the parent a loving service that we don't know how to give to ourself, we give it to the parent instead of to ourself. So it's always something to realize, and it sounds like now you realize that you've grown out of that.

And my sense with Therese is this. It's really true that she came back down the stairs, opened up the presence with Joy as she did all that. This is where she said her childhood ended. This is where she outgrew this kind of sense. But you get the feeling that she never stopped loving herself. You don't get the feeling she hated herself, didn't know who she was, had no... To the contrary, when you start to read the journal, she's so deeply present to the intimacy of herself. She's so present.

So I think that's the very thing that you're saying is a liability, and we can outgrow it. But I get the feeling she was graced with outgrowing it in a way that left her fully aware of the richness of herself. And I think a lot of it had to do for what really helped her, is Jesus. I think Jesus being infinitely in love with her, she

learned to live in that infinite love of Jesus. It was incarnate in her love for herself. She's so present in everything that she says.

Kirsten Oates: It's almost like for her, rather than being parentified, and feeling like the situation required her to behave a certain way and take care of her parent, it's almost like she found Jesus' presence in this brand new way, that Jesus, she talked about it, Jesus giving her courage and strength. And for her, it was more about the relationship with Jesus that grew her up versus the way she interacted with her father. And so, it does seem just a little different in that way.

Jim Finley: And you know other big things that comes out toward the end too, she was always so present to being present to who the sisters saw her when they wanted to talk to her. And even when she was dying, they would come into the sick room. In a very grounded way, she was very attentive to their wanting to be with her. She kind of models that for us.

Kirsten Oates: And she always smiles.

Jim Finley: And she always smiles.

Kirsten Oates: She always-

Jim Finley: ...smiles...

Kirsten Oates: Yeah. Yeah.

Jim Finley: She kind of models that for us.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. But really driven from her connection to Jesus than her sense of losing herself into the needs of others. And now, let's listen to a voicemail from Emma.

Emma: Hi, Jim and Kirsten. I'm Emma from Jonesborough, Tennessee. After listening to your sessions on St. Therese, I have not been able to shake the feeling of a very deep soul connection between the two of us. When I think on her or read her Story of a Soul, I feel as though our girl selves are looking right into each other's smiling faces, and it feels like something is happening to me.

I really want to hear about your feeling of soul connection with another mystic and how you channel this energy to deepen your practice. I really felt like something crazy was happening to me for a while, and I want to know how you discern your vocation and your path when your heart is being lit by a flame. Thank you so much for inspiring me and my partner, Dylan, during these times.

Jim Finley: Yes, very good. This is what helps me, and I think this is true with each of these mystics that we share, certainly more recently, Therese. The way we connect to the mystic is recognizing the event that's occurring within ourself that you just shared.

Very often, it's not so strikingly graceful. It could be quite overwhelming almost. So it's like a subtle, intimate recognition of something, and that's the connection. Because what the mystic is doing, he or she is putting words to what your own heart knows, but it makes what you know experientially accessible 'cause you're touched by it.

And so when we read, for example, there's a phrase I like in Thomas Merton, he's praying to God and he says to God, "Oh, how far I have to go to find you in whom I've already arrived. I only wish it were over. I only wished it would've begun." And as you listen to it, there's like an intimacy and, "Oh, how far I have to go, and yet I'm searching, and yet I know I'm searching for you and you're already unexplainably one with me."

And then we just sit with the unexplainable depth of that and walk with it. And as we keep turning to them over and over, that mystical sensitivity becomes more and more habitual in our life. And I think that's like listening to music. That's the way I think.

Kirsten Oates: That's so helpful, Jim. Just to ask one more question about that, because Emma asked about the energy, and I know this for myself, too. When you feel this deep connection maybe for the first time, or deeper than you've ever felt, and all this energy arises and you feel a little bit overwhelmed by it, do you have a little tip for us around that?

Jim Finley: Yes. Most often, it's extremely delicate. The image I use, like water filling the marshlands. It's very subtle. As a matter of fact, it's so subtle, we know we're being drawn into this, but we can't single out the moment we were drawn. There's a gradual kind of emerge. But sometimes, like with what you speak of, it kind of blindsides us with this suddenness. It's momentarily disorienting. And you can start to think that you're crazy, except as you sit with it, you know that you're not.

Paul says in Romans, "We don't know how to pray, but the Spirit within us with inutterable groanings pray." So when these awakenings happening, we're feeling the groanings of the Spirit in us being awakened, and we know that it's a gift. And also, when we read the mystics, some people have a lot of those, like ecstatic. Some people have very few sometimes they're so personal how God leads each one of us in these quickenings and these intensities based on God's divine providence this way. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. One thing that's been helpful to me, Jim, is that phrase that, 'Your heart's being enlarged to divine proportions.' And that comes with a bit of a sense, for some people, of that energy of being overwhelmed, and your whole being's being expanded to the level of this energy that's arising inside of you. And just to be able to relax and lean into it, hold it, let it expand you.

Jim Finley: That's a good example also. When Teresa, she's sitting there in her Lectio Divina, and she uses this image of a basin being filled with water, but instead of overflowing, the basin keeps getting bigger and bigger. As you sit there, you realize that's what's happening to your heart. But the point is this, and so you learn to surrender to it, or to let it have its way with you.

And so what can be so startling is you can't find the place where you stop and God begins, because God's flowing into you, and the very presence of God has merged with the mystery of your presence. You don't get the feeling, at least at this point, later on, that's ecstatic. It isn't kind of an ecstasy, but it's a kind of a quiet amazement. She just sits in the quietness of the amazement.

Kirsten Oates: I love that. Yes. Yes. And that's Teresa of Avila you're talking about right there. Yes, yes.

Jim Finley: That's right. And notice with Therese, she wasn't an ecstatic mystic. She does it to visions and Teresa and John of the Cross and so on. It's almost as if the intimacy of her sincerity was itself being divinized by God, by these stunning things that she says. And so she was that kind of mystic, like the divinity of her ordinariness and her sincerity with God.

Kirsten Oates: It's beautiful. And I love that story from Emma because it's her relationship with Therese that's expanding her to these divine proportions because Therese is so expanded. And so when she sees herself mirrored by Therese, she feels that-

Jim Finley: It's a gift. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: ... big expanse. Yes. Thank you for sharing that, Emma.

Jim Finley: Another thing that helps me is that sometimes we're graced with moments of awakening in the aftermath of which we're never quite the same because it's asking something out of us, like we've been quickened. I'm called to how to become habitually surrendered to this, even though I don't always feel it. How do I always knowing it goes deeper and deeper unexplainably? That's what the mystics are trying to help us do. They're trying to help us understand it and walk with it and trust it. And it's just extraordinary, really. Yeah.

Kirsten Oates: Yes. So thank you so much for sending in that voicemail, Emma. Well, we've come to the end of this wonderful listener question session, and we've also come to the end of this wonderful season and our time was Sent Therese.

And so, Jim, I want to join the listeners in just thanking you for bringing St. Therese to all of us in your special way, and introducing her to some people, and reminding others of the depth and beauty of her life and her teaching. So thank you.

Jim Finley:

You're very welcome. And again, I think as you sit and listen to this yourself, when we have our dialogue, you're asking questions when we dialogue that represents the kind of questions that seekers ask.

So I think our dialogue too, some people commented on this number of times, that really helps them to get drawn into it at a deeper level. So, it's been a gift. It's a grace.

Kirsten Oates:

Thank you, Jim. And a big thanks to our producer, Dorothy. I should also say that Dorothy is the one that receives all the emails, voicemails, poetry, music. And I'm reminded we had some amazing drawings and art pieces that came in this season also.

So, I know Dorothy wants to say a big thanks. She enjoys so much being a part of the team that gets to read and see everything that people send in. So, thank you again for sending those in. We'll be taking a break. We'll be back for season 14 in the fall. We'll see you then.

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](mailto:podcasts@cac.org), or send us a voicemail. All this information can be found in the show notes. We'll see you again soon.