

## **You are a Mystic!**

For the last several years, I have taught a seminar at our church, titled “A Month with a Mystic.” We study mystics from around the world – from Mother Teresa to Dag Hammarskjold to the Celtic spiritual guides and Native American visionaries. Oftentimes, participants protest, “These people are so different than I am. I don’t have visions, I can barely pray, and if I try to meditate, my mind wanders in the first fifteen seconds. Surely you aren’t talking about me.”

I respond that if God present everywhere and is present in all things, then every moment can be a doorway to divinity. We can experience holiness and beauty anywhere and everywhere. We can, with Brother Lawrence, experience God as fully cooking a meal as in church, taking communion, or looking at a starry sky.

Jacob had no business being a mystic. His name meant “trickster” or “supplanter,” and if you were smart, you would never enter into a business deal with him. He knew the art of the deal and could swindle even the craftiest of business people. In today’s scripture, he is on the

run. He has cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright and blessing, and Esau wants to kill him. After a day's travel, he finds a lonely place to hide and sleep, and then – to his amazement – has a wondrous dream – a ladder to heaven, with angels climbing from the earth to the sky. He awakens awestruck and terrified, and exclaims, "God was in this place – and I did not know it." This place, he cries out, is surely "the gateway to heaven."

Sometimes we have to prepare to experience God through prayer, meditation, and mission; other times God comes without announcement or preparation on our part. In fact, God may come to us when we are furthest from God – as the Psalmist proclaims,

Where can I go from your spirit?

If I rise to the heights you are there

I descend to the depths you are there

If I hide myself in the darkness

You are there, I can't hide from you

For darkness is light to you.

“God is in this place.” The mystic is simply someone who discovers God’s presence in “this place” and “this place” is right here in this place and wherever you are.

Could it be that God is coming to you every moment of the day, disguised in synchronous encounters, landscapes, creative ideas, dreams, and intuitions? God may never announce, “I’m here and I’m God,” but we may experience God simply by going about our business, with open eyes and hearts. Mother Teresa – Saint Teresa – who spent her life working with outcasts, persons dying on the streets of Calcutta and persons with AIDS, proclaims that she experienced Christ in all his distressing disguises. Mother Teresa’s witness gains credibility by her own life of service in spite of dealing with times of emotional and spiritual darkness over the last four decades of her life. Even in her feelings of depression – and depression doesn’t disqualify you from spiritual experiences – she encountered God in the least of these.

The author of Hebrews counsels us: “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” Could it be that angels – divine messengers – are coming to us every moment, calling forth what Abraham Lincoln describes as “the better angels of our nature” in this time of chaos and uncertainty? Could it be that our willingness to entertain the idea that God is here will open our senses to God’s presence in everyday life?

Yes, deep down, you are a mystic. We see the mystic in our children and grandchildren’s unbridled imaginations. We see the mystic in chance encounters that change our lives, in moments of insight, in moments when the world opens up as we gaze at a sunrise, walk along the beach, and are filled with amazement on a starry, starry, night. We see the mystic at the bedside of a dying companion and in the reports of near death experiences, and we see the mystic in our own moments of healing and recovery. God is in this place! God is in you! God is calling you right now!

You don't have to go anywhere to be a mystic or to encounter the holy. Remember, Jacob was simply trying to get some sleep. Moses was on his way to work when he encountered a burning bush and was commanded to take off his shoes, for he was on holy ground.

The Celtic Christians speak of "thin places" where heaven and earth meet, places that are transparent to God – stone formations, islands, groves of trees. But, in a God-filled world, thin places are everywhere, right here, just waiting for us to pause long enough to notice.

In conclusion, let me suggest one simple pathway to mysticism. It comes from Therese of Lisieux, St. Therese, who died about a hundred years ago. She was shaped by Brother Lawrence, who counseled us to "practice the presence of God" throughout the day. Her simple path was to "do ordinary things with love." Yes, do ordinary things with love, for God is Love, and in devoting every act one moment at a time to God's Love, you will soon see every situation, even difficult ones or our

current national and planetary challenges, as an opportunity to share love. You will become God's companion in healing the world.

There is a ladder of angels everywhere. It is right on earth and ascends to heaven. The angels are here, the holiness is here, heaven is here, love is here – look into the faces around us and the faces of those who struggle with poverty, homelessness, and exclusion, look into the face of your companion animal or gaze at a bird in flight, and then respond with love. God is in this place and now we know it.