

S09E08 - Lent Part 1 Transcript

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Hello and welcome to the Abiding Together Podcast. Abiding Together is a place where you can find connection, rest and encouragement on your journey with Jesus Christ. My name is Sister Miriam James Heidland and every week I'm joined by two of my very dearest friends, Heather Khym and Michelle Benzinger. This podcast is born out of our friendship and all that the Lord is doing in our lives. You hear us laugh. You hear us cry. You hear us share very vulnerably, and you hear us talk about the things that we're still learning along the way. And you're most welcome to join us. You can find out all of our information on our podcast episodes on abidingtogether,podcast.com, but for now, grab a cup of coffee, settle in and welcome home.

Hello and welcome to this week's episode of the Abiding Together Podcast and our deep dive into the season of Lent and a wonderful book on St. Elizabeth of the Trinity by Claire Dwyer, which you're going to love. As we were talking about this right before we recorded it, cause we've been talking for an hour, as everybody knows we do that. We just can't wait to unpack this for you and just dive in with you, on the simple path of love and the cloister within, but welcome to Lent. Welcome to the very first full week of Lent 2021. Heather, how's it treating you? What do you think? Tell me everything.

Heather Khym: Well everything. Oh my gosh. Well, you know, I used to love Lent in my younger years, I was a bit more hardcore and now I'm like, eh Lent, you know, like I got to gear up for it, but actually I was doing the reform wellness stuff like with Jackie Mulligan right before Lent. And so it's been actually a beautiful thing to lead into because there's some practices that I want to continue through Lent. It was just such a nice flow to set up, you know, for Lent. So, yeah, I'm excited, you know, I want to open the door for whatever God wants to do this Lent. Yeah. How about you Michelle?

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Throw wide the doors.

Michelle Benzinger: Um, yeah. Throw wide those doors. I already feel like I've been in the desert

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Didnt Lent start like January 1st, 2020, like what happened? A year and a half of Lent.

Michelle Benzinger: Yeah, it's not like this desert that's like, oh, this horrible thing, but it's this desert where there has been like I've switched my schedule a lot for some more solitude as much as you can have with six children, but solitude and just changed some practices already. And I'm off social media a lot. And so just to make space and time for the Lord. So I am excited for Lent and I'm like also kind of like, Oh, how much more growth is gonna have to happen here? You know?

Heather Khym: How much more can I sacrifice? Really.

Michelle Benzinger: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, Cardinal Newman says growth is the evidence of life. I'm like, baby, then I'm living. I am living because there's a lot of growth going on in here. We are living. So sister, how about you?

Sister Miriam James Heidland: I agree. Oh, I want to say, I really wish I was holy enough to say that like Lent was my favorite season, but I've never - hashtag things I've never said. I am so sorry. Football season and advent and Easter and Christmas are my favorites. Sorry. So work with me, people. I'm just the nun being honest, but I agree with you. I know the Lord does beautiful things during this time, and I know he has something very special for each one of us. And I think even the way we've been led over the last couple of years to do a Lenten book study and just the way that the Lord has led us through Searching for and Maintaining Peace and Henri Nouwen, and then now this beautiful journey as well. I'm excited to see what the Lord is going to do. Yeah what he's going to do. So it's cause it's, yeah, it's been quite a year for all of us in so many ways. So, so yeah. So if you just listeners, just to let you know, you're most welcome to jump along in this stream with us at any time. So the book that we are going to talk about for the next several weeks is called This Present Paradise by Claire Dwyer. You can find that on Sophia Press. I believe Michelle. I think there's a special code people can use just on the outset. Is that right?

Michelle Benzinger: Abide10, if it is out of stock, I think it's going to be back in stock at the end of February, because you all bought all this copies from Sophia Press. Thank you. But, uh, it's also on Amazon, but all the links are in our notes.

Heather Khym: Yes. I remember some of our listeners are like, you should have given them a heads up that you guys were going to do this book. I'm like, Oh, we did. It's just that everybody went so crazy on it, which is like amazing, you know, so yeah check Amazon Kindle and eBooks and all the places that you can get it.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Yes. And we have posted where we're going with which chapters each week. So you don't have to have read them before you can listen to us and then read them or read them along or what. So just, we want to make it as easy for you as possible just to join us on this journey. And I think what you're going to find is we both, as all of us are reading the book, the chapters are very small. And they're very simple and they really have some great reflection questions at the end of each chapter for you to either dive in personally with a journal or with your small group, or however you listen to the abiding together podcast. I think you're going to find it really just really simply, just simple and beautiful. And we're going to just use her, one of St. Elizabeth's quotes. Where she says this. She says, "May my life be a continual prayer. One long act of love, may nothing be able to distract me from you." She says of the Lord. And that's really what we want to articulate to you as the heart for Lent. This is not something, we're not trying to give you a penitential practice, but we really we're going to keep hearkening back to what Saint Elizabeth calls, the cloister of the heart. Where every single one of us, no matter what our vocation is or where we are in life, that all of us, because the Lord dwells within us, we have a sacred place, a quiet place that we can go to at any time. And I think that's so hope-filling because all of us at any time can go into that place and meet the Lord there. So that means nobody listening, nobody on earth is excluded from this beautiful intimacy with the Lord. And I think that's, that's such good news. So this is not something we're trying to add to your, to do list for Lent. This is just a simple journey that we want to invite you along with us, into all the places, you know, in our hearts, but especially the cloister of our heart. So maybe just kind of on the outset as we talk about these first five chapters, uh, Michelle, and I know this book came onto your radar, early, before it came on to Heather and I's radar. Can you just tell us a bit like your heart for the book and just your opening kind of thoughts about this whole journey and the book?

Michelle Benzinger: Yes. Um, well, one, if I would have to name like one type of spirituality, well, you know, I'm an 'I choose all.' So like I would say like my imagination is probably Ignatian, my worldview is probably Franciscan, but my prayer is Carmelite. Like the women in the Carmelite tradition, and the men- St. John of the Cross- it just really forms my prayer. But when I was at Franciscan, one of the cute older friars gave me, he said, I have something for you. And he's like, I want to introduce you to my girlfriend. I was like, um, what? Huh? And then he gave me this book, the writings of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity. And it was just, yeah, it was just precious. It was Fr. Sam. And it was just, I mean, um, just precious. And so it was like, you know, we don't choose saints, they choose us. So she's always been one of those distant sisters to me. And then when Claire told me she was writing this book, she's asked if I would review it. And so I started reading it and I was like, it was simple yet profound, which I think are the best kind of books. But I think Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity - and was a contemporary, she was right after Saint Therese- both have such a beautiful way of simplifying the deep part of our spiritual life. Simplifying the depth of it that they go deep, but yet they simplify it. And that really both of them, but especially Saint Elizabeth of Trinity is like just to make ourselves home, like our heart and our soul's home in the Trinity. And I love it. She had a deep and profound impact on John Paul the II's, his writings like, John Paul II's spirituality was very Carmelite also in a lot of ways. But I loved, he called her the prophet of the presence, you know, and I just think that is so needed at this time in our lives, in this time in history. How do we be present to the Trinity in our everyday moments and our everyday actions and our everyday interactions? And how do we really bridge the Mary and the Martha in each of us? And so how do we live that out? And I think she's a perfect example to teach and her personality is fun, it's just different and I love how the Lord chooses different saints. Each is so unique. And so just, yeah, there's not one saint that is alike the, I mean, there's similarities, but we're all such a unique masterpieces and creations. I think that's so fun to dive into.

Heather Khym: Yeah. My hope for this Lenten journey is that some of these ideas that we know in our mind can move more deeply into our heart. Like I remember a time where I- we've heard the scripture, you know, Jesus lives in us or like the power of Christ, the power that raised Jesus from the dead lives in me, all of those things. And it had been in my mind for a long time, but there was one day I was feeling incredibly alone and I remember laying in my bed and it just hit me like a ton of bricks. Like, Jesus is within me right now, mysteriously, you know, he is alive in me and that means that I'm never alone. And I remember laying there and a huge smile just crept across my face. And I was like, I'm not alone right now. I'm never alone right now. Jesus is living within me and I think this idea of like the cloister within the heart, like the place that no matter where we are in our state of life, whether we're a mom or a student, single, married, religious, like no matter what we're doing, poor, rich, doesn't matter - that there's this place within. The secret place where we can unite with Jesus where we could meet him there. And for that idea to move from our head to our heart and actually become a lived experience for us this Lent, I think would be the greatest gift of all for each of us.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: I totally relate to what you both have said. And that's so true of, and I was, as I was reading some of her words I was thinking of what things matter most. You know what things matter most? And how do we as women, especially in our gift of receptivity, in our gift of outpouring so life is born in all the ways that the Lord does that, how do we continue to give of what is most true and most beautiful? And there really is no

other way than being continually grafted and integrated and brought into intimacy with God. I mean, that's the, every single person on earth has a place where nobody else dwells, but the Lord in their soul, and it's sacred and it's sovereign for the Lord. And that we must go to that place and we must learn how to live out of that place because it's then- we talk about this all the time on the podcast- it's then that our loves are ordered. Otherwise it's us distracted or us grasping, or us pushing away, all the things we do. But like that deep place. And I want to, I loved the introduction. I mean, there's just so many great things here, but I love the introduction on page two where, uh - and Claire writes so beautifully, can I just say that? Like, I love her just even like articulating when she was a little girl living in Wisconsin, just like the beautiful countryside. She just writes so well, but she said this and she herself, you know, as a mom and she's trying to figure out union and, you know, Uh, you know, and of Saint Elizabeth saying her vocation was not really Carmel, but union. And she says this, this is Claire's introduction. She says, I remember exactly where I was standing in the backyard, holding a book of her writings. When I realized that I had found a Saint who perfectly bridged the divide between the Carmel and the kitchen and the chasm separating the cloister and the carpool. That is so great. And I think so, I mean, our listeners, whatever that is for you, we can all relate to that. We can all relate to that. So the simple truth of the Carmelite spirituality is that it's not beyond the reach of anyone. That God is within and we need, we need only turn to him and have him reveal himself there.

So shall we dive in ladies? Let's just dive into, let's just talk about some things that stuck out to us. Michelle, do you want to lead us off? What are some things in the first five chapters, or if you want to go chapter by chapter we can kind of just see just some things that you'd love for our listeners to notice as they, as they make their way.

Michelle Benzinger: Yeah, I think you start at the beginning of her life when it talks about, um, who she was and you know, this family of four, but that she lost her father at the very beginning. And if you read different biographies about her, I would like - read this book and I have her writings. So then I went ahead and read a couple more biographies about her life. Like she basically, like her father almost died in her arms. Like she was there through that whole point. And then it just became her mom and her and her sisters. And just that whole idea of communion and hope at the very first chapter, like the communion we belong in a family. And I think it's so beautiful that she was so close to her father and her grandfather, and it talks about this. But that really the Trinity is family. It is communion. It's communion with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and their love. But I love that she extends an invitation to us all that we're part of that family and that we are called to be in union with this family also. And that family dwells within us. You know, it is always there. And like Heather, you were saying earlier, we are never alone. We are always in the midst of the Trinity and in the midst of family. But even in that great loss, that she had hope. That she had a gaze of hope. And I loved that Claire weaved in some of John Paul II's beautiful poetry. You know, we will put us the link here to the book of poetry, because as soon as I read the book, I ordered that book of poetry. Cause I'm a huge poetry fan, but from John Paul II but just that beautiful language of a hope. And that we, our hope is we have to put on our eyes in eternity. And it actually got me thinking, because I was like, Lord, there is something about different saints where they lose their mothers early. Like I was thinking of Saint Therese and and then like Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity lost her father and then St. Theresa of Avila lost her mother, John Paul II lost his mother early, like, Lord, what is that? You know, that they suffer. But yeah, I think the Lord uses all of that suffering to bring them in deeper

communion with him. And that is what he's calling us to do to have hope within the separation. But to also realize the desire of our heart is communion in each and every one of our hearts is that, is family, is that ache for home. And the true home is the Trinity.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Yeah, I was, I thought it was really beautiful too, that articulation of her life and loss and cause can't we all relate to that. And I could also feel like, even as Claire was writing about St. Elizabeth's mama, like you could see why her mom would not want her daughter to go to the cloister. I mean, you could just totally, you could, you could you just feel in her mom's heart, like circle the wagons, circle the wagons. You know like let's, and you could just feel even her own heart in this. The woman who had just lost her father and her husband. And it said that she even lost her first fiance. And then, you know, she's got these two young daughters and I can just imagine how hard that would be to raise two young girls during that time, especially, I mean, it's always hard, but it's, so you can just feel like her heart there and all of us can relate to losses in our life and the places where we often grieve so deeply. And then maybe that grief has never been trans- like walked through or allowed to really come to the surface. And I love right on the onset that, you know, here she is, as a young girl who was very choleric and very fiery and has suffered a lot, even as a young girl and that doesn't preclude her from still seeking God.

Michelle Benzinger: Absolutely.

Heather Khym: Yeah. There's just like one little line that says surrender is so painful. I was like, it truly is like, it truly is. Because we have a choice to make when we experience loss and difficulty and things in our life that just don't go as they should and we're in pain. It's like, what are we going to do with that? You know, are we going to surrender it to the Lord? And trust that out of his goodness, he can make all things new and he can take horrible things and turn them into something beautiful? Or are we going to bury it? Um, you know, cope, like get into all our own coping mechanisms? Like what, what are we going to do? And we do have a choice. And I think sometimes we just let life happen to us. And then we wonder years from now, like, how did I get here? You know? But I think there's hope even in that. Like when surrender is so painful, but when we surrender to a God who is good and trustworthy, and kind and powerful. You know, like he is not meek and mild in this way. Like he is powerful and he can make all things new. We open up to the goodness of God in places that, yeah, it doesn't make sense to the world. You know, only God can take horrible things and make them beautiful. That's what he's all about.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Mm. And I think that's something that we see continually in the life of St. Elizabeth is that reality of surrender. And I thought, what an astute- the Lord, the Holy spirit, really given her an astute insight, even as a little girl into her own temperament and you know her about to make her first Holy communion and promising her mama, that she would be better. I promise- this fiery girl learning. And it said, you know, her being reduced to tears when she lost that battle sometimes. And gosh, don't we all know those places in our own heart, these areas of deep poverty where we see. Oh, gosh, we all have them and it isn't it. So I know it brings me to tears at times in my own life. Like, Oh Lord, here's this place again. You know, here's this place again. And, and she also talks about, I thought Claire spoke very beautifully about just the humiliation of St. Elizabeth's mother when Claire's like acting crazy. And it just, she had this great quote in there. Claire says, when she talked about how Elizabeth had this massive outburst, you know, when this nun took her doll and made it baby Jesus and Claire realizes that the doll is now dressed up on the alter.

And she screams out in the middle of mass. You wicked priest, give me back my doll. It's so great because Claire writes, Oh, the humiliation she's like, we can almost see the color rise in her mother's cheeks as she carried Elizabeth out, followed by the stares of the congregation. Nothing can mortify our pride like parenting. Amen.

Michelle Benzinger: Amen. amen.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Can the two of you just talk about that for a second, please? I would just, I think it would bless our listeners so deeply.

Michelle Benzinger: Oh my gosh. Yes. And then like, I love how her mother says in the book. Claire writes "a real devil her mother called her. Prone to frequent tantrums and stubborn outbursts. Her parish priest, that she would either be a saint or a demon. And I know for certain that there are two children that I say that this child is going to make me a Saint, you know. And he's amazing and I love him, but he just. I want my kids to conform to my will. My will, not your will! Yeah, it was just so funny. Like, I mean, I know there's been so many times where I really have to just check my ego and everything else at the door because my kids will do stuff. I'd be like, what are you? I mean, I literally like look at them in amazement. Like, what are you thinking? I mean, a perfect example is I had all these boys and we lived on 120 acres on this huge camp. So when we were potty training, we taught them to pee outside. You know, not thinking like that, oh, we need to say, okay when other people are around... You know, so I will not forget, like they're having an outdoor mass somewhere at the place where we're at this camp, all the sudden we turn around and you see two little white butts peeing on the other side of the field and all these teenagers laughing. And I'm like, just let me melt into the ground, melt into the ground but they're like, Mom, you said we could pee outside. I mean, in their minds, you know, they're like four and five years old, but it was just so funny. So funny.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Oh I can imagine. Heather, what about you, what has been your experience at times?

Heather Khym: Oh my gosh, like just how candid kids are and you know, I mean, self-control is something that grows over time and kids don't have that. Like I mean, they are just brutally honest at every moment and they go against the "what's appropriate," you know, for situations like Michelle's story case in point. But yeah, I remember my youngest, Eva, we were somewhere and it just smelled weird where we were and she was standing there with her little finger like stuck under her nose. And she just says loud for everyone to hear, you know, like it smells like the reeks in here and I'm just like mortified. Like you're looking around at everybody. I was like, Oh my gosh. But there's so many moments like that where you're like, just humbled beyond, or your kid is screaming their face off. They have a blowout in their diaper and there's just poop everywhere. Like yeah, nothing humbles you like parenthood that's for sure.

Michelle Benzinger: Nothing.

Heather Khym: But I've often said, you know, like about things like that, experiences like that, and parenthood is a good, kind of an easy way to see it, but we all have these places where you can be stretched so far beyond your own capacity. And there's a purpose for that because God is stretching your heart to love deeper, you know, to love deeper and more selflessly. Like those crucibles are really the place where you can become who you were

meant to be. If you surrender to it, like that's what it goes back to - surrender is painful. Yes it is. But when we do and we stop fighting with the circumstances that happen and trust that God can bring about good things. Those truly can be the places where our hearts expand to love in ways that we never would have been able to do on our own.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Yeah. Go ahead, Michelle.

Michelle Benzinger: Yeah and I think that there's such insight, like you said earlier, sister, there's something child-like about her and that she came into her faith so boldly when she was young. And Cardinal Newman - can y'all tell I'm reading another book about Cardinal Newman- He said, there's a special grace for those that fall so deeply in love with their faith when they are young. Like when the Lord grants it, it's a grace, you know, to be able to, because you know, a lot of us know second graders, like this is a grace that she is that self-aware that the Lord entered her heart so boldly and that she received that invitation so boldly also. That she was able to do this. And she has a line after her first communion saying like, "I'm no longer hungry, he fed me." So that beautiful union she had was an extension of the invitation. But I love that she really struggled with her temper. And that was the struggle for awhile. Not just, I mean, for a long while and that she had this intensity, like there was an intensity personality about her, you know, which I think like for any of us that are raising intense kids or live with intense kids or have intense people in our family. I am an intense person.

Heather Khym: Or we are the intense one. Yeah.

Michelle Benzinger: Exactly. And so, you know, okay, how does the Lord need to channel that intensity? And for me, I know for my intensity, it is a blessing and it is a curse. My counselor said to me, you know, she's like, you can exhaust the people around you so easily because you go at a speed that is not normal. And so she's like, not only do you exhaust yourself, but you can exhaust the people around you, you know, with just your idea of pace, expectations, stuff like that. And it was just like this aha moment where like, okay, I know what she's saying is true. But wow, you're right. Oh, okay. I do do this, you know? And so our intensity, like our biggest blessings are also sometimes our hardest crosses to carry because they haven't been refined or like you said, Heather surrendered. And that's such a beautiful thing to realize in each and every one of us. Like where has the Lord brought this different intensities or where are the things in our life that are both blessings and curses, you know, that are all wrapped up in one? And the Lord is just continually refining. It's not a one-time refinement process. It is a continual refinement process over and over again.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Well, it's so true. I mean, it reminds me so much of St. Paul. We have this fiery preacher who at the same time says I have this thorn in the side. And that, that Jesus says my power is made perfect in weakness. And it reminds me of the episode we did on St. Joseph, the letter of St. Joseph where Pope Francis just beautifully. He just beautifully articulated that of how our frailty is the very place where the Lord works and we want to do away with it. But he said, it's often in these very places where salvation history is made known, and it's just really just stunningly beautiful. And I love where she says, I mean, she's preparing for her first Holy communion and, and it's true. Like what you're both saying, like this is a lifelong journey. And we, I think often, sometimes we get so frustrated with ourselves and other people at times that we're not there yet. And we're, it's like the continual journey of like, are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet? And we see

movements and amen to it, but isn't this, and it's so humbling. It's just so humbling. But I love when she's talking about receiving her first communion and she says, the first encounter that great day when we gave ourselves to each other completely. Right? For her to receive the Lord and to give, that's so... I wept over that. I just sat and cried over it, cause that's the truth of what is. That's a union. That's what we all long for. That's home. That's heaven, you know where she says, Jesus, my heaven. And that's true. He's our home. And that continual always going back to the inner cloister when she writes one of her friends later, one of the other chapters she talks about writing her friend and she's like, you know, you can go there anytime you want. When things upset you or you're irritated, you just go right there and you tell Jesus all about it. I was like, I love that.

Heather Khym: Yeah, that's incredibly beautiful. I think those places, like, just back to those places where we feel the blessing and the curse. I have found in my own life that because like, that could be, like if we allow it to be transformed by God and the Holy Spirit breathes like into those places, that's the place where the enemy feels most threatened. Like that's our places of glory, like potential glory. And so He will hit us hard in those places and attack us. And that's where the twist comes in. Like we talked about in a previous episode with Fr. Josh, like our desire starts from a good place. When the enemy attacks our desire, we experience woundedness, it twists into something else, sin and you know, we distance from God and all of that stuff. And I think that's the same with like these places of our heart, where like, if I don't avail myself to the Holy Spirit, this is going to become really bad in my life. And it could cause a lot of destruction to me and to other people. But when I surrender that to the Lord, then he can use that to actually be the place where I am most building his kingdom and bringing his kingdom here on earth. Because I've surrendered it to him and this is where my greatest gifts lie. You know, it's sort of like the diamond that becomes like polished and whatever. I think those are the places that threaten the enemy. And so when we surrender or we feel that tension within us of like, Oh, this place in my heart, like I'm really being hit hard here, like to press in deeper to ask the Holy Spirit, to come and shape and form those places even more. Because that's what's going to draw us into intimacy. That's what we see with Elizabeth, right? Like her intensity is what drew her in. When I read those words too sister, like when she's having her first communion. And I was like, what little kid says that? Like what little kid experiences that? It was her intensity that allowed her to experience that even then.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Yeah. I remember one time somebody said, there's a great saying that, you know, people often say that our gift and our wound often lie side by side. And so you see like what you both are saying, you see that and you see that in her, which I think is such a great example for all of us, is the continual not being afraid to dive into those places. And the last chapter, chapter five, she talks about her diving into music and how beautiful that is, and her love of beauty. And just so it's just so stunningly revelatory of God's grace and his goodness. And she says, you know it really wasn't me playing. It was Jesus playing for me. Like he played for me. It was just so stunning of even her, the gift that Lord had given her in that, which she will also, she'll surrender all of that. She'll surrender the music, she'll surrender her desire to enter Carmel, she'll just continually surrender that. And just to watch later how Jesus gives it all back to her in ways she can't even possibly imagine.

Michelle Benzinger: And I love how the Lord uses everything in her life. He uses the intensity and of the Lord. I love it. How Claire says it in the book that he has the map to your holiness already mapped out for you, you know, and it's an individual unique map, but each of us

have that. And it is just a response. We, He extends the invitation and we have to respond, but I've been really been thinking about this one of the things about Elizabeth of the Trinity is, she was one of the first ones to really talk about the universal call to the holiness before the church really verbalized that and made that clear. This universal call to holiness. It is not only just priests or religious sisters, but it is laity, it is all, you know. And even her relationship with her sweet sister, that's who she wrote a retreat for a mom at home with all these children. And I love, and she talks about this a lot in the book, that bridge in between religious sister and a wife and mom or whatever, all women. That bridge between the vocations or all people, but that each of us have a call to holiness. That it is written in our hearts, you know, and it is already there. And the Lord has a map. And it uses our weakness. It uses our wounds, but it uses our gifts to, you know, like this beautiful gift of music. But that, you know, she used it as a prayer, like she said, but she had to surrender that gift back and the Lord transformed it. And it'd be very easy to say, like, I can't join Carmel because I have this beautiful gift of music that the Lord uses it, but the Lord will use it. It may not look like what we think it does, like what we think it should look like, but it does. And also I think sometimes that he calls us to surrender these gifts or these desires for a season for him to refine them, so that we use them for his glory. You know, I know before, like I had a real reconversion, you know, like I went to design school and art school and all of that, you know, and thought that that's the route that I was going to go. And then I had a, you know, a radical reconversion and that all shut down. And I thought I will never use that ever again, you know? And then I went the theology route and all this kind of stuff, but yet there was something ingrained in my heart for aesthetics and beauty and art. But I, my pendulum swung so far the other way, I'm like, well, that's just worldly and I'm not going to, the Lord hadn't redeemed it yet, you know? And he didn't bring it back until after I had children. And I started designing again for my kids, my boys. Because there's no cute kids, boy shirts. And so that's why I started, you know, but the Lord redeemed that gift and brought it back in another season and it needed to be restored. And the gift was not bad, I just did not use it to his glory. So he knew in his wisdom that he needed just to remove it for a season until I had the maturity to steward it well in another season. And that is what I think is such a beautiful thing about her and just the gifting part in this book.

Heather Khym: I think she, she does a great job in this book of, of drawing out like God can use all things.

Michelle Benzinger: All things.

Heather Khym: Like exactly what you're saying, Michelle. And I love this part in here where she says "The Lord has laid out for us the exact means to holiness. We may look for signs in the stars, a parting of the clouds with streams of light illuminating a brilliant way to paradise, but more likely our path is made of breadcrumbs and fingerprints pointing the way to heaven in smudges of peanut butter. It's the little things. It really is." And I was like, it is the little things, like this is Saint Therese. This is the spirituality of so many saints. It's the little way of love. And every time that we think that sainthood isn't possible for us, you know, like I read these words and I'm like, Oh, it just gives me hope. Like it, it really is the little things like, and I can do the little things. Like if I put my, not just my mind to it, but if I set my sights on like, Jesus, I want to love you in all of these little things. I'm not just going to do things for the sake of doing them, but I want to love you in all of these small ways that I can right in my world today, no matter who I am or where I am. I'm going to pick this up because I don't want to, I'm going to serve this person, even when I don't feel like it. I'm going to just

sacrifice, for you, Jesus, so that you can, you can bring me. You know, closer to your heart. It's possible, you know, it is possible with the, with the gift of the Holy spirit with us.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Oh, this just so stunningly lovely. And just so simple. And really, you know, as we kind of come to the end of our first discussion here, but kind of synthesizing, what you both are saying that the Lord, he purifies our gifts, so they don't become idols. Right? So that people don't become idols or situations don't become idols. And so often, as you were saying, Heather, that we just fight against that. We fight against the very things the Lord's like, "I'm trying to help you, like help me help you, you know?" And we're like, no, Lord, it has to be something different. Or we think if only I had a different story I'd be Holy. And if only this hadn't happened to me, I'd be Holy now. And I'm sure I've said this a million times before, but I'm very much convinced that on the day we leave this earth and we leave chronological time and we enter into Kairos into the present fullest moment with the Lord. And we look at him and I think all of us are going to look at him and say, Oh, right, right. Yeah. Yeah. It had to happen just that way. It couldn't have happened any other way. It had to happen like that. And I just, I think, well, I just smile, like, yeah gotcha. Yeah. So, yeah, but anyway, I'm excited y'all this is beautiful. This is beautiful and fun. And I just can't wait to hear from our listeners how it blesses them. And I know we've talked about a lot today and so we just want to encourage you just to really sit with the Lord and just to ask what's stirring in your heart. What are some places that the Lord wants to speak to you? Maybe in the area of, of surrender or a gift and a gift and wound or intensity or where that is for you or even what it like, what it looks like to have a cloister in your heart?

What does that look like? What does Jesus, what beautiful room is he preparing in your heart, where he's already waiting to meet you? Because he's already there. So this is a great transformation, a bit of a metamorphosis, right? Pouring out of this Lenten season. So ladies, any last things before we jump into our one things for the week

Michelle Benzinger: No for our listeners, we wanted to make this just really practical and hands-on, but simple where it's not like a lot of times during lent and you're like, Oh, I'm going to do this, this and this and this. I think one of the biggest things is to be present to the Lord in the present moment. You know, to really enter into that inner cloister. I think for us, one of the beautiful ways and tools that the church has given us is an examen, is where you look upon your day and say, okay. Like, it's just a review for you to ponder and pray through your day. Where did I feel the Lord close? Where did I feel the Lord, not so close? Where did I fail to love? But it shows you almost the movements of your heart. And I think that's what it is. And I think more and more as I grow in the spiritual life, the majority of spiritual life is paying attention to the Lord's presence and the movements of your heart and others. And so we will post the link in our show notes about, there's a beautiful examen, Carmelite examen that the Carmelite sisters out in LA have on their website, but it is beautiful. And you could actually, they let you print it out as a PDF that you can use just to be a tool for you, you know, to really examine your day and see the posture of your heart. And just to be present to the paradise that is literally around you, you know, with the people that you love or in your own heart. So we will give that to you.

Heather Khym: That's awesome.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Yeah. Yes. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, ladies, so we talk about our one things for the week. Ms. Heather, would you like to share your one thing with our listeners?

Heather Khym: Yeah. My one thing is just a little gift for those of you that might be blessed by this. I have a Lenten playlist on Spotify. The link is going to be in our show notes. So you can go on our website, abidingtogetherpodcast.com, just click on this episode and you'll find all of our one things. This is for every episode we do. Um, but there's going to be a link for a Lenten playlist in there. So if you just need some music to accompany your time in the desert. I just chose these songs. They spoke to me of those themes and I hope it blesses you. So, Michelle?

Sister Miriam James Heidland: I hope one of those songs is I went through the desert on a horse with no name, is that one of them?

Heather Khym: Dang. I forgot about that one.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Oh no.

Michelle Benzinger: Sister. Why don't you sing it for us right now, please, please? Come on girl. Yeah. Give her a beat Heather. Give her a beat.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: I couldn't resist, I couldn't resist.

Michelle Benzinger: That's awesome.

Heather Khym: We need Fr. Josh back.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: He would totally do it.

Michelle Benzinger: He totally would sing it for you.

Sister Miriam James Heidland: What about you Michelle?

Michelle Benzinger: Mine is a book. I don't think I've named it on before. I've had this book for a little while, but this is like the third time I've gone through it. Yeah. But it is, uh, it's almost like a coffee table book, but it's a practical book too, called restoration house, and it's creating a space that gives life and connection to all who enter. And it is amazing author. I love her. It is Kennesha Buycks. And she really says, how can you make of inviting spaces in your home? And how the whole process of restoring her house restored her soul and her heart in the Lord. It is a great book. And just as I'm taking this time and like really living into my word of the year, you know, Lorien and creating a space and sanctuary. I've been going through this book and I just know, like, there's something about when you get your hands busy, it also does something to restore your heart as I'm restoring and making space in my own home. Just that practical part, it is a prayer. Like we said, it makes me very aware of the present moment and makes me very aware of the Lord in the space, in my house. And so where I'm trying to, creating space in my house and, um, even homemaking is I want it to be an art and not just a chore, like, let's be honest. There'll be times where it's a chore. Like, I mean the laundry, it is plentiful and full at my house, but you know, I'm really trying to, what does it look to make a home, an art form in its way shape or form. So I'll let you know. And sister, what is your one thing that is stunning?

Sister Miriam James Heidland: Uh, My one thing is a shout out to our dear friend, Monica, who she and her husband run Damascus, the Catholic youth camp out in outside of Columbus, Ohio. And I got to go just to visit we, uh, Dr. Bob and I put on a priest retreat there a day of reflection for priests, and it was hosted Damascus, hosted it. And Monica and her staff prepared the room for us. And I can't, I would love to go in the summertime, it's such a glorious Catholic youth camp. If you're in the Ohio area, I would highly recommend you joining one of their summer programs. I think they have winter programs too, but I just want to say how beautiful I'm just going to embarrass Monica, but we know how lovely Monica is. And she's just so lovely. You talk about the feminine genius at its finest and just her attentiveness to detail. And she's a mama with many kids and she's a mom of many staff members of the missionaries and all the people that come there and she was so lovely and just so gracious and just so caring. So I just. Could not go another day without giving a public shout out to her, just for her beauty and also, what her family does there and all the people that come to Damascus and receive. So I, it just, it was so edifying and it was just so blessed.

Heather Khym: That's awesome

Michelle Benzinger: She a great one, that Monica

Sister Miriam James Heidland: She is wonderful. Yeah, so, well, dear friends, we're happy to have you on the journey. As we mentioned, you can find the book this present paradise on, uh, Sophia Press, their website. You can find it on Amazon, but just come along with us or just listen, if you want, we would love to have you on the journey. And so here we go, diving into Lent, in a very little way, each of us in the cloister of our own hearts with the Lord. So until next week we will be abiding together. God bless you. Have a wonderful week.

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