

THE ORDER OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

THE OBLATE RULE  
AND COMMENTARY

FOR ASPIRANTS  
TO OBLATE VOWS  
IN THE  
ORDER OF JULIAN  
OF NORWICH





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*This pamphlet comprises the first section of the Manual for the Oblates of the Order of Julian of Norwich, which is presented when a person enters Probation as an Oblate of the Order. The probationary period lasts around 18 months.*

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE OBLATE MANUAL

The Order of Julian of Norwich is a contemplative monastic order of monks and nuns in the Episcopal Church. Following the most venerable practices of contemplative Christian monasticism, we aim to renew the spiritual life of the Church. Through liturgical prayer, contemplation, and intercession, through teaching, publishing, retreats, and spiritual direction, and by living an authentically contemplative life, the monks and nuns of the Order hope to leaven the Church and incline it more to the Kingdom of God. Living in the Order's two monastic houses, the monks and nuns take the traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, obedience and prayer 'in the spirit of Blessed Mother Julian.'

Out of this core commitment and following Julian's inspiration, the Order supports a community of affiliates who seek to live into the same contemplative depth and unceasing prayer of the monks and nuns — not in monasteries, but in the world. These affiliates, both Associates and Oblates of the Order, live according to the same vows as the monks and nuns — poverty, chastity, obedience, and prayer — moderated only in degree to meet the needs of those called by God to a life in 'the world.'

The Oblates are an essential and intimate part of the Julian Family. An Oblate is not merely a friend of the monastics, or someone interested in Blessed Julian or contemplative prayer or Anglo-Catholic liturgy. Rather, Oblates are an integral and essential part of the mission of the Order in the Church. The Order of Julian could not fulfill its God-given task without its Oblates! To begin with, the Oblates and the Members Regular are united in common prayer and contemplative silence before the Mystery of God and in the celebration of the Sacraments. The Oblates and the monks and nuns of the Order are also strengthened by a complementary union between their two different ways of life. While the Oblates give outward and active expression to the mostly hidden lives of devotion and self-gift of the monks and nuns, the monks and nuns hold a spiritual frequency of contemplative prayer and silence at the heart of the Oblates' active service. In the deep union forged by life-long commitment and contemplative and sacramental prayer, the Oblates and the Members Regular strive to live contemplative spirituality at its deepest possible level, and then to share the riches of this loving encounter with God in the Church and world. Bound

together by the Holy Spirit in Love, neither expression of the Julian vocation is complete or could realize its vocation without the other.

The monks and nuns of the Order sincerely hope that you, the Oblates, will experience the courage, power, and insight that their constant intercession seeks for you as you give expression to their mostly hidden lives. They also desire that the Oblates will turn to them to share their needs and hopes, their struggles and joys, to be offered up to God in prayer. Few things are more beautiful than the experience of Christian lives linked in complementary love and service. In this case this means the concerns of the Oblates flowing into the monasteries, and the energy of the monastic prayer and stillness flowing into the lives of the Oblates; the Oblates incarnating the monastic prayer in the world and the monks and nuns incarnating the Oblates' desire for God in their monastic withdrawal and regular prayer.

## **THE OBLATE RULE OF LIFE**

Pursuing the spiritual life according to a communal Rule of Life to which one is held accountable is one of the most ancient and essential means for long-term spiritual growth and deepening union with God. And, as mentioned above, the Rule followed by the monks and nuns in the Order's monastic houses and that followed by the Oblates living in the world differs only in degree, not in kind. The Oblate Rule in particular is meant to emphasize the Oblate's witness to the Church and world of the unity of the contemplative and active life, and that all our ministry emerges from an intentional, committed, ever-deepening relationship with God. God the Holy Trinity calls the Oblates into a life of deep contemplative union as well as outward mission, an inward ebb towards divine union in loving solitude and an outward flow into loving relationship and service.

The call to be an Oblate of the Order of Julian of Norwich as defined by this Rule is thus a serious and demanding call to a conversion of life in prayer, discipline, sacred study, and loving service. Whether your vocation to this distinct ministry in the Church came through a devotion to Blessed Julian of Norwich, or by contact with the Members Regular, or by the positive example of an Oblate living a holy life, or by a deep need for a Rule of Life held by a community — ultimately it is you, the individual Oblate, supported by the whole community of Members Regular, Oblates, and Associates, who is going to have to work through the sacrifices and joys of implementing this Rule in your own home and in the unique context of your own life.

Living a monastically-inspired life in the world is not easy. Some may tell us that we have chosen a Rule that is too difficult. When we have families to support, taxes to pay, clothing and cars to buy, adherence to the norm of the tithe can be costly. When we are surrounded by the temptations of the world, faithfulness in our marriage, life-long partnership, or celibate chastity can be a profound and a seemingly impossible offering. In a world in which individualism is the norm, discipline of the will faces very strong temptation. When there are a thousand calls on our time, it can be a monumental effort to set aside time for prayer.

The Rule of Life for an Oblate of The Order of Julian of Norwich is as follows:

1. **IN HOLY POVERTY** we offer to God the world of things and finding our identity in them.
  - The Julian Oblate accepts the Biblical tithing as the norm for giving towards the spread of God's kingdom, and is either tithing or taking intentional steps towards that goal.
  - As part of that tithing, the Julian Oblate gives at least three percent of his or her income for the support of the Sisters and Brothers in the Order.
  
2. **IN HOLY CHASTITY** we offer to God our bodies, our sexual energy and creativity, and all our desires and our hungers.
  - A Julian Oblate strives to live in a chaste manner in all their relationships, in their speaking and personal conduct.
  - A stable and committed, life-long, monogamous and non-abusive relationship is understood as the context for chaste sexual intimacy. It is expected that such relationships would be graced by public vows in the community of one's parish, in so far as this is possible. For heterosexual couples, life-long relationships are normally recognized as such by the Church's sacrament of marriage. For homosexual couples there may be the possibility of an ecclesial blessing of the relationship.
  - A vow of strict celibate chastity, taken before the Guardian of the Order, is possible for Oblates who have been professed for over one year. This vow will be renewed annually for three years before becoming permanent.
  
3. **IN HOLY OBEDIENCE** we offer to God our anxiety about ourselves, the presumption that we can do God's will without the help of others, and we seek in God the overall purpose and meaning of our lives.
  - The core of the Oblate's practice of obedience is obedience to the Oblate's Rule of life.

- The Oblate respects and is guided by the pastoral direction of the Guardian of the Order and the Warden of Oblates, and makes semiannual reports to the Warden on Julian Day and All Saints' Day. Missing three reports in a row without dispensation from the Warden is grounds for release from Oblate vows.
  - Probationers and Oblates are encouraged and expected to have a spiritual director in addition to the Formation Director or the Warden of Oblates.
  - The Julian Oblate observes special acts of discipline and self-denial on all weekdays in Lent and Holy Week, and all Fridays of the year except during the seasons of Christmas and Easter, or those that fall upon a Feast of Our Lord.
4. **IN HOLY PRAYER** we offer to God everything! Having a *vow* of prayer reminds us that love and such total offering of self is only realized in a lifetime of consistent, faithful endeavor.
- The Julian Oblate will receive Holy Communion at least weekly, and will be present at a celebration of the Holy Eucharist each Sunday and the Julian Holy Days of Obligation: All Saints' Day, Christmas, The Holy Name, Julian Day, Ascension Day, St. Mary the Virgin and Holy Cross Day.
  - The Oblate will recite the Offices of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer, and the Prayer for the Order, daily.
  - The Oblate will spend at least three hours each week in Still Prayer, and make an annual silent retreat (of three days, if possible).
  - The Oblate should make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, as appropriate.
  - The Oblate is expected to engage in a life-long meditation on Mother Julian's *Revelations of Divine Love*. This begins with the reading of the *Revelations* as an Oblate Probationer, and an annual refreshing of their knowledge and reading of Julian.

During Oblate Probation, lasting from 12 to 18 months, and including a visit of at least three days to Julian House Monastery, the Probationer will receive monthly pastoral direction from a senior Member of the Oblate community. A great part of this direction involves learning appropriate flexibility and prudent discretion in the practice of the Oblate Rule. Once professed as an Oblate, he or she will continue to receive help and direction as needed from the community of the Oblates, the Warden of Oblates, a spiritual director, and the Guardian of the Order.

Generally speaking, the amount of community support that an Oblate finds in her or his life in the Order is dependent on the level of energy the Oblate puts in to making these connections and sustaining relationships with other Oblates, Associates, and the Members Regular of the Order. It is a particular delight and deeply meaningful to the monks and nuns of the Order when Oblates come to visit Julian or Llewelyn House, and join the Members Regular in their monastic practices and daily prayers.

## THE OBLATE REPORT

During Oblate Probation, a report is to be sent to one's Formation Director once a month (due on the last day of the month). After Profession of Oblate Vows, a report is due to the Warden of Oblates twice a year, on May 8 and November 1. Please use the following outline to structure your reflections on each of the four vows. As the Warden's intent is to help you grow in your whole life as an Oblate, please feel free to share other things happening in your life that are affecting your experience of the Oblate Rule and calling.

### 1. HOLY POVERTY

- a. **How has the Vow of Holy Poverty enriched your spiritual life?**
- b. Have you accepted the tithes or taken positive steps to do so?
- c. Have you faithfully donated 3% of your income to the Order?
- d. How else have you implemented the Spirit of Poverty?

### 2. HOLY CHASTITY

- a. **How has the Vow of Holy Chastity enriched your spiritual life, especially in the quality of your relationship with other persons?**
- b. Have you been faithful in the context of your marriage, partnership, or celibate chastity?
- c. How else have you implemented the Spirit of Chastity in your relationships with friends and family, co-workers and acquaintances?

### 3. HOLY OBEDIENCE

- a. **Under the Vow of Holy Obedience, how has being obedient to the Oblate Rule strengthened and clarified your overall sense of responding to God and your vocation in the Church?**

*The Oblate Report*

- b. If Lent has fallen since your last report, have you observed Lenten self-denial? How?
- c. Have you observed Friday abstinence? How?
- d. Have you made use of a Spiritual Director?
- e. Have you made use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- f. How else have you implemented the Spirit of Obedience?

**4. HOLY PRAYER**

- a. **How has the Vow of Holy Prayer enriched your spiritual life?**
- b. Have you been at Eucharist and made Holy Communion on Sundays and Holy Days? Any problems?
- c. Have you recited the Daily Office and the Prayer for the Order? Problems? What has been the most difficult part of this? The most meaningful?
- d. Have you given three hours a week to Still Prayer? Are you following a certain method at this time?
- e. Have you made an annual silent retreat? How long?
- f. How else have you implemented the Spirit of Prayer?

**5. JULIAN'S WRITINGS**

- a. **How has the reading and study of Mother Julian's *Revelations* enriched your spiritual life?**
- b. What new insight or learning have you had from reading or studying Mother Julian's *Revelations* since your last report?
- c. Have you done other spiritual reading?

**6. GENERAL**

Please add any comments, celebrations, difficulties, etc.

# PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING

A COMMENTARY ON THE OBLATE RULE OF THE ORDER OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing,  
give thanks in all circumstances;  
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

## PART ONE: AFFILIATION WITH OJN

### INTRODUCTION

Prayer without ceasing, rejoicing and giving thanks in all circumstances: from the earliest days of Christianity, these admonitions from Saint Paul have inspired countless Christians in their journey towards holiness. In this briefest of passages, Saint Paul has revealed our heart's deepest longing and the goal of every Christian life. The Christian monastic and spiritual life can be understood as a response to this passage. Prayer without ceasing means becoming a person who is prayer in their very being, who has become utter response to God. 'Rejoicing always' implies a total surrender to God that leads to a vibrant, singing, intensified existence in the world. Giving thanks in all circumstances means celebrating Eucharist with everything that happens in life (*Eucharist* in Greek translates literally as 'thanksgiving'). As daughters and sons of Blessed Mother Julian, we recognize too that the whole of Julian's *Revelations* is meant to lead us into the joy that God has in us and into unceasing prayer and gratitude in the mystery of God's homely loving. The outward and physical happenings of life become the means of inward and spiritual communion with God. The present moment is the moment of our consummation in divine love.

For the Order of Julian of Norwich, its Associates, Oblates, and Members Regular, rejoicing always, prayer without ceasing, and giving thanks in all circumstances is the absolute heart of our life. It is the animating and inspiring center of our call to renew the spiritual life of the Church. As a specifically contemplative community, this is our dream, our passion, and our vision. This is the great hope that God has inspired in us and in rekindling this in ourselves we become a center of intensified spiritual life for the whole Church. Looking back at monastic history, we can see that every major monastic and spiritual reform in the Church has in fact had this vision of unceasing prayer and communion with God at its center: the

Desert Fathers and Mothers in Egypt and Syria, the 11<sup>th</sup> century hermits in continental Europe, the Cistercian reform of the Benedictine tradition, and the great Carmelite reform in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spain. God has created the Order of Julian as one more branch springing from this most ancient, ever-living, and vigorous root at the center of the Church's life.

### THREE WAYS OF LIFE IN ONE JULIAN VOCATION

Once we claim our communal vocation as that of total conversion of self into unceasing prayer, rejoicing, and thanksgiving, the fundamental equality of the three different ways of belonging in the Julian Family – Associates, Oblates, and Members Regular – becomes clear. If, for instance we were to say instead that the purpose of the Order was to perform contemplative and monastic liturgy, it would be clear that the monks and nuns, praying in Gregorian plainchant five times a day in chapel, would be the highest realization of this goal. The Oblates would be further out and the Associates probably even further. But because we say that the Order exists to renew the spiritual life of the Church by reclaiming the radical call to unceasing prayer and the best practices for reaching that goal, then things look much different. There is then no longer any 'higher' or 'lower' determined by the different Rules we keep, no closer or farther away from the center. In the monastery or as affiliates we are all committed to the same goal and the same fundamental spiritual practices; the only difference being what means we choose as the wisest and most prudent for each of us. It goes without saying that an Associate with a large family and working in the Lower East Side of Manhattan could very well be much further along in a realization of unceasing prayer than a Member Regular in the relatively peaceful seclusion of a Julian monastery, who could still be living out of anxious self-concern and a chaos of moods and desires! This clear-minded differentiation of essential spirit from outward forms of life is precisely what Jesus calls us to when he tells us to 'stop judging by appearances.'

Which Rule we choose to live under is thus not a matter of how close or devoted we are to God, or how much we are willing to give up, or how holy we might be – not in the least! It is not a matter of how high one can climb on the ladder of apparent godliness. There is, after all, no ladder to climb! It is instead a matter of carefully discerning which means, which Rule, is the most skillful one for the pursuit of the same end as everyone else in the Julian Family. Such discernment is done by prayerfully considering the call of unceasing communion with God in the context of the whole reality of

one's life. For a mother of three young children with a husband who is strongly opposed to religion, it might well be unwise, uncharitable, and imprudent to take up the Oblate life. On the other hand, a person who shows emotional and psychological fitness for monastic life, who is attracted to it, and who is free of any material encumbrance might well choose monastic life as her best and most prudent means to unceasing prayer. It is true that the Oblates are given a scapular to wear and are allowed in monastic enclosure while the Associates are not. This is not, however, an expression of the Oblates being closer in to the monks and nuns who are even closer to God! It is a recognition and expression of the more specifically *monastic* character of the Rule which the Oblates have chosen to live by.

Finally, it is always helpful to remember that John Cassian, the Father of western monasticism and the greatest ancient exponent of *unceasing prayer* as the contemplative realization of the Kingdom of God, was of the opinion that it is the weak monks, and not the strong, who need the support of more frequent communal worship! That this insight was completely reversed in the development of western monasticism and spirituality, such that strong spiritual persons were assumed to be those most frequently in church, praying the official liturgies of the Church and wearing the most distinctive clothing is most unfortunate and does not square easily with Jesus' invitation for all people to find communion with God. In OJN, we are consciously reclaiming the more ancient, more radical, less institutional perspective – a perspective that comes directly from the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Resurrected Presence to all the Faithful. We are making alive again the brilliant summons that God sends to everyone to live in His Presence, by His Spirit, and with His love. We are, moreover, recovering the spiritual disciplines and practices that allow us to respond to God's summons with an ever-increasing love. The most basic and important practice as we seek to respond to God is that of following a Spiritual Rule of Life.

#### WHY FOLLOW A RULE OF LIFE?

From the very earliest days of Christianity, following a Rule of Life has been understood as essential to spiritual maturation. Whether we are Members Regular, Oblates, or Associates, the basic reasons for keeping a Rule of Life are the same. The Rule provides a necessary, supporting structure that will carry us through the long process of spiritual conversion.

The practices embedded in OJN's Rules also form us spiritually with wisdom gathered from centuries of Christian spiritual experience and reflection. Finally, the Rule unites us to a community of prayer, practice, and conversation in which our own deepest reality is mirrored back to us in the commitment of others.

### 1.) The Rule as Supporting Structure

In the first flush of our spiritual conversion, we may think that simply wanting to be a person united with God in prayer is enough to realize it. But we soon learn that this is not the case. The spiritual healing and transformation that allow us to become persons of continual response to God take years and years to happen. The spiritual life has valleys and peaks, agonies and great joys, times of fruition and times of barrenness and trial. Often the spiritual life entails a painful exposure of past wounds for the sake of their healing. Once we set our sights on prayer without ceasing and all that it entails, we are thus committing ourselves to a life-long journey that will necessarily involve times of great dryness, confusion, darkness, anxiety, and real pain. Having a Rule of Life to establish the basic tempo of our spiritual practice, and to which we are held accountable by a spiritual director and a community, is of inestimable help in making this journey. By a commitment to a Rule we are saved from abandoning the spiritual life precisely at the point when a regular spiritual practice is most essential, when serious self-gift and heroic faith in God are asked for. A Rule establishes a regular spiritual practice that keeps us vulnerable to grace and carries us when we cannot carry ourselves.

### 2.) The Rule as Bearing the Wisdom of the Christian Spiritual Tradition

The Order of Julian developed its Rules of life from the most basic and foundational wisdom of the Christian spiritual tradition, and embedded this wisdom in the vows and promises that we take. In Holy Chastity we recognize that our journey towards transformation in prayer will be impossible if we are lost in a chaos of moods and desires, if we use others for our own good or pleasure, or if our sexual lives are not integrated with our desire to belong totally to God. In Holy Poverty we recognize that becoming

transparent to God will be impossible if we regard this-worldly possibilities, experiences, security, and possessions as being our way to the fullness of life. In Holy Obedience to our Rule we recognize that we can never mature in the spiritual life if we make our own attractions, interests, moods, or thoughts the bedrock of our response to God. We need something more solid and steady and time-tested than ourselves to rely on. In Holy Prayer we recognize that without a daily practice of opening our hearts and minds consciously to God, we will not be giving God enough room to effect a transformation of our lives. In short, our Rules present us with solid spiritual direction that shows us how to be the material, relational, sexual, financial, emotional, and intellectual creatures we are in a way that opens all of this God. The vows and promises of our Rules are the way we realize our baptismal vows, and journey towards unceasing prayer.

### 3.) The Rule as Uniting us to a Community of Prayer, Practice, and Spiritual Friendship

By making our commitment to our Rules we become part of an outward and visible spiritual family, the Order of Julian of Norwich. The Order provides support, challenge, accountability, and the great strength of spiritual friendship as we seek to respond to God.

Community is in fact essential to the Christian Life, inseparable from the message of the Gospel and a relationship with Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As we advance in our baptismal vows and intentional spiritual practice, and as we undergo contemplative conversion that leads to unceasing prayer, having a community to guide, support, and reflect back to us our own spiritual desire becomes more and more critical. In having our own deepest reality mirrored back to us, we become stronger and clearer in ourselves. We are able also to become more diversified and unique in our spiritual gifts and calling because of our relationships.

As we are freed from self-concern we discover moreover a call to go beyond reaping the gifts that community gives to us. We are impelled in love to help support the community as a place in which

others, often quite different from ourselves, can flourish in the Kingdom of God.

The Order of Julian of Norwich is thus a community of persons united by the core commitment to renew the spiritual life of the Church by the retrieval of the most venerable aims and practices of Christian contemplative spirituality. Being an Oblate or Associate of OJN does not, however, replace normal commitment to parish and diocesan life. Rather, belonging to OJN means being strengthened and enabled to enter into parish life as someone sent by God to reveal the Kingdom and the Love of God in that place. As we become stronger persons in the Spirit because of our grounding in OJN, we are more able to bring God's presence to all our communities, our families, our workplaces. Such bringing of God's presence to others is not primarily a matter of talking about God or contemplation, spirituality or Julian. It is rather a spiritual authority that flows inexorably from the transformed quality of our lives as we join others in common tasks and relationships.

Although the Order is not organized into geographical 'chapters,' many opportunities are provided for the face-to-face encounters that nourish friendships and build a sense of communal belonging. Every affiliate is strongly encouraged to make a retreat at a Julian monastic house to meet the Members Regular and to experience first hand the intensity of spiritual commitment held by the monks and nuns. Once a year the Order also sponsors *JulianFest* as an annual family reunion of the Affiliates and Members Regular and scholarships have been made available to help meet the costs of traveling to and attending this event for a number of our affiliates. And although there are vast differences in the regional density of affiliates, for those in many regions there is the possibility of attending *Regional Affiliate Retreats* as well as less formal *Affiliate Days* when local groupings of affiliates meet to pray and talk about their life in the Order. While the *Julian Gatherings* sponsored by the Order are not limited to affiliates, these monthly gatherings for Contemplative Prayer and reflection are often a way for affiliates to connect with each other.

For those more isolated by region, there is the possibility of staying connected with the Order through our mailings, our website and

the on-line affiliate group, through correspondence with other affiliates, and through the making of annual reports to the Warden.

For some affiliates, the experience of tangible community has very high priority. For others, the intangible community of prayer and commitment is vital enough to be sustaining and challenging. The affiliates and the monks and nuns who have been a part of the Order of Julian the longest tend to experience this intangible communion more and more strongly. They know with a joyful certainty that they are upheld in prayer, connected in a web of contemplation and spiritual aspiration that includes the living and the dead, the sinners and the saints. Belonging to God in OJN has become something so deep in themselves it is part of their very breath.

## **PART TWO: A COMMENTARY ON THE OBLATE VOWS**

As noted above, the vows provide the basic framework for living a life open to God in joy and stable enough to mature in the grace of unceasing prayer. They are a life commitment and as such their practice will grow and change as one proceeds through the various stages of life. At the beginning, keeping the material obligation of the vows may be the central preoccupation of one's spiritual life. After some time, however, they become a kind of liberating framework, inside of which one is released to live in the fullness of life and to die with a surrendered heart, deeply in love with God. The Rule's specific obligations are like an eagle's wing-bones that allow us to circle high in the currents of the Spirit. What follows here are short reflections on each of the vows to help the Oblates understand the joyful and flexible spirit behind their Rule of life and thus for the discerning and wise application of it in the unique circumstances of their lives.

### **HOLY POVERTY: OUR WEALTH IS IN GOD**

The Oblate's practice of Holy Poverty begins with the intention of practicing the Biblical norm of tithing 10% of their personal income for the work of God's Kingdom in the world, inside and outside of the institutional Church. 3% of their income, or just under a third of this tithe, is to be given to the support of the Order.

The Order of Julian of Norwich depends directly, month to month, on the pledges of its Associates and Oblates, these pledges making up around two-thirds of our annual income. Without the financial support of the affiliates, the Members Regular could not live their monastic vocations and the Order could not support the activities and publications that make for a thriving affiliate community. The pledge of 3% of your income to the life and work of the Order is thus directly and immediately meaningful, as it supports OJN's ongoing mission to renew the spiritual life of the Church. On behalf of the monastic brothers and sisters of the Order, all our affiliates, and the Order's friends, and everyone who benefits, known and unknown, from our prayer, our retreats and guest-ministry, I, as Guardian, offer you the most heartfelt thanks.

Practicing the Biblical tithe is also an inward spiritual discipline that transforms one's relationship to money and possessions. In our culture money is power. Having money means having more opportunities to grow as a person – through travel, education, cultural events, and hobbies. It provides a measure of security and gives one a voice of authority in the secular arena. Yet as Christians and especially as people committed to prayer we are aware that the fullness of life comes in a relationship of loving surrender and cooperative union with our Lord. We are aware too that all the travel, all the entertainments, all the education and cultural enrichment and all the relationships which can be found in the world will never be enough to sate our longing for God. As Blessed Julian says so clearly, nothing less than God in Godself can bring our hearts to rest. In holy poverty we lay claim to our longing for God as the absolute heart of who we are. The desire for God is moved to the center of our lives, and we know that the only thing that will ever satisfy us is a state of being transfused with God. In such a state, the whole of our life and all our possessions and possibilities are ordered by and given to God's service.

From the perspective of this spiritual desire, practicing the tithe makes complete sense, as it brings our assets and earnings — and the enriching worldly possibilities they represent — into alignment with our baptismal desire to be utterly at God's disposal. Financial reality is brought underneath and is ordered by our spiritual desire. It is our greatest joy to discover in God a freedom, a peace, and a sense of wholeness that for years we sought to no avail in worldly goods. Moreover, the discipline of the tithe will reveal to us clearly when our heart wanders into an obsession with material things

or when we have become blind with the delusion that material goods will make us happy.

The Gospel example of the ‘Widow’s Mite’ must occupy a central place in the Oblate title and pledge to the community. What matters is not the amount relative to what other people might be giving, but how the giving manifests and effects a deeper belonging to God and dependence on God for one’s deepest fulfillment.

There are times in most everyone’s life when a strict keeping of the Biblical tithe becomes impossible; for example, when unforeseen health care arises or when unemployment makes one’s pledge impossible. This is what the Oblates have Wardens for! It is at times like these that, contacting the Warden and explaining the situation allow the Warden and the Oblate to discern what is the godly and prudent solution. It is assumed that one will make careful steps to get back to a place where tithing again becomes possible.

It is important also to understand that the Oblate’s tithe is a tithe on their own personal income, not the total income of a partnership or marriage. Thus a husband who earns ten thousand dollars a year is asked to tithe one thousand dollars of that income (with 300 dollars coming to OJN), regardless if his wife earns one or one hundred thousand dollars each year. This condition is very important in situations where the spouse or partner does not support the Oblate’s spiritual practice.

From time to time the Order will likely make a special appeal for funds. In the Order of Julian we try to keep these to a minimum and will usually reflecting a long process of discernment leading up to a decision to make a capital improvement to a monastery. While such appeals will extend to the affiliate community and often are most generously responded to by the affiliates, the Oblate who is faithfully offering his pledge and the rest of his tithe to God need not be distressed if he or she in good conscience cannot respond to the appeal.

Finally, as a part of the vow of poverty, many Oblates have included the Order in their estate planning. This can be a way of providing the Order with the resources it needs to continue its mission in the Church. Information on this is available from the Guardian of the Order.

## HOLY CHASTITY: OUR DESIRES ARE OPEN TO GOD

Chastity is the opening and maturation of sexual energy and identity in a way that empowers us to belong completely to God and to offer loving service to others. In recognizing the deep interconnection between spiritual and sexual energy, we are aware of the potential in sexual intimacy for personal fruition and Christian maturation as well as the possibility for real spiritual harm, personal diminishment, and a violation of one's baptismal commitment to the dignity of all persons. Spiritually committed and mature Christians thus recognize the need for deep awareness, humility, and care in sexual expression and experience.

For these reasons, a stable and committed, life-long and non-abusive relationship is understood as the context for chaste sexual intimacy. For heterosexual couples, life-long relationships are normally recognized as such by the Church's sacrament of marriage. For homosexual couples there may be the possibility of an ecclesial blessing of their relationship, public or private.

If an affiliate is entering a relationship tending towards sexual intimacy and for which the ordinary solemnization of matrimony or the public recognition and blessing of a life-commitment are not possible or advisable, the Oblate Wardens are readily available for counsel and advice.

The Wardens also have materials on hand to help an affiliate develop what is traditionally called 'an informed conscience' in regard to sexual expression, morality, and spiritual development. Having an informed conscience means being able to make a decision in matters of sexual intimacy and expression in the light of one's whole relationship to God and the revelation of God's loving desire for us.

One of the greatest losses incurred in the current debate over sexuality in the Church is the reduction of chastity to the most externalized matters of who may be in a relationship with whom, determined by physical gender. In the Order of Julian, we seek a deeper and broader practice of chastity, one that questions and purifies all of our relationships — and even questions how we relate to non-personal Creation. Chastity in its most basic sense is concerned with the ordering of desire, relationships, and the use and care of created reality to the service and love and glorification of God.

The fact that one has confined sexual intimacy within the boundaries of a marriage or life-long committed relationship does not insure chastity, any more than a technically correct observation of celibacy necessarily makes for a chaste heart. The care, humility and reverence with which one relates to one's partner or spouse must also be looked into. There is also the question of how one relates to other people in general. Exploitive, abusive, derisive, or manipulative behaviors are unchaste. Speech that abuses or derides others or that mocks sexuality is unchaste. Any use of other persons as a mere means for personal, emotional, or social gratification is unchaste. A chaste person will also instinctively honor her body and the bodies of others. He will guard and reverence his emotional life. Modesty is a beautiful outward expression of the chaste spirit — like the vestment over the ordained priest. Spiritual chastity is the restraint of one's desire for special consolations and experiences, so that one is not led by 'spiritual promiscuity' into a never-ending search for spiritual novelties and ideas.

Finally, both poverty and chastity come together to question human exploitation and greed in the abuse of our planetary ecosystem and the oppression of the developing world for the sake of our own pleasure, security, or comfort. In the decades to come, the question of how we relate to the planetary ecosystem and to economic oppression will move more and more to the center of our practice of poverty and chastity.

#### HOLY OBEDIENCE: GOD'S DESIRE IS MEDIATED TO US THROUGH OTHERS

Given that the idea of religious obedience has been used for centuries to bind less powerful persons in harmful, abusive, or overly-dependent and co-dependent relationships, we have to be very careful in how we understand obedience in the Oblate rule. Our primary obedience, expected of all Christians, is directly to God. Christ models and invites every one of us into a life of responsive, joyful, unconditioned obedience to God the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a life of obedience is comprised of listening awareness of God and a surrender of oneself to cooperate fully in God's transforming action in the world.

When we become part of a Christian community what we are saying is that we believe that the incomprehensible mystery of God's relationship with us is going to be mediated in part through the earthly, outward and physical forms found in this community. Thus in the Church we take on, for instance, the Nicene Creed, the celebration of the Mass, community

deliberations about morality, and traditions of prayer and spirituality, as our way into an obedient surrender and offering of self to the Divine Mystery. The narratives, rituals, teachings, and symbols of the community mediate God's desire for us and allow us to express our desire to be wholly God's.

In professing vows as an Oblate in the Order of Julian of Norwich, our obedience is brought down to an even finer focus. What the Oblate is saying in the profession of her vows is that she believes herself called by God to the limitations and expectations of this way of life as being now the center of her response to God. The first and most basic obedience that the Oblate offers is thus obedience to the Oblate Rule of Life. In his profession, the Oblate says that he believes that the Oblate Rule and the communal ethos of OJN mediates God's loving desire for him. Thus in taking on the Rule and practicing obedience in regard to it, the Oblate is practicing obedience to God.

In a mature Christian faith, such acceptance of a communal tradition as *partly* mediating God's presence, desire, and direction, does not preclude the need for critical questioning. One of the glories of the Anglican tradition is its combination of spiritual, artistic, theological, liturgical, and literary richness with an ability to question and to probe how this very richness is the means of knowing and loving God. In the Anglican Church we are invited to hold in creative tension the critical, questioning spirit with the need for open participation in the communal traditions. Our critical questioning and playful participation are both expressions of obedience in responding to God.

The spirit of obedience, like chastity, extends beyond this first and primary meaning to color the whole of one's experience of other persons. The spirit of obedience holds open the possibility that other persons, in their *otherness, their difference from oneself*, may mediate something of God's desire for oneself. In practice this means being able to listen attentively and openly to other persons and to discern in prayer if their advice, suggestions, or desires are in harmony with one's baptismal vows and vocation in the Church. The spirit of obedience is open, attentive, discreet, prudent, and discerning. It neither abandons adult responsibility by being overly-dependent and submissive to others, nor does it proudly dismiss others as having no possible bearing on one's life. The spirit of obedience in this sense is thus the very spirit that makes adult listening and mutual relationship and communal discernment possible. At its root is an awareness of our own

limitations, an awareness too of how God infinitely transcends all our presumptions, and of how we can yet, by listening and experiment, move together to a greater expression of God's Kingdom. The spirit of obedience transforms all of one's relationships, in one's family, to one's superiors and subordinates at work, and with one's friends, into a spiritual practice of attentiveness and humility.

As part of their vow of obedience, the Oblate is advised to have a spiritual director or friend. This is an expression of the humble awareness that we need other people to help us live fully into God's desire for our life. The Oblate is thirdly asked to be guided by the pastoral direction of the Guardian and the Warden to make semi-annual reports. The semi-annual reports are ways of remaining accountable to the whole Julian family and the vows one professed, as well as of receiving support and direction from the Warden of Oblates. The Guardian almost never directs an individual Oblate in any particular decision or action. But the vow expects that the Oblate will receive respectfully the spiritual vision and commitment of the Order as this is articulated by the Guardian and refreshed to meet the needs of the day.

#### HOLY PRAYER: OUR UNCEASING RESPONSE TO GOD

Prayer is direct relationship with God. *The Book of Common Prayer* helpfully defines prayer as "responding to God, by thought and by deeds, with or without words." All Christians are thus called to lives of prayer — adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation, intercession, and petition. It is the very first promise we make in our baptismal vows. And as noted at the very beginning of this commentary, the spiritual aim of unceasing prayer has been at the center of monastic and Christian life from the apostolic age.

The Order of Julian of Norwich is unique among religious Orders in having an explicit vow of prayer. All religious pray; some even spend more time in chapel or in meditation than the monks and nuns of the Order of Julian. What does it mean then for us to take the assumed life of prayer and to make it into a explicit vow?

Having a vow of prayer serves to strengthen and emphasize the Order of Julian's charism as a contemplative Order. In our day and age prayer can often become an afterthought to a life of Christian ministry; God and

relationship with God becomes subordinate to our religious programs and plans. Because this is the overwhelming tendency in culture, having a vow of prayer is a wise and powerful way of keeping our life of intentional relationship with God at the center. Our vow of prayer reminds us that our lives are to be lived as response to God rather than as a series of religious initiatives to which we hope God will respond!

Concretely, the journey into unceasing prayer, unceasing response to God can take many forms. The Oblate's journey is in general a way in which creative involvement in the secular world, often in the context of a family and a career, is united with a regular practice of prayer that has three distinct dimensions: the praying of the Divine Office, sacramental worship, and contemplative prayer. As the Rule specifies, these material obligations have a daily and weekly regularity to them, with special observances for Holy Days. More flexibility is allowed for contemplative prayer. In becoming an Oblate, one affirms that this life of regular prayer united with active involvement in the Church and world is one's pathway towards total transformation in the love of God.

The Daily Office, recited every morning and evening, is the basic framework for the Oblate's life of prayer, growth in knowledge and appreciation of Scripture, and penetration into the mystery of Christ. The obligation of sacramental worship reminds the Oblate that her vocation is not for herself alone, but is a gift to the whole Body of Christ united around the altar.

The weekly practice of three hours of contemplative prayer flows from the recognition that, in our culture, if we do not build some silence into our lives, we will be unlikely to hear the Word of God at all. Sometimes vocal prayer flows naturally into deep contemplative rest and silence. But often it does not. The disciplined practice of contemplative prayer in the Oblate's life – whether one feels loving or not, peaceful or not – is a way of maintaining a certain minimal amount of silence in one's life. It is also a powerful spiritual action of turning away from one's thoughts, experiences, anxieties and desires towards God. In this way the minimal practice of contemplative prayer enacts the core insight at the heart of all Christian prayer: that God is more than we are, that God can carry our burdens, that God is making all things well, that we are one with God even if we don't recognize it. It is helpful to remember that Blessed Julian said that our

prayer was most pleasing to God when it seems to us most barren and dry – not when we are filled with consolations!

There will be times in the Oblate life when the vow of prayer begins to slip, just as there will be times when one is tempted to pray too much. What matters is to return without fuss and without guilt to the practice as best as one can, doing neither more nor less than the Rule asks. In the case of a habitual or increasing inability to keep the vow, it is best to bring this matter up with a spiritual director or the Warden of Oblates. Sometimes all we need is the outside perspective of a friend to re-order a couple things in our lives such that we can return to regular prayer. Sometimes there is due cause for a temporary dispensation from the obligations of part of the vow. Oblates are encouraged to periodically refresh their experience of contemplative prayer by reading one of the many books available on the topic.

Reading Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* was added to the Oblate Rule in recent years. This is not meant to be a burden, nor is it meant to turn all of us into Julian scholars. Rather, it is meant to recollect the Oblate community around Julian in a recognition that the Order of which the Oblates are a part is called by God to be an extension of Julian's *Revelations* into our day. In our journey into unceasing prayer, supported by a community and appropriately challenged by the Rule, purified and strengthened by spiritual practice, we become uniquely able to bring Julian's revelation of God's peace and joy into our families, our Church, our world. A relatively easy and effective way of fulfilling this obligation to review Julian periodically is to read a short passage each day from *Enfolded in Love: Daily Readings with Julian of Norwich*, by Robert Llewelyn.

## CONCLUSION

In the Gospels, Jesus often shares with his disciples his sense of the overwhelming desire of God that all people would come to God in love. Blessed Mother Julian calls this the love-longing and thirst of God for us, which she sees most graphically in the dried-up body of Christ on the Cross. That longing of God for us is like a net that is being drawn invisibly through our world, continuously night and day, pulling us all up into a loving relationship with our God. Surrendering finally our wrath and fears and resentments, we are free to release ourselves to God's homely, simple, amazing joy in Jesus. We are transformed. We are made whole. We learn

what it means to satisfy the heart of God in God's love for us, and we learn what it means to live our whole lives in unceasing response to this love. The whole reality of the Order of Julian, Members Regular, Oblates and Associates, is ordered to this end.

## PRAYER FOR THE ORDER OF JULIAN OF NORWICH

*“I” pronouns may be changed to “we” pronouns.*

O Lord Jesus Christ, Guide and sanctify our brothers and sisters whom you have called to follow you in Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, and Prayer in the spirit of Blessed Mother Julian. Protect them from danger and want, and grant that by their prayer and service they may enrich your Church and by their life and worship they may glorify your Name: for you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, One God, Now and Forever. Amen .

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### THE SYMBOLISM OF THE JULIAN CROSS

No one knows for certain which of the several St. Julians gave his name to the church where Mother Julian had her cell. Some think it was St. Julian the Hospitaller because he was the patron saint of ferrymen, and there was a ferry landing not far from St. Julian's Church. However, we are told by Abbot Butler (who for a time was chaplain to the Duke of Norwich) that the church was named for St. Julian of Le Mans in France because Henry II of England had been born in Le Mans and had been baptized there in the Cathedral de St. Julien. When he came to the throne in England, several English churches were named for the French cathedral in his honor.

According to the clergy at the cathedral in Le Mans, nothing is known for certain about St. Julien, except that he was the apostle and first bishop of Le Mans. An ancient legend tells that during a persecution in Palestine, St. Mary Magdalene loaded a boat with Christians and set sail, landing eventually in Southern France. Among her passengers was St. Julien, who traveled to what is now Le Mans and established the Church there.

The Julian Cross was his coat of arms. Again, the exact meaning is unknown. In heraldic terms, it is described as a “saltire cross crosslets azure in a field of argent” (translated “an 'x' shaped cross with little crosses on the ends, in blue, against a silver field”). Historically, it has been understood to be a “missionary cross” in that the four little crosslets that make up the larger cross were aiming at the four points of the compass. In our use, however, we consider each of the small crosslets to represent one of our four vows Poverty, Chastity, Obedience and Prayer which joined together equally form the unity of the cross.





THE ORDER OF JULIAN OF NORWICH