The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

Volume IV • December 2012 • No. 4

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In this Issue

From the Guardian 1
Mthr Hilary OJN

Listening 2
Janet Irvine ObJN

The Pacific Julian 6
Michael Ida ObJN

St Thomas the ... 9
Mthr Hilary OJN

Book Notes: *Flourishing Life; On a Quest for Christ* 12

Community Notes 13

On the cover: The Creche and Star in choir during Christmastide

The Order of Julian of Norwich

is an Order of monks and nuns following a contemplative charism in the Episcopal Church. Our aim is to renew the spiritual life of the Church in three ways: first by a renewal of the contemplative monastic tradition, second by supporting a vibrant community of affiliates who are a bridge between the monastery and parishes, and third by occasional works of mission in publishing, retreat leading, spiritual direction, and hospitality. For more information on the Order, please see our website at **www.orderofjulian.org,** through which we publish articles on the spiritual life and liturgical resources.

Julian's Window, also found on our website, is published quarterly. For permission to re-publish, please write to the Order:

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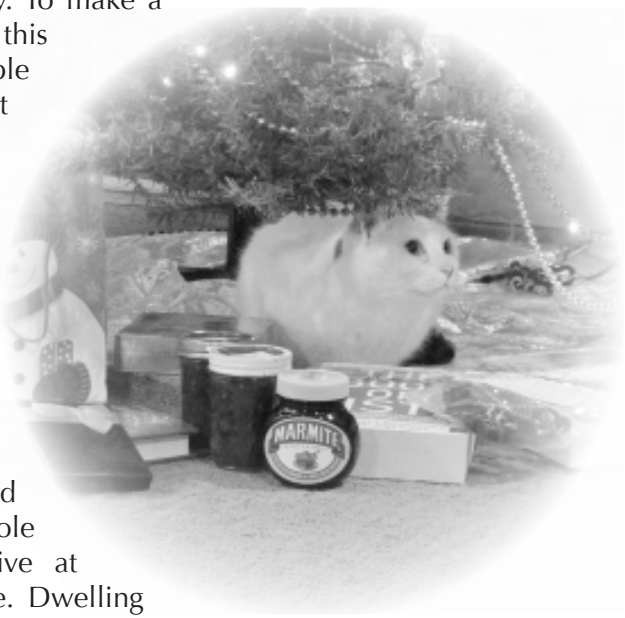
A Note From the Guardian

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." Gal. 4:4,5

Made even more familiar to us on so many holiday greeting cards, this word from St. Paul tells of the in-breaking of Jesus, the Good News of God for humanity. To make a timely borrowing, this word with remarkable brevity serves just as well to speak of the essence of contemplative monastic life in the Church, for the Church and for the World. Grounded in the ordinary human situation, loving the world for God's sake, men and women give the whole of themselves to live at God's good pleasure. Dwelling in the heart of the Church, monks and nuns make themselves available at all times to listen for God's heartbeat of love and desire for all that he has made, and like Jesus, to be that desire embodied. The Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Julian of Norwich are grateful for you, our families, our affiliates, and our friends, who make it possible for us to respond fully to this, God's invitation to us.



We wish you a blessed Christmastide, and God's own peace through the coming year.

M. Hilary, OJN

Guardian of the Order

Listening

Janet Irvine ObJN

Somewhere, some time, I watched the opening scenes of a stark black and white movie about a young and beautiful woman being bricked into her anchorhold, isolated and shut into a cell, never to see the world again. As she lay weeping, shrouded under a heavy funeral pall, the camera zoomed in on the hands of the bricklayers who dramatically placed a wall around her, brick by solid brick, emphasizing her imprisonment to a miserable life of prayer. Of course, there was the even more dramatic close-up shot of the key turning ominously into a lock and the sound of much weeping.

I turned the movie off then. Whoever wrote or produced this didn't know much about anchorites or anchoresses. Or Julian. And they forgot the part about the windows.

When Julian was first introduced to me, I assumed she was a hermit. I knew she spent hours poring over and pondering what she had been shown in a series of revelations and painstakingly wrote what God had revealed to her. Her *Revelations* introduced me to thinking about Jesus in many new ways. But as far as Julian as a person was concerned, I thought of her as silent, isolated and remote, much like many of the saints were described when I was a little girl.

As I grew in my knowledge of Julian, however, I learned of her little cell, the *Rule of the Anchoress*, and the unique but not uncommon way in which she served her surrounding community. My assumption regarding her silence, isolation and remoteness was partially correct, but not quite.

While Julian vowed as an anchoress to remain in her small, simple cell, she was still very connected to what was beyond its confines.

Her cell contained three windows, three windows to her world. One faced the altar of the church to which the cell was attached; another her maidservant's quarters, and another faced outward, which allowed her to dispense alms or wisdom to those who came by.

Her cell was not so much to isolate, but rather to enable her to practice the art of listening; listening to God, listening to herself, and listening to others. This was not a passive kind of listening, but a listening alive with wonder and imagination. She listened with her heart and soul, and if we focus on her *Revelations*, it is possible to perceive her as one who listened with gravity, humility and insight. Her writings took on greater depth and meaning as she mulled over them over the course of her lifetime. Her writings intimate that as a person, she was not prone to come quickly to conclusions or interpretations. She "chewed" on what was revealed to her, both in what she saw, and what she heard.

Julian's window to the church allowed her to "hear" Mass daily and receive the sacraments. This window allowed her to hear the Words of the Eucharist that enabled her more deeply to steep herself in the Word God through scripture and sacrament. Anticipation, awe and reverence for her time participating with the Church through this window strengthened and confirmed what she was discovering about Christ in the silence of her heart.

I know little of what might have transpired in that second window between Julian and her maidservant. Her needs were simple and fixed by the Rule. But, by the simple fact that she was human, she

would have needs; and her Rule allowed and encouraged her to communicate these to those who cared for her. As she listened within, what might she discern to be necessary to meet her practical and physical needs? A bit of an apple? More ink? A tonic, an extra blanket? The *Rule of the Anchoress*, while strict and spare, encouraged her to take care of physical needs and to listen to herself in order to stay healthy and hale. Strict asceticism and physical acts of mortification were not a part of the wise anchorite rule. And so, Julian's window provided a place to have her own small needs met. In a world where the physical was deemed sinful and worldly, Julian listened within to the very real and human side of herself.

And what about that third window? What would have transpired at that windowsill?

Human nature being what it is, then as it is now, people probably came to talk! They came surely to seek advice, to discern God's direction, to ask spiritual questions. Knowing Julian, a woman of warmth and cheer, it probably would not be uncommon for some to come to her window and simply chat. And all would need a listening ear. Here, her gift of listening would come full circle: listening to her Lord, listening to herself, and listening to others.

As in the other areas of her life, Julian would have spent more time listening than talking. Forgetting herself and putting aside her own eagerness to share her thoughts, she probably sat puzzling and pondering over the words from those pained folk who came to see her. For her, silence and listening became intertwined, not just in interpreting her showings but in all her conversations with those who came by. Her active listening to God and self poured out as a ministry of healing, which manifested itself in listening; listening intensely,

empathically and optimistically to those who suffered and shared in the bleak time in which she lived.

J. Janda, in the short play *Julian*, imaginatively describes her as saying, "The sorrowing, the sick, the unwanted, both young and old, rich and poor, all came to my window. No one listens, they tell me, and so I listen…I sit in silence, listening, letting them grieve. All I did was listen…."

In our world today, listening is a lost art, and a precious commodity. Interruptions, one-upping, interjecting and overriding another's thought are common in conversations in the give and take of human interactions. Pushing the kleenex box too quickly, offering glib advice or rushing into "help" are all too frequent responses. In our society great value is placed on noise and making things better — fast!

Finding a listener, one who is genuinely interested and willing to wait and wonder and puzzle and ponder, is a precious gift. Moving one's own self aside, allowing space to give room for another's thoughts and words, and even allowing space for silence requires interior stillness and quiet. Listening enables God to speak through our silence and mutual wonderings. Listening to another is the place where healing begins. As Julian shared her way of listening to Christ, I can only imagine she listened to her fellow human beings in much the same way. And so they came to her, surely for a word of wisdom or kindness, but to have another simply listen in the spirit that Jesus had so kindly and courteously bestowed upon her.

Once, I stumbled across a sprawling Greek Orthodox monastery that sat in the middle of a cornfield in northern Illinois. I was able to wander around the grounds a bit and entered their public chapel, curiously named "The Church of the Holy Listening." I thought this

might be an apt description of Julian's windows, where much "Holy Listening" took place.

Julian was obviously a "Holy Listener." She listened to what Our Lord showed her, puzzling and pondering over His Word expressed to her in a myriad of ways. In the silence of her cell, she learned to listen to the voice of God, listening to sacrament, to scripture and to self. The result was a book that survived through the centuries, and spoke to the hearts of those who came to her.

As contemplatives, we may spend time obliviously practicing Holy Listening as others bob and weave through our lives. Our own silence overflows into the life of the other. Julian teaches that silence with Christ is the fuel that enables us to become vessels of His healing. It can happen when we are least aware, least intentional! Julian is our model as we look through our own windows to the world. May our stillness bring healing as God brings the sorrowing, the sad, the distraught — and even the merry — to our own window sills.

The Pacific Julian

Michael Ida ObJN

The saints belong to all the Church. But does an anchorite who lived on an island in the North Atlantic hundreds of years ago have anything that particularly resonates with cultures on the opposite side of the globe?

Julian's relevance to the people of the Asia-Pacific region is complex and not immediately apparent, notwithstanding her single reference to God's presence even at the bottom of the ocean — which clearly resonates with island cultures and those whose lives are spent near the ocean.

> At one time my understanding was taken down into the seabed, and there I saw hills and green dales, seeming as if it were overgrown with moss, with seaweed and gravel… Then I understood this: that even if a man or woman were there under the broad water, if he could have a vision of God there (since God is with a man constantly) he would be safe in body and soul and receive no harm and, even more, he would have more solace and more comfort than all this world can tell.

The question of what a medieval Englishwoman of the fourteenth century could possibly have to say to people of a time and place beyond her comprehension gives rise to an answer that speaks to the universality of the Christian faith, and that the temporal and spatial bonds we share as brothers and sisters in Christ supersede our differences which, when all is said and done, are superficial and skin-deep.

What has the potential to resonate most deeply with those whose cultural touchstones and points of reference lie in the Pacific Rim are the elements of Julian's showings that speak to those aspects of Asian and Pacific island cultures that many of a more Western mindset often find so baffling and impenetrable — the concepts of shame, face, humility, and filial piety.

Though often unspoken and implicit, the values of face and humility, and the prospect of shame (both individual and family/community) are powerful forces that lie just beneath the surface of every thought and action. Thus, the idea that we will have to answer in some way

for our sins and that they will in some way eventually be revealed in the light of day is a particularly troubling one. Julian's reassurance, however, that God's infinite mercy and grace will turn all sin into honor is correspondingly comforting.

> Also God showed that sin shall not be shame, but honor to man — for just as for every sin there is a corresponding pain in reality, just so, for every sin, to the same soul is given a blessing by love.…The recompense that we shall receive shall not be trivial, but it shall be exalted, glorious, and full of honor. And in this way shall all shame be transformed to honor and more joy.

In a similar way, the virtue of humility — being mindful of our faults and errors and not thinking ourselves higher than we are — is championed by Julian:

> And in this awareness it is necessary that we remain, for it is a loving humility of a sinful soul (wrought by the mercy and grace of the Holy Spirit) when we will willingly and gladly accept the scourging and chastening that our Lord Himself wishes to give us.

Finally, the virtue of filial piety — that we owe our earthly parents a unique and, in a sense, unpayable debt — can be especially strong in cultures of the Asia-Pacific region and finds a unique expression Julian's showings.

> And furthermore, I saw that the Second Person, who is our Mother, in essence that same dearworthy Person has become our Mother in flesh, because we are twofold in God's creation: that is to say, essential and fleshly. Our essence is the higher part, which we have in our Father, God Almighty; and the Second Person of the Trinity is our Mother in human nature in our essential creation. In Him we are grounded and rooted, and he is our Mother in mercy by taking on our fleshliness.

Imbuing the Trinity with concrete aspects of both earthly parents is a powerful symbol and metaphor for those whose earthly parents claim so much respect and honor, particularly when the Trinity is all-loving and all-merciful as one's earthly parents could only hope to be.

St Thomas the ...

Mthr Hilary OJN

Year to year, the ingredients for the feast of St Thomas seem to add up only to a single possible dish, the question of whether we would be doubters like Thomas, or be counted among those who believed. But the table the Church spreads for us today is wider than that. The readings prompt another, more fruitful question, namely, whether we are looking at our brother St Thomas (and ultimately ourselves) through the eyes of wrath, or through the eyes of Jesus.

The filters through which we see things are powerful; not only can they color our interpretation of event, speech and action, they can also determine it. The conventional habitual concentration on the negative — on what St Thomas could not seem to do — betrays a

filter over this scene of the kind of fearfulness that Julian calls wrath. Perhaps this episode conjures the specter of shame, or of being found wanting or being subject to paralyzing uncertainty. Whatever the cause, when this kind of fear couches too close to home, censure of others is an easy way to comfort.

Let us turn, then, to the possibility of a better outcome, shifting the concentration of this feast off of Thomas' debility and onto Jesus. What is Jesus doing here in this scene, and what is his response to Thomas?

Just for Thomas, entirely at the service of his need it would seem, Jesus appears again in the Upper Room, revealing himself to the disciples. He greets the ones gathered there with his peace, in this way setting the proper bounds of all our future discourse. "Peace be with you," he says. And then Jesus turns to Thomas and says simply, without reproach, 'Look and touch these wounds, do not doubt but believe.' Thomas' eyes are opened, not by shame and reproach but by burning recognition, to hope fulfilled beyond all expectation.

"Write the vision," says the prophet Habakkuk, "make it plain upon tablets so that a runner may read it." This is the large print of the Gospel, the vision of peace Jesus has made that requires no manner of opposition to ensure its effect. What we are offered on this day is not a thin dish consisting simply of the case for belief versus doubt. What is on offer is the chance to be freed by Jesus' word of peace from habitually seeing ourselves and others, starting with our brother St Thomas, through the eyes of wrath.

Doubt can, in fact, be a faithful response to the work of God in the world. Honest doubt such as Thomas had serves a critical function, guarding against a too-easy acceptance of what may turn out to be counterfeit grace. Thomas was in need of certainty because he knew how high the stakes were, how much was riding on whether or not what the others were saying was true. This we can safely infer because of what happens next. Thomas sees, understands, and exclaims in worshipping response, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas immediately gets the full implication of Jesus' resurrection, recognizing him for who he really is. This is not the response of a willful skeptic but of

a person who has been leaning into both loss and hope with every muscle strained.

What opens the eyes of St Thomas are the wounds of Jesus, God's wounds. In the economy of God who wastes nothing, even brokenness has a place. Neither Jesus' wounds nor ours are erased but transformed, even the wounds of our fearfulness. By means of his wounds Jesus grants Thomas what he needs, without censure, and in peace. This gracious act is the promise of Jesus granting what we ourselves will need, without censure, and in peace.

Book Notes: *Flourishing Life*

Flourishing Life: Now & in the Time to Come
Sandra M Levy-Achtemeier Cascade Books 2012
pp 130 ISBN-13: 978-1-61097-685-5

In her 2006 book, *Imagination and the Journey of Faith*, the author investigated at length the need for imagination to help us approach the Transcendent. She brought before the reader works of scholarship as well as of culture which can give both reason and sustenance for such a journey. *Flourishing Life* is a shorter book about self-perception, happiness and psychology in their Christian aspects. But that is to make the book seem small and dry — and it is most definitely not that. Not only is it about the necessary means for making one's life "flourish" (and calling to mind all the items of the nurturing imagination from the earlier book), it is also very much about "flourishing life" — that is, waving life in a joyful, triumphant way so as to call attention to it! Why bother? Because (citing Teilhard de Chardin's *The Divine Milieu* — an important work for flourishing!) "Creation itself is being drawn toward a final destination, equipped with embodied minds or souls to respond to God's impingement in our lives" (p. 12). We carefully need to tell ourselves the stories of our lives. So, in addition to her own story, the author tells us the stories of three of her friends which serve as links throughout the book. Having drawn our stories out of our lives, we then need to tell them "in conversation". "Our flourishing is always flourishing-in-community" (p. 112). Levy-Achtemeier draws on very interesting data from The Emerging Church movement, to call attention to its frequently more embodied responses to God's processes; but recognizes that any communities which "embrace orthodox and ancient beliefs and traditions without rigidly clinging to dogmatic claims to absolute knowledge can be welcoming places" (p. 116)

Also Recommended

On a Quest for Christ: Tracing the Footsteps of Your Spiritual Journey by Lisa Wulf. [Spiritual Formation House. pp 142. ISBN-978-1-938042-00-3]

A reviewer of *Flourishing Life* commented "very few books of this nature do well" before going on to give it high praise. How much more can the same words be said about *On a Quest for Christ,* with high praise especially. A great deal of thought and work has gone into these thirty short chapters, which put into practice the principles discussed by Levy-Achtemeier. Lisa Wulf's spiritual life story is briskly told and arresting; the guiding questions to prompt one to consider one's own story are sharp and this reader certainly felt like trying to answer them. This little book is definitely a wake-up call!

Community Notes

Despite the drought it proved a good year for certain vegetables, and aside from the cultivated beds, a fallow plot yielded a dense supply of volunteer squash and tomatoes, the latter of which are both going to sauce and becoming the annual delicacy known as 'fried green ones'. After a very dry summer the skies at last opened in October, making the mulching of leaves and the turning of the garden quite challenging, but nobody is complaining! Our fall harvest day was celebrated quietly in the rain.

We continue to receive inquirers to our life. This year, we also had the pleasure of receiving singing duo CAIM — our Oblate Heather Innes, and Jacynth Hamill — for a retreat in the midst of a North American tour. We will be quick to point out 'Jacynth's tulips' when the bulbs that she planted while here come up next spring.

In October local affiliate Susan Fiore represented the Order at the Milwaukee Diocesan Convention. Mthr Hilary attended the Fond du Lac Convention later in the month.

Our 'first snow' was a freak flurry that erupted on the last Sunday of October, which may or may not portend a real winter this year. Snow or not, there will be plenty of cold; moved forward a few weeks from its usual time, we will observe our annual silent retreat in the growing darkness of early Advent.

The winter that snows gives us as many opportunities to work outside as inside; the inside work remains regardless of weather, and this winter we hope to tackle some minor remodeling in the house, as well as continue to explore better solutions to acoustic problems in the chapel.

from the top: Sr Therese glimpsed at work in the attic; Mthr Hilary and the bounty of autumn; the refectory at Christmastide

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