

A LITTLE DAILY
WISDOM

A LITTLE
DAILY WISDOM

Christian Women Mystics

carmen acevedo butcher
foreword by phyllis tickle



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A Little Daily Wisdom: Christian Women Mystics
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for my mother
Doris Griffin Acevedo

whose light shines

LIGHT

ray
stream
gleam
beam
sun
glow
flicker
shine
lucid
spark
scintilla
flash
blaze
flame
fire
serene
luciferous
lightning bolt
luster
shimmer
glisten
gloss
brightness
brilliance
splendor
sheen
dazzle
sparkle
luminous
reflection
kindle
illuminate
brighten
glorious
radiate
radiant
splendid
clarify
clear

ROGET'S THESAURUS

Lucille Clifton
The Book of Light

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foreword

One of the most poignant—by which I mean to suggest not sentimentality, but a sorrow of great dignity and a loss without remedy . . . One of the most poignant stories in American literature has to do with the poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In 1841, Longfellow, a widower but still a young man, married the love of his life, Frances Appleton. The marriage was a famously happy one; and the Longfellow home, a gathering place for young and old alike. The five Longfellow children filled Craigie House with their own turmoil, while Longfellow's Harvard colleagues and students daily added a considerable amount of activity of their own. Then in 1861, while she was alone in the kitchen, sealing locks of her children's hair into waxed boxes in order to preserve them, and while the poet was working in his nearby study, Frances Longfellow somehow spilled her vat of hot wax onto the stove. Fire shot up everywhere, engulfing her in flames, and she died a few minutes later in her husband's scorched, blistered arms.

Mourning usually tempers itself, or else it succumbs to the distractions and removal of time; but that surcease did not happen for Longfellow. Finally, unable to find relief from his agony, yet no longer able to sustain it, he did what many another bereaved human being has done. He determined to distract himself by intentionally setting himself some task that, being just slightly beyond the range of his natural abilities, would exhaust him into rest . . . which is how Henry Wadsworth Longfellow came to

render the most daunting poem in the Western tradition into the vernacular of the West's newest nation-state. He set himself the task of translating Dante's *Divine Comedy* for Americans.

When the work of translation was done and when, mercifully, torment had begun to soften into sorrow, the poet had only one task left before releasing the manuscript to publication. He lacked a foreword or, as he came to call it, a prologue. Forewords, by whatever name, must satisfy the fixed expectation of setting a context for the material the reader is about to read and of offering a kind of seductive precis of what lies ahead. Longfellow could do neither; the wound was too deep and the remedy he had sought too near. Instead, he wrote a sonnet, one of the most perfectly fashioned in all of American poetry, in which he describes his coming each day into the work of the *Divine Comedy* as having been an act of catharsis and devotional escape, like unto that of the spent worker who enters a cathedral at midday for respite and healing. He wrote:

Oft have I seen at some cathedral door
A laborer, pausing in the dust and heat,
Lay down his burden, and with reverent feet
Enter, and cross himself, and on the floor
Kneel to repeat his paternoster o'er;
Far off the noises of the world retreat;
The loud vociferations of the street
Become an indistinguishable roar.
So as I enter here from day to day,

And leave my burden at this minster gate,
Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
The tumult of the time disconsolate
To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
While the eternal ages watch and wait.

Much as I have loved Longfellow's words over the decades of my life, and as frequently as I have heard them in my own heart, as well as from the mouths of others, never had I thought of them in terms of some work other than Longfellow's *Comedy*. Or I had not until I read *A Little Daily Wisdom*. Yet I was no more than halfway through these medieval women mystics whom Carmen Butcher has so reverently translated into our American idiom before I began to hear, singing through my thoughts over and over again, "Oft have I seen at some cathedral door, a laborer, pausing in the dust and heat, lay down his burden. . . . Far off the noises of the world retreat . . . [and its tumult] to inarticulate murmurs dies away, while the eternal ages watch and wait."

The circumstances surrounding the Butcher translations were very different, of course, from those surrounding Longfellow's. This time, moreover, the one speaking the words of the sonnet prologue was neither the author nor the translator of the volume in question; rather, it was I, the book's reader, who was murmuring the words to myself. But the cathedral metaphor held for me; and in my reading, the cathedral effect was there—the easing of the burden, the kneeling in prayer and not ashamed to pray, and most blessedly, the realization that the loud vociferations

of the street were indeed fading away into indistinguishable sounds.

One can say—and I have said to myself several times—that the cachet of the medieval, which so drenches these mystics of Butcher's choosing, is the same that perfumes Dante's *Commedia*; for the medieval, after all, was his time and theirs, having been at best only lent to the rest of us who have followed. Or one can say that the parallels between Longfellow's americanizing intention toward a medieval classic and Carmen Butcher's are certainly there in effect, if not in cause. One can even note acerbically that cathedrals and medieval translations invite a kind of inevitable juxtaposing. But there is more than these things resonating here.

This small collection really is, in substance and in detail, a house of God where all who dare may enter. I say dare, because this house was chiseled out of life's living stone by women who worked in a time when strong women were prophets and seers of God. In these pages, the images of the Spirit's life are the erotic ones of the feminine experience. They are the stuff of very physically present women who, born in a lustier time, lived fully in the flesh and loved their Lord with a ferocity and passion that could be reported only in those experiences of the flesh. Stern mother-love also courses through these passages of adoration and exultation, as does mother-counsel. There is quiet here, too, deeply running quiet, just as there is a roar of holy fervor which suppresses and surpasses all other of the heart's roars. And then, too, there is a bit of that sly, exquisitely feminine, faintly mocking

trick of seeing out of the corner of the eye and then almost—just almost—laughing about it.

Beyond all these things, though, there is peace here in the company of these good women—peace, and the nurture that only wise and well-worn priestesses can bring to a day's occupation. So it is in their name, not mine, that I invite you: enter here, and laying your burden at this minster gate, listen for a year (or a clutch of years). Then marvel with me as the noises of the world do indeed retreat into inarticulate murmurs that soon begin to die away.

PHYLLIS TICKLE

The Farm In Lucy

introduction

What makes this volume different from other devotional writings? This book is about a luminous God, who loves us as gently as a mother and knows us as well as a lover. In recent times greater numbers of people are looking for an authentic relationship with this all-powerful, incarnate deity. That's where the medieval women mystics can help us. They preach Radiance. They focus on the unconditional nature of God's love. God's incandescent mercy is far more attractive to them than the dark finger-pointing concerns of a more masculine, medieval spirituality which was often obsessed with original sin and with guilt.

Among their bright themes is the reminder that we can converse with God. Catherine de Heuck Doherty, a twentieth-century Canadian mystic, offers this classic description of what these medieval women knew so well:

A mystic is simply a man or woman in love with God, and the Church is hungry for such people. . . . It isn't hard to be a mystic. All we have to do is fall in love with God; the rest will follow . . . the mystics of the Church call us to experience God by being in love with Him; He is already in love with us.¹

That's why mystics make alacritous teachers. They are enthusiastic in the most essential sense of that word. They know and love "the God within," so they are original, extreme, frank, ordinary, and often eccentric, but always relevant. Their writings may sometimes seem bizarre to our smug, scientific perspective, but that's only because the spiritual world was so real to them.

Through these independent women, we experience the unfathomable serenity of God's supreme love. Their God is never faceless. They dialogue with a loving Person, not an abstract intellectual concept. God is as intimate as your own breath. His three-in-oneness is as accessible as it is mysterious. This is good news for a world constantly interacting with answering machines and automated tellers.

These medieval mystics make excellent spiritual teachers for contemporary readers, because they are risk-takers. One example suffices: On a dark night in Italy nearly eight hundred years ago, Clare Offreduccio, unable to accept her birthright—a life of privilege and an economically sensible marriage—escaped through a small side door in her family's pricey home. This runaway teenager followed the God of light to become the future St. Clare of Assisi.

These women are risk-takers in love, knowing God in ways we often do not. The immensely likeable Catherine of Siena is quick to tell us we should risk everything for God's goodness, because it is within the reach of every honest heart. She is delighted that the more you love God, the more you know God, and the more you know God, the more you want to love Him,

and so on, snowballing into never-ending joy. She rejoices that agape love is addictive and that gaining godly knowledge is possible. All that it requires is a little focus. She explains, “If you want to find and experience the fruit of God’s will, always live in the cell of your soul.”

Being alone with yourself and learning to trust in God takes courage. But in that private soul place, these medieval women mystics meditated consistently, for hours and days and years and decades, creating the devotionals gathered and presented here, which now sparkle like diamonds. They explore the world of God’s divine, mothering love, the guidance of God’s light, the sensuality of faith, and a helpful Trinity.

Julian of Norwich reminds her readers that every time we make ourselves vulnerable before God, allowing a weakness to be exposed before Love, we are rewarded for this risk: “God pats us secretly, reassuring us, and showing us our sins by the gentle light of His sweet mercy and grace.” The more we humble ourselves before God, the more we see that our every weakness, pain, grief, embarrassment, or harmful error is met with His divine patience and love. Julian embodies her entire theology in this sense of God’s love as “meaning”:

Would you like to know your Lord’s meaning?

Okay, then know it well. The Lord’s meaning is Love. Love is His only meaning.

Who shows this to you? Love.

What did He show you? Love.

And why does He show it to you? For love.

Stay in God's love, then, and you'll learn more about its unconditional, unending, joyful nature. And you'll see for yourself, all manner of things will be well.

For those of us who wonder how we will know what to risk spiritually and when to risk it, the mystics recommend divine light's illuminating presence. Marguerite d'Oingt had a vision in which she witnessed the redeeming luminescence of Christ's broken body: "From these magnificent wounds poured out a light, so great it was stunning." Christ's radiant wounds of light liberate us from our gloomy self-absorption and our own dark wounds. As Catherine of Siena tells it, "The cloud of self-centered love darkened the eye of my understanding, but You came with Your light, Eternal Trinity, and banished all the darkness in me!"

We will also be guided by the very intimacy of a growing relationship with God, as Mechthild of Magdeburg tells us in her poetry. Well-known for her love mysticism, she invites us to enjoy a sensual faith: "Lie down in the fire and see and taste the flowing Godhead in your being. Feel the Holy Spirit move in you, compelling you to love God, His fire, and His flowing in many different ways."

Catherine of Siena echoes the very physicality of faith, "Let God's light help and comfort you. Now, no more words, but action!" She reminds us that God's luminescence is a way of living: "You, God, light coals on fire with the love that eventually melts hatred and bitterness from the hearts and minds of those who are full of anger. It will even turn their hatred into tenderness."

Gertrude the Great is of the same mind: “Remember kind actions—more than anything else—cause the soul to shine with brilliance.”

We need these mystics’ unapologetically *feminine* view of a tender, nurturing, forgiving God, who shares the divine body with the beloved—and the beloved is, of course, everyone. This God bleeds for us and lets us suckle nourishment from the divine breast, as Catherine of Siena says:

Love gives her children milk. Love feeds her children well.
We get this milk in the same way a baby sucks milk from its
mother’s breast. We get our nourishment by sucking milk
through Love’s nipple. Just so, our soul can have life only
through Christ crucified.

When these women who knew pregnancy, birthing, pain, and bleeding describe the special intimacy a maternal God offers, they are convincing. Their yearnings for close relationships with the people in their lives inform their ideas of God as the gentle, attentive Lover. Their own complex relationships as mothers, sisters, wives, and friends form the foundation of their understanding that God’s love is relational. Loving God means establishing and maintaining healthy bonds with those at our elbow. Like the contemporary poet Lucille Clifton, who wrote the poem “light,” their honest voices and sometimes startling visions are life-affirming.

These women challenge us from their understanding of *simpatico* suffering. They knew the darkest days, too, and their

thoughts on depression are especially sinewy. When I was a college freshman, my roommate taped a Pollyanna-yellow poster up on her side of the room. This poster's too-bright theology bugged me. It announced, "The best prayer is one word, 'HELP!'" However—two decades later—that little word *Help!* has become a real friend, mainly because of my own encounter with the spiritual world of depression. The devotionals in this book speak to that world. Because the mystics were especially susceptible to black days, they can teach us how to say the word *Help!* and look to God for light.

In the pages that follow, seventeen famous, and not-so-famous, medieval women mystics—Hildegard of Bingen, Catherine of Siena, Gertrude of Helfta, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Genoa, Birgitta of Sweden, Angela of Foligno, Marguerite Porete, Hadewijch of Brabant, Margery Kempe, Beatrijs of Nazareth, Elisabeth of Schönau, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Teresa of Avila, Umiltà of Faenza, Clare of Assisi, and Marguerite d'Oingt—converse with God in original ways. They invite each one of us to join in their intimate relationship with God.

A Little Daily Wisdom offers the concentrated spiritual wisdom of these mystics in easy-to-use, daily form. As a sort of mystics primer, it presents their most representative, most arresting, most convincing passages, and is intended to help readers create a "cell" or "quiet space" for focusing on God's love in the midst of busy lives. There is a meditation, a prayer, a poem or song for every day in a year's journey.

Each one is designed to be used as a private devotion. Taken into the spirit early in the morning, a medieval woman's

meditation can sing to you throughout the day. Read before bed, it can put your mind to rest as you prepare for a night's sleep. The devotionals can be enjoyed back to front or front to back, one at a time, or many all at once, whichever works best for you.

My hope is that these pages will taste good to your soul, and I know that would especially please these women, because they wanted nothing more than to midwife spiritual nourishment in others. They hungered for the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control that the New Testament book of Galatians describes, and they wanted others to have these, too. Over and over, they point out that the first spiritual step is always the hardest because it requires honesty and humility.

Readers wanting to know more about these women and their spiritual pluck can find short biographical information in a separate section at the back. I hope the selected reading list also provided there will make you curious to read more about these hard-to-pigeonhole women who deserve and reward any extra study.

I've modernized the mystics' words (or, in some cases, those words written about them) so the readings will sound more familiar and appealing. Many of the passages are condensed, but I have omitted ellipses. I have also changed many third-person passages into first-person. In all these changes, my goal was to make the text more reader-friendly. I enjoyed reading many Latin and German works in the original, and labored through many Old French texts.

Being still before God is never easy, but the devotional readings in this book can make the attempt all the more worthwhile. As you spend time with these mystics, may you enjoy a dialogue with a mysterious God, who is the Light leading us out of every darkness.

⁴See Catherine de Heuck Doherty, preface to *Purgation and Purgatory, The Spiritual Dialogue: Catherine of Genoa*, Serge Hughes, trans. (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), pp. xiii–xiv.

j a n u a r y





january 1 🌿

On New Year's Day,
we hope the new season
brings new flowers and new joys.
But—come what may—
those who suffer and worry for Love
will live joyful lives.

Love's rich power is creative and friendly.
Love is kind and has a sweet temperament.
Love soothes with compensation
every new sadness.

Love knows the repeated blows
I must endure for her.
From now on, though, I'll rely on Love.
totally,
with a sad heart, joyful.

—Hadewijch, *Poems in Stanzas*—

january 2

God tells us, “You must help achieve your own salvation. Obedience is the key of the Word, but you must still use it. So walk by the light of faith, stretching out your hand in love. I created you with no help from you, without your asking Me, because I loved you—how I love you! I loved you even before you existed.

“But you must help Me save you. Carry the key in your hand. And walk—don’t sit—along the way of Truth’s teaching. Don’t sit by the fire, concentrating on finite things and glittery material possessions. If you do, you’re throwing the shiny key of obedience into manure. You’re smashing it with a hammer. You’re letting it get rusty with self-absorption. Instead, tie this key tight around your waist with the belt of humility and submission. Wear it with joy. Then you’ll never lose the key to Love.”

—Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*—

january 3

God is a happy Trinity, and God is everlasting, a creature with no end and no beginning. His omnipresence always intended the creation of the world and of all of us who live in it, and God’s sensual, beautiful character was first designed for His Son, who is the second person of the Trinity.

When the Trinity—through love—made the world and us, this act of creativity joined every one on earth to God, and this unique unity helps us stay as pure and as excellent as when we

were first created. In this bond with God, we are strong. In it we love and thank the One who made us.

We can't stop praising Him. God's good love is continually re-created in every soul who seeks healing in God's will.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*—

january 4

A voice from heaven sang out, saying to me:

“Depressed child of God and daughter of much hard work, even though you’ve been thoroughly seared—so to speak—by endless terrible pains in your body, the deep mysteries of God have completely permeated you. Give others an accurate account of what you see with your inner eye and what you hear with the inner ear of your soul. Your testimony will benefit others. As a result, men and women will learn how to know their Creator, and they’ll no longer refuse to adore God with excellence and respect.”

That voice made me—heartbroken and fragile creature that I am—begin to write with a trembling hand, even though I was traumatized by more illnesses than I could count. As I started this task, I looked to the true and living Light and asked, “What should I write down?” I was never in a condition similar to sleep, nor was I ever in a state of spiritual bliss. I saw the visions with the inner eye of my spirit and grasped them with my inner ear.

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*—

january 5

The Holy Spirit, the Paraclete—giver of everything good—breathes where He wants and how He wants and when He wants and keeps all secret inspiration hidden, but sometimes God’s Spirit decides to bring spiritual truths to light, for the good of the many. That’s what happened in my case. Divine love always flowed into my servant soul, but I was only commanded to make this known on some occasions.

One Mass, as the host was being consecrated silently by the priest, I said to the Lord, “This act is so significant and so deserving of ultimate respect that in its presence I must lie down in the deepest valley of humility and there wait my portion of it bringing my salvation.”

But the Lord answered me, “When a mother wants to embroider with silk or pearls, sometimes she puts her little child up in a higher place to hold the thread of pearls or to help her in other ways.

“That’s why I’ve put you in a higher place—I intend to make you participate in this Mass. If you’ll raise yourself up to help Me of your own volition in My work of love—even if it’s hard—then you’ll have helped Me as best you can, according to your unique abilities.”

—Gertrude the Great, *The Herald of Divine Love*—




january 6 🌿

O blessed poverty,
you give everlasting wealth to all who love you!
O holy poverty,
God promises eternal glory and a joyful life to all who
possess and crave you!
O God-centered poverty,
you whom the Ruler of heaven and earth and Creator of all
that was made
—our Lord Jesus Christ—humbled himself to embrace!

Whose power is stronger?
Whose generosity greater?
Who looks more beautiful?
Who loves more tenderly?
Whose manners are more gracious?

If so mighty and excellent a Lord, then, came into the
Virgin's womb and chose to appear scorned, needy, and poor in
this world so that anyone utterly poor and in absolute need of
heavenly nourishment might become rich in Him, then you
should rejoice. Smile! Be joyful!

—Clare of Assisi, *Letters*—

january 7 

I looked up at the bright sky and heard different kinds of music in it:

○ glorious living light, living in holiness!

○ angels who—in the middle of the mystical darkness surrounding all creatures—look eagerly on God!

How joyful it must be to be an angel,
and be free from every kind of evil.

○ angels with shining faces who guard the people.

○ archangels, who take honest souls to heaven.

○ virtues and powers and principalities and dominions and thrones.

○ cherubim and seraphim.

Praise be to you all, seeing the heart of the Father,
looking on the Ancient of Days gushing up in the fountain,
praising His inner power
appearing like a kind face.

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*—

january 8 🌿

Sweet eternal will of God, you've taught us how to find you. If we asked our kind, loving Savior and most merciful Father, "How can we find You?" God would tell us: "If you want to find and experience the fruit of My will, always live in the cell of your soul." Now the cell is a well of both earth and water. We can understand the earth to be our own poverty when we recognize that of ourselves we're nothing. That's why we must admit our being comes to us from God. He is living water.

Let us plunge into this well!

—Catherine of Siena, *Letters*—

january 9 🌿

Wise Love,
you keep holy order
as you praise God and know God in your praising.
You accomplish God's will in all things
when you do this.

And if we praise God faithfully,
we'll rest in God, and
this will be the cause of our rejoicing.

—Mechthild of Magdeburg—
The Flowing Light of the Godhead



january 10

Sweet measureless love, who moved you? Love alone. O gentlest love, Jesus! To strengthen each person's soul and free it from the weaknesses it fell into knowing through disobedience, You built a wall around it, mixing the flow of Your own blood into the lime for the mortar. This blood fuses the soul with God's gentle, divine will and fits it for His love because just as lime mixed with water is put between stone and stone to bind them together securely, so God mixed the blood of His only-begotten Son into the living lime, the fire of God's shining love.

God put this celestial cement between Himself and every one of His creatures—because there is no blood without fire, nor fire without blood.

—Catherine of Siena, *Letters*—

january 11 

THE SOUL (burdened and bad-tempered): I hate long working hours! I'm weary of the tiring load I carry while on earth! I find it hard to fight my humanness.

VIRTUES: Dear Soul, God's will created you, you happy catalyst of good! Why be weak against the thing God crushed with the Virgin's help? Through us you can conquer the devil.

THE SOUL: Help! Give me strength. Help me stand firm.

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: Remember the grace you wear, daughter of salvation, and stand strong. Then you'll never fail.

THE SOUL: But I don't know what to do or where to run. I am afraid. I'm not able to wear my clothing well. I want to tear it off.

VIRTUES: Miserable soul, why do you hide your face from your Creator?

KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: Why do you refuse to see or taste the One who made you?

HUMILITY: I, Humility, queen of the virtues, have something to say: Come to me, every virtue. I'll strengthen you. Then you can seek the lost coin and give it the crown of joyful perseverance.

VIRTUES: Glorious queen, kindest mediator, we come, dancing!

THE SOUL (in the body, repentant and lamenting): Divine virtues, you shine so marvelously in the highest Sun, and your home is so sweet!

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*—

january 12

Praises must always be offered to the divine Creator. Praise God with your heart and mouth, for by His grace He sets on heavenly thrones not only those who stand erect, but also those who bend and fall.

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*—

The Way God Approaches the Soul:

I come to my beloved as the dew on the flower.

—Mechthild of Magdeburg—

The Flowing Light of the Godhead

january 13

If you want to understand what's in my book, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, be careful what you say about it because it's very hard to comprehend. First, you must be overwhelmed by Humility. She's the keeper of Wisdom's coffers and the mother of every other virtue. Even you brilliant theologians and you smart students won't have any intellect for *The Mirror*—no matter if you're geniuses—if you don't read my book humbly. Only then can Love and Faith, the ladies of the house, help you rise above Reason.

Reason boldly admits that she doesn't live apart from Love and Faith. Reason says they act as her lord, and she must humble herself before them. So humble your wisdom that's based on

Reason. Place your trust in everything Love gives you, as shown through Faith. That's how you'll understand this book that makes the Soul live by loving.

—Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*—

january 14 🌿

God be with you. God will teach you the true ways of agape Love. Your part is to be vigilant and discerning in all you do.

Consider your journey. Remember who you are. Be firm in your faith.

If you earnestly desire eternal life and do not follow your emotions but God's will, you will possess everything His love desires for you. So live in joyful hope. Be utterly confident that God will allow you to love Him with that great love with which He loves Himself.

—Hadewijch, *Letters*—

january 15 🌿

The Soul Praises God for Five Things:

You're the Emperor of praise!

You're the Crown of every king and queen!

You're the Wisdom of the most learned!

You're the Giver of every gift!
You're the Deliverer from each addiction!

—Mechthild of Magdeburg—
The Flowing Light of the Godhead

january 16 🌿

Prayer unites the soul to God. Although the soul is like God in nature, it is often different from Him in condition because of a person's sin. Prayer then acts as a witness that the soul wills as God wills. It eases the conscience and prepares us for grace. That's why God teaches us to pray—to trust without doubting that we will have grace, for the Lord looks on us in love. God wants nothing more than to make us partners in His good will and work.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*—

january 17 🌿

Sin is unclean and unnatural—and horrible. However, the loving soul wanting to be beautiful and shining in God's sight shouldn't be afraid of sin, except to the point that fear is useful. Instead, we should humble ourselves and weep over our weaknesses to God, our beloved Mother, who'll sprinkle us with

His precious blood, and our souls will become as supple and as kind as possible.

God always heals us, and with the most amazing gentleness over time. It does take time for us to heal in ways that will bring God the most glory, and us the most joy, forever. The Lord never stops or even slows His kind, gentling healing in us.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*—

january 18 🌿

O tall mountains
of confidence in God,
you never surrender when the Lord tests you!
Although you stand far away from me
as if in exile, all alone,
you remind me that
no armed power is strong enough to best you.

Your trust in God is wonderful!

—Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*—

january 19

When we trust in God, we live in the light of true faith, and our obedient souls are set on fire in the furnace of divine love. We're anointed then with humility and become inebriated in Christ's blood. Then the sister of Humility—Patience—and the submissiveness she teaches us helps us accept umpteen spiritual rewards from God, our Creator and Friend. We become courageous then and persevering, and we are also able to enjoy all the other virtues God gives, as well as their fruits.

—Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*—

january 20

Miserable sin, what are you? You're nothing. I looked and saw God is in everything. And I didn't see you then. When I saw God made everything, I didn't see you. When I saw God is in everything, I didn't see you. When I saw God does everything that's done—both great and small—I didn't see you, either.

When I saw our Lord Jesus Christ seated in our soul so well—I saw love and delight, good laws and protection, and all that He has made there—but I didn't see you. That's why, sin, I'm certain you're nothing.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*—

january 21 🌿

Be happy. Be content—always, everywhere, in all circumstances—because every circumstance is a gift of love for you from the Eternal Father. That’s why God wants us to rejoice in every one of our troubles, and to praise and give glory to His name—yes, in everything—because God loves you with a forever kind of love.

Buck up! Remember who loves you, and be encouraged today and every day in Christ, gentle Jesus.

—Catherine of Siena, *Letters*—

january 22 🌿

We praise You, Lord, that You searched for us in Your humility.

We praise You, Lord, that You kept us in Your mercy.

We praise You, Lord, that You adored us in Your humiliation.

We praise You, Lord, that You provided for us in Your generosity.

We praise You, Lord, that You watched over us with Your strength.

We praise You, Lord, that You made us good with Your goodness.

We praise You, Lord, that You taught us in Your intimacy.

We praise You, Lord, that You lifted us up in Your love.

—Mechthild of Magdeburg—
The Flowing Light of the Godhead

january 23 🌿

You're the highest, infinite God. You're good above every good. You're joyous good. You're good beyond measure and understanding. You're beauty above every other sort of beauty. You're wisdom above all wisdom. You're wisdom itself and the food of angels, and You are given to us with a burning love.

You're the clothes that cover all nakedness. You pasture the starving within Your sweetness. How sweet You are, God, with no hint of bitterness!

—Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue*—

january 24 🌿

God Compares the Soul to Four Things:

You taste sweet as grapes.

Your fragrance is as intoxicating as balsam.

Your radiance is like the brightness of the sun.

And you're the maturity of my most sublime love.

The soul always follows a rare and excellent path, and she draws the senses after her in joyful obedience.

—Mechthild of Magdeburg—
The Flowing Light of the Godhead

january 25 🍀

The Lord only promises the kingdom of heaven to the poor. That's because anyone who loves temporary material blessings loses the fruits of love. No one can serve both God and money because either one will be loved and the other hated, or one will be served and the other detested.

You also know this is true: A person wearing clothes is at a disadvantage in a fight with a person who's naked because the person in clothes is more easily thrown. Clothes give the opponent a place to make purchase on this person. Just so, anyone who revels in the glories of earth can't rule with Christ in heaven. Jesus did say, "It's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven."

So give away your clothes—your earthly possessions and riches—and you won't be pinned by the one fighting against you. Then you can enter the kingdom of heaven via the straight path and the narrow gate. What a great swap! To exchange the things of time for the things of eternity, to select heavenly gold over earthly goods, to get one hundred gifts instead of one, to enjoy life everlasting.

—Clare of Assisi, *Letters*—



january 26

I'm not good because of any revelations I've had. No. I'm good only if I love God better. Also, however much you love God more than I do, you're closer to God than I am.

I don't say this to the wise. You already know it. I say it to those of you who admire my revelations. Be comforted and strengthened, because we're all one in love. God certainly didn't reveal to me that He loves me better than the humblest soul who's in a state of grace. I'm sure there are many who've never had revelations or visions—only the usual teaching of the Holy Church—who love God better than I do.

If I pay special attention to myself, I'm nothing, but in general I am—I hope—unified with my fellow Christians in love. This union holds salvation because God is everything that is good, God made everything that is made, and God loves everything that He made. The person who loves everything and everyone God made, loves God because God is in every person. God is in all things.

The person who loves everything loves as God loves.

—Julian of Norwich, *Revelations*—