



Series:

When the Heart Ripens

—and life becomes spacious

Today's Episode: E2: MYSTERY -

From Certainty to Mystery

Tony Macelli

The ripened heart may discover divine Mystery not as emptiness, but as inexhaustible depth, and words may seem shallow. At Porziuncola, a Colombian Franciscan guesthouse, Brother Nico serves soup, silence, and difficult sayings to guests learning that trust may reach where answers cannot.

Enjoy today's One Act Play, Reflection, Discernment and Practice boxes—and Meet the Witnesses.

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Previous Episodes in this Series

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<https://laikosblog.org/blog-by-tony-macelli/>

This Series traces witness-attested qualities of the spiritual heart when it has “ripened” – by divine grace and lived experience. Please read the Introduction online if you are new to the Series.

Group A. Rootedness in the Real. Episodes A1–A3 traced how the ripened heart becomes grounded in ordinary life as it is. Attention settles, imagination softens, and the need to secure meaning through achievement begins to ease.

Group B. The Spacious Heart. Episodes B1–B4 explored the widening through which love and attention become less anxious and less possessive. The heart learns to hold others, uncertainty, and time itself with greater freedom.

Group C. The Inner Surrender. Episodes C1–C5 turned toward the relinquishing of subtle inner compulsions: image, the need to win, wilful striving, resistance to limits, and fear of failure. The ripened heart learns to consent without needing to prevail.

Group D. Meeting the Shadow and its Gifts. Episodes D1–D4 explored what happens when the heart stops evading its own darkness: shadow faced and integrated, vulnerability no longer hidden, compassion widened by suffering, and the gentle joy that may take root when sorrow has been carried before God over time.

Group E. Opening to Mystery. This group turns toward the heart's deepening capacity to live before God without demanding premature closure. Episode E1 explored living at ease with paradox. Today's episode, E2, traces the movement from certainty to Mystery, and the deep trust that may grow when the heart no longer needs to resolve divine unknowing in order to be held by it.



PLAY:

After the Desert, the Garden

Place: *Porziuncola, a Franciscan guesthouse in Colombia, near the coffee-growing hills of Antioquia, set among extensive gardens above a village. Guayacán trees, bougainvillea, herbs, plantain leaves, and coffee shrubs further down the slope surround the house. A small chapel stands beyond a covered walkway. The kitchen and dining area share one long room, so that cooking, conversation, and prayerful awkwardness are never completely separate.*

Time: *Late afternoon into evening. Rain has recently passed over the hills.*

Sound: *Water dripping from leaves; a distant dog; occasional motorbike on the road below; chopping from the kitchen; a parish bell far down in the village.*

Light: *After-rain brightness, then lamps, then the softer light of the dining room.*



Characters

BROTHER NICO – elderly Franciscan brother; Chilean; guestmaster, cook, listener, gardener. He spent several years near the Atacama Desert. Speaks little, and often obliquely, but without theatricality.

FATHER MATEO – local parish priest of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá. Practical, affectionate, slightly teasing. He joins the group as a participant rather than as leader.

LUCÍA – parish catechist; sincere, organised, anxious that Mystery may weaken faith.

MATEO ARIAS – lawyer, not related to Father Mateo; articulate, sceptical of mystical language; came because his sister insisted.

CLARA – widow, still raw after bereavement; wary of explanations offered too quickly.

JULIÁN – social worker; tired, restless, suspicious of retreats because the world's pain feels too urgent.

ISABEL – musician on individual retreat; quiet, observant, spiritually seasoned enough to recognise depth without needing to announce it.

Scene 1 – Arrival at the Table

The long dining table is partly set: clay bowls, folded napkins, a basket of arepas wrapped in a cloth, sliced avocado, limes, a small bowl of ají, rice, black beans, and a large pot of lentil and vegetable stew waiting near the stove.

BROTHER NICO is in the kitchen area, half-listening while cutting coriander. FATHER MATEO stands at the head of the table. The retreat guests are settling into chairs, still damp from the garden paths.

FATHER MATEO -- Good afternoon. Those of you who are local know me as the parish priest of Our Lady of Chiquinquirá, down in the village. You have asked to have a group retreat, and I will join you. There is no retreat leader or facilitator, but Brother Nico says, just make sure you attend the meals on time.

BROTHER NICO -- Meals forgive many things. Lateness is not always one of them.

FATHER MATEO -- You see? Already the first teaching. Before we finish eating, and before we begin arguing with the Holy Spirit, I should introduce Brother Nico, who is always ready to talk with you, unless the beans are at a delicate stage. Some of you know Porziuncola as a guesthouse rather than a formal retreat centre, and that is mostly its gift. People come here to rest, eat, walk under the guayacán trees, quarrel gently with God, and sometimes sleep soundly for the first time in months.

CLARA -- That sounds ambitious.

FATHER MATEO -- Sleep or quarrelling?

CLARA -- Both.

FATHER MATEO -- Then you have come to the right place, Clara. So, here is Brother Nico. He is the guestmaster here – cook, listener, gardener, and occasional rescuer of burnt lentils. Years ago, before most of

us knew him, he spent several years in the Atacama Desert, where speech dries out like the little streams in summer. We are still deciding whether that was improvement or something wrong with him.

BROTHER NICO -- The desert has never asked for my defence.

FATHER MATEO -- If he says something you do not understand, do not worry. Some of us have been not-understanding him for years, and it has done us no obvious harm.

ISABEL smiles. LUCÍA opens a notebook. MATEO ARIAS looks towards the kitchen with courteous doubt. JULIÁN is watching the rain slide from the roof.

LUCÍA -- Father, when you said there is no retreat leader, does that mean there is no theme?

FATHER MATEO -- There is a theme. You gave it to me in three emails, two voice notes, and one message from your cousin. "Trusting God when we do not understand."

MATEO ARIAS -- That can mean almost anything.

BROTHER NICO -- Yes. That is why it may be useful.

LUCÍA -- But faith needs content. People cannot just sit around saying God is mysterious.

BROTHER NICO -- A doctrine is a window. Do not ask it to become the sky.

LUCÍA stops writing. She looks at him, not offended, but unsettled.

CLARA -- I have heard too many windows break.



JULIÁN -- I have heard too many people admire the sky while others are bleeding under it. BROTHER NICO adds coriander to the stew, then pauses. BROTHER NICO -- Then we should eat before the words become thinner than the soup. He begins serving. The guests pass bowls. Rain ticks from the gutters. The first spoonfuls are taken.

Scene 2 – Supper

The table has loosened. Bowls are half-empty. Someone has asked for more lime. BROTHER NICO moves between kitchen and table with a cloth over one shoulder, placing extra rice near CLARA without comment.

MATEO ARIAS -- I respect faith. I do. But when people say “Mystery”, I often hear, “Please stop asking questions.”

LUCÍA -- Sometimes questions become pride.

MATEO ARIAS -- And sometimes answers become fear.

FATHER MATEO -- Good. You have both brought kindling.

JULIÁN -- My problem is different. I work with families who have lost homes, sons, papers, land, sometimes all four. If I speak to them about divine Mystery, I would feel dishonest.

CLARA -- Or cruel.

The table stills. BROTHER NICO returns to the stove. He adjusts the flame under the beans.

BROTHER NICO -- God is not made safer by being explained.

CLARA -- No. But sometimes God is made unbearable by being explained.

BROTHER NICO -- Yes.

CLARA looks at him. The simplicity of the agreement disarms her.

CLARA -- After my husband died, someone told me that God needed another voice in heaven. I wanted to ask why God’s choir was so badly managed.

FATHER MATEO -- A question many theologians should be made to sit with.

BROTHER NICO -- The unanswered prayer is not always empty. Sometimes it is still being widened.

CLARA -- That sounds beautiful. I am not sure I believe it.

BROTHER NICO -- Do not believe it too quickly.

ISABEL -- That may be the first merciful thing I have heard all week.

LUCÍA -- But surely there are things we must believe firmly. The Creed. The Resurrection. The Incarnation. The Church cannot live on mist.

BROTHER NICO -- Mist is poor foundation. But it teaches distance.

MATEO ARIAS -- There. That is exactly what I mean. Beautiful, but what does it mean?

BROTHER NICO -- Sometimes the eye needs mercy from edges.

MATEO ARIAS laughs despite himself.

MATEO ARIAS -- You are not helping my case against mystics.

BROTHER NICO -- I was not trying to win it.

JULIÁN -- This is what troubles me. If we let go of certainty, what keeps us acting? What keeps us from becoming quiet people with clean hands?

BROTHER NICO sits for the first time. He takes a small piece of arepa, folds it, and does not eat yet.

BROTHER NICO -- The one who trusts does not see farther. He is carried deeper.

JULIÁN -- Deeper into what?

BROTHER NICO -- Into the wound of the world, without letting the wound become his only name.

A long pause. Outside, a bird calls once from the wet garden.

ISABEL -- That is not withdrawal.

BROTHER NICO -- No. Incarnation is not finished while love still has bodies to enter.

FATHER MATEO lowers his eyes. LUCÍA writes this down slowly.

CLARA -- And Resurrection?

BROTHER NICO -- Resurrection begins where the heart stops demanding that life return unchanged.

CLARA receives the line as if it hurts and helps at the same time.



MATEO ARIAS -- You speak as if certainty is the enemy.

BROTHER NICO -- No. Certainty is a good servant. It becomes dangerous when it wants the master's room.

LUCÍA -- And who is the master?

BROTHER NICO -- Love.

The answer is almost too simple. No one moves for a moment. Then BROTHER NICO stands abruptly.

BROTHER NICO -- The beans are innocent. I must not neglect them.

He returns to the stove. A little laughter releases the room.

Scene 3 – The Garden Door

Later. Plates have been cleared. The table holds coffee, panela with lemon, guava slices, and a small dish of roasted plantain. The garden door is open. The air smells of wet earth and herbs. Some guests stand; others sit. FATHER MATEO is washing cups badly. BROTHER NICO silently takes one from him and rewashes it.

FATHER MATEO -- I am being corrected by a Franciscan without words. This is a historic humiliation.

BROTHER NICO -- Not historic. Repeated.

Laughter. Then the room settles.

ISABEL -- Brother Nico, may I ask something?

BROTHER NICO nods.

ISABEL -- When you were in the desert, did you feel close to God?

BROTHER NICO -- Sometimes. Sometimes I felt close only to sand.

ISABEL -- And that was enough?

BROTHER NICO -- No. Then it became enough. Then even "enough" became too large a word.

MATEO ARIAS -- Why stay?

BROTHER NICO -- At first, because I had nowhere else to be. Later, because God had stopped needing to be interesting.

LUCÍA -- That sounds frightening.

BROTHER NICO -- It was. The mind asks for a shore; love learns the sea.

CLARA -- I cannot imagine loving the sea when I am drowning.

BROTHER NICO -- Then do not love the sea. Let yourself be held by one piece of wood.

CLARA -- What is the wood?

BROTHER NICO -- Tonight? Perhaps soup. Perhaps sleep. Perhaps not explaining your sorrow to anyone.

CLARA looks down. Her hands soften around the cup.

JULIÁN -- I think I am angry because quiet people often ask the wounded to be patient.

BROTHER NICO -- Some quiet is cowardice. Some quiet is listening with the whole body.

JULIÁN -- How do I know the difference?

BROTHER NICO -- After cowardice, the poor remain alone. After listening, someone carries water.

JULIÁN nods, reluctantly.

MATEO ARIAS -- You keep bringing everything back to ordinary things.

BROTHER NICO -- God came by body. We should suspect any mystery that refuses bread.

FATHER MATEO -- That one I understood.

BROTHER NICO -- Then I apologise.

Again laughter, small and grateful.

LUCÍA -- Brother, may I ask one more? When I teach children, I need to give answers. I cannot tell them everything is beyond us.

BROTHER NICO -- Give them answers that know how to kneel.

LUCÍA -- Answers can kneel?

BROTHER NICO -- The true ones do.

ISABEL -- What happened to your own answers in the desert?

BROTHER NICO dries his hands slowly.

BROTHER NICO -- The desert did not answer me. It emptied the place where answers had become idols.

Silence. The line stays in the room.

CLARA -- And what was left?

BROTHER NICO -- A little trust. Badly dressed.

FATHER MATEO -- That sounds like half my parish.

BROTHER NICO -- Then your parish is blessed.

Scene Four – Before the Chapel

Night. The rain has stopped. A few lamps glow along the covered path to the chapel. The guests have gathered there almost accidentally, cups in hand, as if the evening has walked them to prayer without announcing it. BROTHER NICO carries a small tray of candles.

CLARA -- I do not know if I can pray.

BROTHER NICO -- Bring the part that cannot pray. It may be the most honest one.

MATEO ARIAS -- And if I do not know what I believe?

BROTHER NICO -- Stand where the question is clean.

JULIÁN -- And if the question is not clean?

BROTHER NICO -- Then wash it in service.

LUCÍA -- You make everything sound simple.

BROTHER NICO -- Simple is not easy. It is what remains when display grows tired.

ISABEL -- Brother Nico, do you ever miss certainty?

He considers this. From the village below comes the faint sound of a motorbike, then silence.

BROTHER NICO -- Sometimes. Old armour remembers the body.

ISABEL -- And what do you do?

BROTHER NICO -- I loosen the straps.

He hands candles around.

BROTHER NICO -- The heart can be held where the mind cannot stand.

They enter the chapel. The door remains open. For a moment the garden is visible beyond them: dark leaves, wet stones, a guayacán tree holding rain in its branches. Then the lights lower.

End of Play

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Brother Nico and the Deep Unknowing

on divine Mystery, trust, and the heart carried deeper than answers

Meals forgive many things. Lateness is not always one of them.

The desert has never asked for my defence.

A doctrine is a window. Do not ask it to become the sky.

God is not made safer by being explained.

The unanswered prayer is not always empty. Sometimes it is still being widened.

The one who trusts does not see farther. He is carried deeper into the wound of the world, without letting the wound become his only name.

Incarnation is not finished while love still has bodies to enter.

Resurrection begins where the heart stops demanding that life return unchanged.

Certainty is a good servant. It becomes dangerous when it wants the master's room.

The mind asks for a shore; love learns the sea.

Some quiet is cowardice. Some quiet is listening with the whole body.

After cowardice, the poor remain alone. After listening, someone carries water.

God came by body. We should suspect any mystery that refuses bread.

Give them answers that know how to kneel.

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*The desert did not answer me.
It emptied the place where an-
swers had become idols.*

*Bring the part that cannot pray.
It may be the most honest one.*

*Stand where the question is
clean.*

Wash the question in service.

*Simple is not easy. It is what
remains when display grows
tired.*

*Old armour remembers the
body.*

*The heart can be held where
the mind cannot stand.*

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Reflection: When thought bows into love

There is an unknowing that belongs to ordinary life. We do not know how a conversation will go, how an illness will unfold, how a decision will be received, or what tomorrow will ask of us. Such uncertainty can be painful, and it often calls for patience, courage, prudence, or wise advice. But the unknowing explored here reaches deeper than that. It concerns the soul before God: the hidden, living, inexhaustible Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

This Mystery is not a blank space at the edge of knowledge. It is not a cupboard into which we place what has not yet been explained. The Mystery of God is more like depth without bottom, light too abundant for

the eye to command, intimacy that cannot be possessed. St Paul's words hover near this territory: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." The unknown here is not empty. It is full beyond our bearing.

For much of life, the ordinary self seeks firmness. It wants to know where it stands, what can be relied upon, who is right, what is safe, which words settle the matter. This is understandable. Without some definiteness, life would become unliveable. We need names, promises, doctrines, commitments, maps, plans, and shared forms of speech. Even the spiritual life needs structure: Scripture, prayer, sacrament, community, and tradition all give the heart something trustworthy to return to.

Yet there is a subtler thing that can happen. The heart may begin to rely on definiteness itself. It may take refuge in closure, not because truth has been loved, but because exposure to the living God has become too demanding. Formulas may begin as windows, then slowly become walls. Doctrine may be cherished as a guide, then quietly pressed into service as a defence. Even correct words can become a way of keeping God manageable.

Again and again, we find that ripened hearts have been radically humbled on their journey. The level of self that demands certainty, intellectual completeness, and closure is humbled in the face of Mystery. This should not surprise us. Something like this humbling is needed even outside spirituality.

Science continues its extraordinary work of understanding the world through disciplined observation, mathematical imagination, and ever better-fitting theories. Yet at its frontiers, science does not simply hand us a smaller and tidier universe. It raises questions that disturb the ordinary mind's appetite for closure. What does quantum entanglement suggest about separateness, locality, and the relation between space, time, and reality? What does it mean for a physical system to have a definite state? Is space-time fundamental, or might it emerge from something deeper? Why does subjective consciousness remain so difficult to account for from the outside?

These questions are not arguments against science. They are part of science's grandeur. Serious knowing does not always make reality more manageable. Sometimes it makes reality more wondrous. If this is true even where measurement and mathematics have carried human understanding so far, how much more reverently should the soul stand before the living God.

The ripened heart does not despise clarity. It has usually suffered too much from illusion to do that. It may love the Creed, the Gospels, the liturgy, the steady intelligence of theology, and the careful speech of those who know that words about God should not be careless. But something has shifted at the centre. The heart no longer asks certainty to do what only God can do. It no longer needs explanation to provide the ground of trust.

This is where the old contemplative

gun to live from God.

This trust is not withdrawal from the world: it is an engagement at profound levels with the world. The movement into Mystery is also a movement toward the further expression of incarnation – that process whereby divine life becomes more fully embodied in creation, relationship, mercy, and human availability to grace. It is also a movement towards resurrection, that process whereby what has been wounded, scattered, and diminished is gathered into a transfigured life that death cannot finally contain.

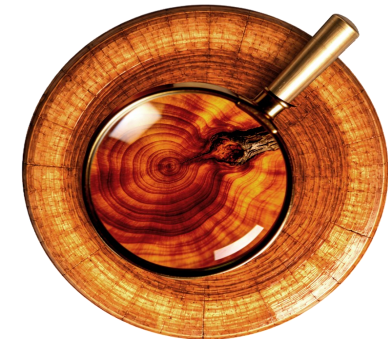
A heart less defended by certainty may become more available to people as they actually are. It may listen without needing to control. It may speak truth without using truth as a weapon. It may act without being secretly governed by the need to guarantee results. The less it possesses God, the more it may become a conduit of grace.

Here the mystery of Christ matters deeply. Christian unknowing is not a flight into abstraction. The Word became flesh. The risen Christ still bears wounds. Divine Mystery has entered bread, body, touch, tears, failure, friendship, death, and resurrection. To trust amid unknowing is not to drift away from the human world; it is to inhabit it with less fear and greater openness to God's hidden action.

The movement from certainty to Mystery, then, is not the end of faith's intelligence. It is intelligence bowed into love. It is doctrine made transparent to communion. It is prayer continuing after explanation has fallen silent. The ripened heart does not resolve

the Mystery in order to trust. It discovers, slowly and often through stripping, that it has been held by the Mystery all along.

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Discernment Box – *Mystery, not vagueness*

The unknowing explored here is not ordinary uncertainty about ordinary matters. It is not the hesitation that comes from missing information, nor the confusion that may accompany a difficult decision. This Episode is concerned with a deeper unknowing: the soul's encounter with the living God, whose fullness cannot be secured by explanation, formula, image, or intellectual closure.

A ripened heart may still value clear thought, careful speech, doctrine, tradition, and responsible judgement. Deep trust does not blur these things. It may even make them cleaner, because language no longer has to pretend that it can contain God. Words are honoured as vessels, not mistaken for the sea.

Nor is this trust a form of passivity. The heart that rests in divine Mystery may still



teachers become so useful. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* writes with startling simplicity: "He can certainly be loved, but not thought. He can be taken and held by love but not by thought." This is not an insult to thought. It is a mercy shown to thought. The mind is relieved of a burden it was never made to carry. It can think, study, distinguish, and serve; but it cannot enclose God. Love reaches where possession fails.

St John of the Cross approaches the same truth through darkness. His darkness is not mere confusion, and it is not the romance of melancholy. It is the stripping of easier forms of assurance, so that the soul may be drawn by a deeper light. He can speak of God as hidden within the soul, and of Christ as a rich mine whose treasures never come to an end. The further one goes, the more there is. The path does not conclude with mastery. It opens into inexhaustibility.

Nicholas of Cusa called this "learned ignorance." That phrase is easily misunderstood. It does not mean that ignorance is being praised. It means that deep knowing eventually becomes humble before what exceeds it. The mind learns its own boundary, and that boundary becomes a place of reverence rather than defeat. There is an ignorance that comes from laziness, and another that comes from having travelled far enough to know that God is always greater.

These witnesses differ in temperament and language, yet they point in the same direction. The soul does not mature by abandoning thought, but by allowing thought to become transparent to love. What cannot be

mastered may still be received. What cannot be possessed may still become the place where the heart is most deeply held.

Karl Rahner, in a modern theological language, also helps here. For Rahner, the human person is always already oriented toward holy Mystery. We are not closed beings who occasionally think religious thoughts. We are creatures opened from within toward the infinite God, whether or not we can name this opening well. The mystery of God is therefore not an optional religious topic. It is the atmosphere in which the deepest human life unfolds.

Richard Rohr gives a contemporary, more image-rich expression of the same intuition when he describes Mystery as "endless knowability." In his Trinitarian language, we are invited into "a dynamism, a flow, a relationship, a waterwheel of love." Our words circle through analogy and metaphor. They can say, "It is like this," but they cannot finally say, "It is exactly this." That is not failure. It is the beginning of reverence. The living God is not reduced by being known; God opens further as love deepens.

This has consequences for the way a ripened heart lives. When certainty loosens, the person does not necessarily become hesitant or vague. Sometimes they become more grounded, not less. Their speech may become plainer. Their silences may become less anxious. They may no longer rush to complete every sentence with a conclusion. They have learned that some realities are betrayed by premature expla-

nation.

Such a person may have been through a desert. The desert may have been literal, or it may have taken the form of grief, unanswered prayer, failure, illness, long dryness, or the collapse of an earlier religious self-image. In that desert, many things that once felt like faith may have been stripped away. Easy consolations may have stopped working. Old formulas may have remained true, yet no longer sufficient as shelter. What survived was smaller, poorer, and more real: a thread of trust, a willingness to remain, a love that did not know how to explain itself.

When such a person returns to service, they may seem less impressive than before. They may not speak often. They may avoid the old urgency to persuade. Their words may come slowly, sometimes with a density that others do not immediately understand. This is not because they have become obscure for the sake of obscurity. It is because speech has passed through silence. They know that God is not made safer by being explained. They know that the heart may be held even when the mind cannot close its hand.

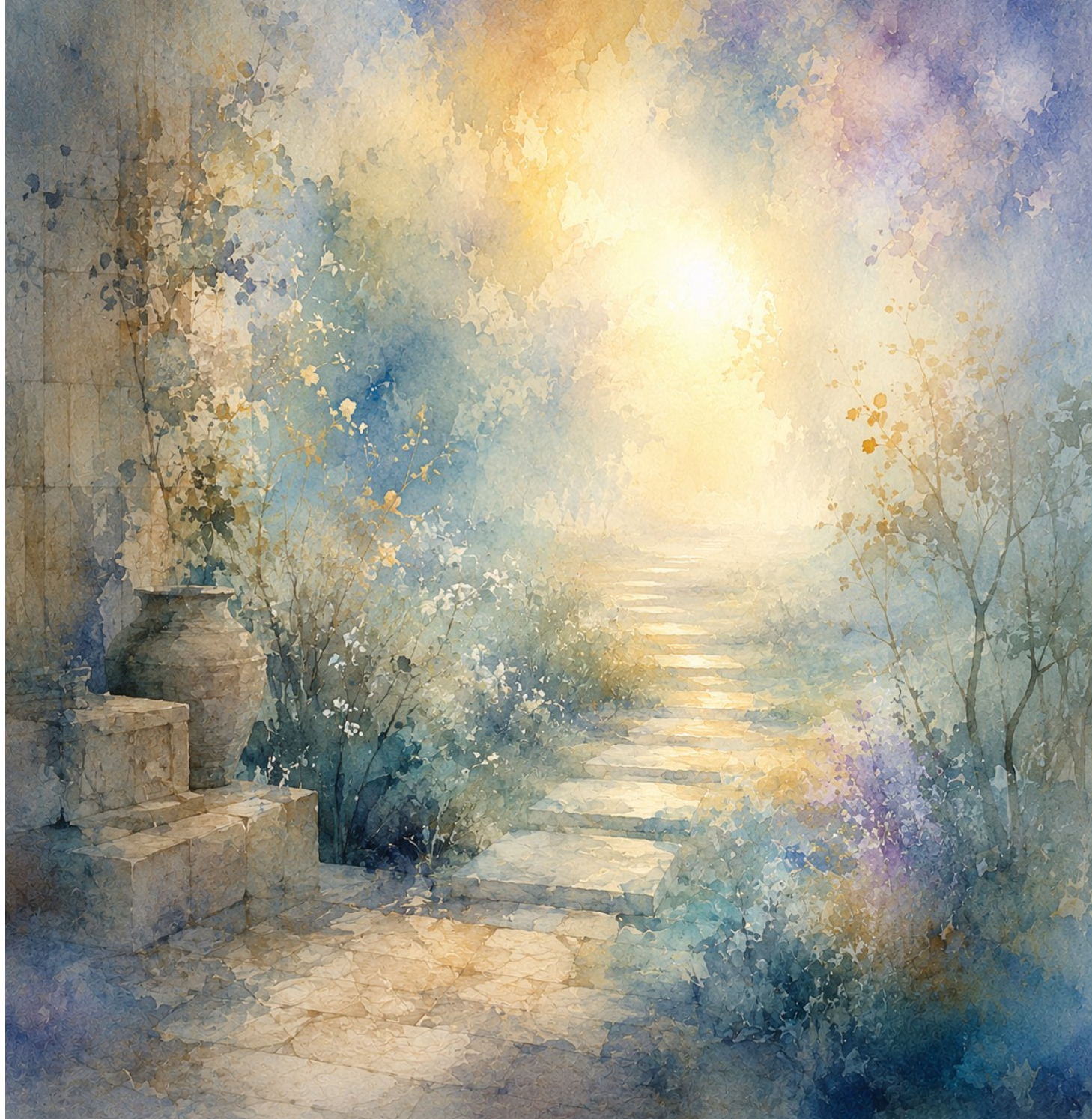
The buoyancy of grace is quiet in such a life. It is not always cheerfulness, and it is rarely certainty in the old sense. It is more like being sustained from beneath. The person may still grieve, still make mistakes, still consult others, still use ordinary judgement. But the deepest reliance has moved. The self no longer has to manufacture safety through closure. Trust has become less dependent on felt assurance, because the heart has be-

act, serve, decide, apologise, persevere, and carry responsibility. What has changed is the inner dependence on control. Action comes less from the anxious need to secure an outcome, and more from consent to grace already at work.

There is also a subtler confusion. Mystery can be turned into a spiritual atmosphere, almost an identity: silence, darkness, desert, hiddenness. The ripened heart does not perform mystery. It has simply been altered by what it could not master. Its speech may become sparse; its trust may become quiet; its service may continue without the old demand for visible assurance.

Faith may therefore look less certain from the outside, while inwardly becoming more faithful. Explanation has lost its central place, but love has not. The heart no longer needs to resolve the Mystery in order to be held by it.

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Practice Box – Trusting where the mind cannot close its hand

A practice cannot produce deep trust amid divine unknowing. This kind of trust is not manufactured by effort, nor secured by insight. It grows, if it grows, through grace, honesty, time, surrender, and the slow loosening of the self's demand to be safe through certainty. The invitations below are therefore not techniques for achieving ripeness. They are ways of noticing where the heart may already be learning to live from God rather than from closure.

Begin by noticing where you reach for certainty in order to feel safe. This may happen in prayer, doctrine, relationships, politics, family life, or decisions about the future. The question is not whether clarity is needed. Often it is. The question is whether certainty has begun to carry more weight than trust.

When a question cannot be resolved, try not to rush either into explanation or into vagueness. Let the question stand before God for a while. You might say inwardly: "Lord, I do not know how to hold this. Hold me while I do not know." Then be still for a few breaths, without trying to make the words feel successful.

Choose one phrase from Brother Nico's sayings and keep it for a day. Do not analyse it immediately. Let it accompany ordinary actions: washing a cup, walking through a doorway, answering a message, preparing food, sitting in silence. A phrase such as "The heart can be held where the mind cannot stand" may need time before it becomes prayer.

Where speech has become too quick, practise a small restraint. Before explaining God, defending a position, or answering someone's pain, pause long enough to ask whether your words are serving love or protecting anxiety. Sometimes the faithful word is clear and necessary. Sometimes the faithful word is quieter. Sometimes presence is the first truth.

Let doctrine kneel. Take one familiar line of faith – from the Creed, a psalm, a Gospel passage, or a prayer you know well – and receive it as a window rather than as a wall. Ask what it opens toward. Ask what it protects. Ask whether it is leading you into communion, or whether you have begun to use it to keep Mystery at a distance.

For group use, invite each person to

choose one unresolved question they are willing to bring into prayer without discussion. After a few minutes of silence, each may speak one sentence beginning, "In this question, I notice..." No one should answer, correct, interpret, or improve another person's sentence. The group simply receives what is spoken, then ends with a short prayer for trust, mercy, and patience.

If suffering is present, move gently. Deep unknowing should never be used to silence grief or hurry someone into acceptance. A person in pain may need food, sleep, lament, companionship, practical help, or protection before any spiritual language can be received. Mystery does not cancel the body. God came by body. We should suspect any mystery that refuses bread.

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“The movement from certainty to Mystery, then, is not the end of faith’s intelligence. It is intelligence bowed into love. It is doctrine made transparent to communion. It is prayer continuing after explanation has fallen silent.”

The ripened heart does not resolve the Mystery in order to trust. It discovers, slowly and often through stripping, that it has been held by the Mystery all along.”

From the Reflection, p 10—11



MEET THE WITNESSES

The witnesses for this combined Episode help trace a single movement: certainty loosening into divine Mystery, and trust deepening where explanation is no longer needed to provide the ground of faith.

The Cloud of Unknowing



The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* wrote in fourteenth-century England for someone being drawn into contemplative prayer.

The work is practical, spare, and daring. It does not dismiss thought, but it knows the limit of thought before God. Its great insight is that God cannot be possessed by the mind, while the heart may still be joined to God in love.

For this Episode, *The Cloud* gives one of the clearest witnesses to divine Mystery as fullness rather than absence. “He can certainly be loved, but not thought. He can be taken and held by love but not by thought.” In that sentence, the mind is not shamed; it is released from pretending to do what only love can do. This makes *The Cloud* a central companion for any reflection on deep trust amid unknowing.

St John of the Cross



St John of the Cross (1542–1591), Carmelite friar, poet, reformer, and doctor of the Church, remains one of Christianity’s most exact witnesses to the dark path of faith. His “dark night” is often misunderstood as depression, confusion, or emotional desolation alone. In his own teaching, darkness can also be the soul’s passage beyond lesser forms of certainty into a deeper union with God.

John helps this Episode because he refuses to make unknowing thin or vague. Darkness is not emptiness without meaning. It is the stripping away of what the soul used to rely on, so that love may be purified. He can speak of Christ as a rich mine whose treasures never come to an end: however deeply one digs, new depths remain. For the ripened heart, this is not discouragement. It is wonder.

Nicholas of Cusa

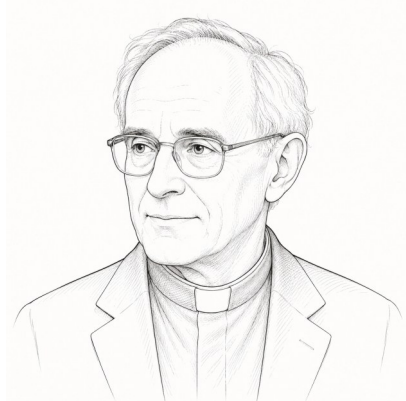


Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464) was a cardinal, theologian, philosopher, and contemplative thinker whose phrase “learned ignorance” gives this Episode a crucial distinction. He does not praise ignorance as laziness or confusion. He describes the humility reached by deep intelligence when it comes to the boundary of its own grasp.

Nicholas helps us see that the relinquishment of certainty need not be anti-intellectual. A shallow mind may be vague because it has not travelled far. A ripened mind may become humble because it has travelled far enough to know that God ex-

ceeds possession. In that sense, learned ignorance is not a defeat of knowing. It is knowing purified into reverence.

Karl Rahner



Karl Rahner (1904–1984), Jesuit theologian, was one of the most influential Catholic thinkers of the twentieth century. His theology repeatedly returns to the human person as one who lives before holy Mystery. For Rahner, God is not one object among others, nor a religious topic added to ordinary life. God is the infinite horizon within which human existence becomes possible and meaningful.

Rahner matters here because he helps modern readers understand Mystery without reducing it to mood or metaphor. The human being is opened from within toward God, even before this opening is clearly named. Faith, then, is not merely assent to religious propositions, though it includes truth and confession. It is the whole person's response to the incomprehensible God who is always nearer than our ideas about God.

Richard Rohr



Richard Rohr (b. 1943), Franciscan priest and contemporary spiritual writer, is not a classical authority in the same sense as the older witnesses, but he serves here as a useful contemporary synthesiser. His language often gathers apophatic, Franciscan, and Trinitarian intuitions into accessible form. For this Episode, his phrase “endless knowability” is especially helpful.

Rohr's point is not that God cannot be known. It is that God can never be exhausted by being known. In his Trinitarian language, divine life is “a dynamism, a flow, a relationship, a water-wheel of love.” Our words about God move by analogy and metaphor. They may say, “It is like this,” but they cannot finally say, “It is exactly this.” Such language honours both knowing and humility. It lets the heart trust what it cannot close.

Together

These witnesses differ greatly: an anonymous English contemplative, a Spanish Carmelite poet, a German cardinal-philosopher, a modern Jesuit theologian, and a contemporary Franciscan teacher. Yet they gather around one shared insight. The heart does not mature by abandoning truth, thought, doctrine, or language. It matures when these become transparent to love.

The ripened heart can therefore live within divine Mystery without treating Mystery as vagueness. It can think carefully, pray honestly, serve concretely, and still confess that God exceeds every grasp. What cannot be mastered may still be received. What cannot be explained may still become the place where the heart is most deeply held.

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