

Daily Meditation 10-5-2026

Annie Dillard & St. Francis of Assisi: Dual Creation Mystics

Good morning.

In our video today, we're honoring St. Francis, whose feast day was Sunday, and also Annie Dillard. And in particular, I want to share with you her thoughts from her book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, which won the Pulitzer prize. She's a wonderful thinker, and lover of Creation.

She says "a meteorological journal of the mind" is what she's writing here. "I am no scientist," she says: "I am a wanderer with a background in theology, and a penchant for quirky facts." Theology and a penchant for quirky facts.

So to share with you some of her insights, other than the ones that I've cited in the essay. Here's one, she cites Thoreau.

Nature, said Thoreau in his journal, is mythical and mystical always, and spends Her whole genius on the least work. Nature is mythical and mystical always, and spends Her whole genius on the least work. Well, it is certainly an affirmation of mysticism, saying as Thoreau does, it is built into Nature itself. And now she comments after this one sentence by Thoreau:

The Creator, I would add, churns out the intricate texture of least works, that is, a world with a spendthrift genius and an extravagance of care. This is the point.

So she's often referring to the Creator in this book, and she has an angle on the Creator that is very different than, say, from Michelangelo's picture of God with a long white beard giving directions to Adam. She's Nature-centered. She's Creation-centered. She's not anthropocentric. And she loves to examine what's going on in the depths of hemoglobin in our blood, or in the lives of flies and insects and so forth.

This is our life shield. These are our lighted seasons, and then we die. You die, you die. First you go wet, and then you go dry. In the meantime, in between time, we can see. The scales are fallen from our eyes. The cataracts are cut away, and we can work at making sense of the color patches we see in an effort to discover where we so incontrovertibly are. It's common sense. When you move in, you try to learn the neighborhood.

And so she talks about the neighborhoods that she has lived in, and that many of us are living in.

In these Appalachians, we have found a coal bed with 120 seams, meaning, 120 forests that just happen to fall into water, heaped like corpses in a drawer. I think about the valley. It occurs to me more and more that everything I have seen is wholly gratuitous. The giant water bug's predations, the frog's croak, the tree with their lights in it, are not in any real sense necessary per se, to the world or to its Creator, nor am I. The Creation is the first place. Being itself is the only necessity in which I would die, and I shall.

The point about that being, as I know it here and see it, is that as I think about it, it accumulates in my mind as an extravagance of minutiae, an extravagance of minutiae. The little things that keep things going. It's our atoms and the molecules and our cells and all the little things going on there that keeps it going. Interceding is the subject, the intricacy of the created world. Intricacy means that there's a hinted fringe to the something that exists over against nothing, a fringe that rises or spreads, burgeoning in detail. Your evolution: You've only begun to make trees. You're a God. Are you tired? Finished? There are 228 separate and distinct muscles in the head of an ordinary caterpillar.

This is the intricacy that she's talking about.

One-fifth of all the heart's pumped blood goes to the kidneys. There are a million nephrons in each human kidney. I've got 2 million glomeruli, 2 million Henley's loops, and I made them all myself without the least effort. They're undoubtedly my finest work. What an elaboration! What an extravagance!

So she's looking at the microcosm and the macrocosm. And she's continually in awe about what's going on in our bodies. So much of our bodies, we have no decision making to make. Our bodies work themselves, and all this is about honoring Intricacy.

Grace is not a study of often sketch that is supremely, meticulously created, created abundantly, extravagantly, and in fine. Freedom is the world's water and weather, the world's nourishment freely given with soil and sap, and the Creator loves pizzazz. What I aim to do is not so much learn the names of the shreds of Creation that flourish in this reality, but to keep myself open to their meanings, which is to try to impress myself at all times with the fullest possible force of their very reality.

So she writes so well, and she's in a constant state of wonder and amazement and gratitude. She's truly immersed in Via Positiva of Creation.

The whole Creation is one lunatic fringe. If Creation had been left up to me, I'm sure I wouldn't have had the imagination or courage to do more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a snowball, and let it go at that. No claims of any and all revelations could be so far-fetched as a single giraffe. No claims of any and all revelations could be so far-fetched as in single giraffe.

The question for agnosticism is, Who turned on the lights? The question from faith is, Whatever for?

Intricacy, she says, is that which is giving from the beginning, the birthright. And an intricacy is a hardness of complexity that ensures against the failure of all life. This is our heritage, the piebald landscape of time. We walk around. We see a shred of the infinite possible combinations of an infinite variety of forms. The wonder is, given the errant nature of freedom, and the burgeoning of texture in time, the wonder is that all the forms are not monsters, that there is beauty in all, grace gratuitous, pennies found like mockingbirds' free fall.

Beauty itself is a fruit of the Creator's exuberance, that grew such a tangle. Their testaments, their grotesque and horrors bloomed from that same free growth, that intricate scramble and twine up and down conditions of Time.

This then is the extravagant landscape of the world, given with pizzazz, given in good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over.

So clearly, she's gifted when it comes to language in her poetic prose, bringing us into the experience of Creation, the wonder of it, the gratuitousness of it, the intricacy of it. And this really is at the heart of recognizing that Creation is not just a word that covers everything; it is a process that's going on continuously. That's what evolution means, and here we are, a species that is able to marvel at it, and to talk about it, to sing about it, to give praise for it, to thank it on the one hand. And on the other, we are a species that is capable of destroying it, and calling climate change a hoax, and putting all of our effort into war-making, including war against Mother Earth herself, instead of stepping back, and saying, "Isn't it marvelous that we're here?" That we have these capacities. We have this science and technology, whereby we are extending our senses way back to the beginning of Time. Surely we are responsible, a species that is responsible, to praise this amazing Creation that Annie Dillard spent so much time delighting in, and giving us this language for.

Thank you. Of course, Saint Francis did the same. Thank you. We'll see you next week.