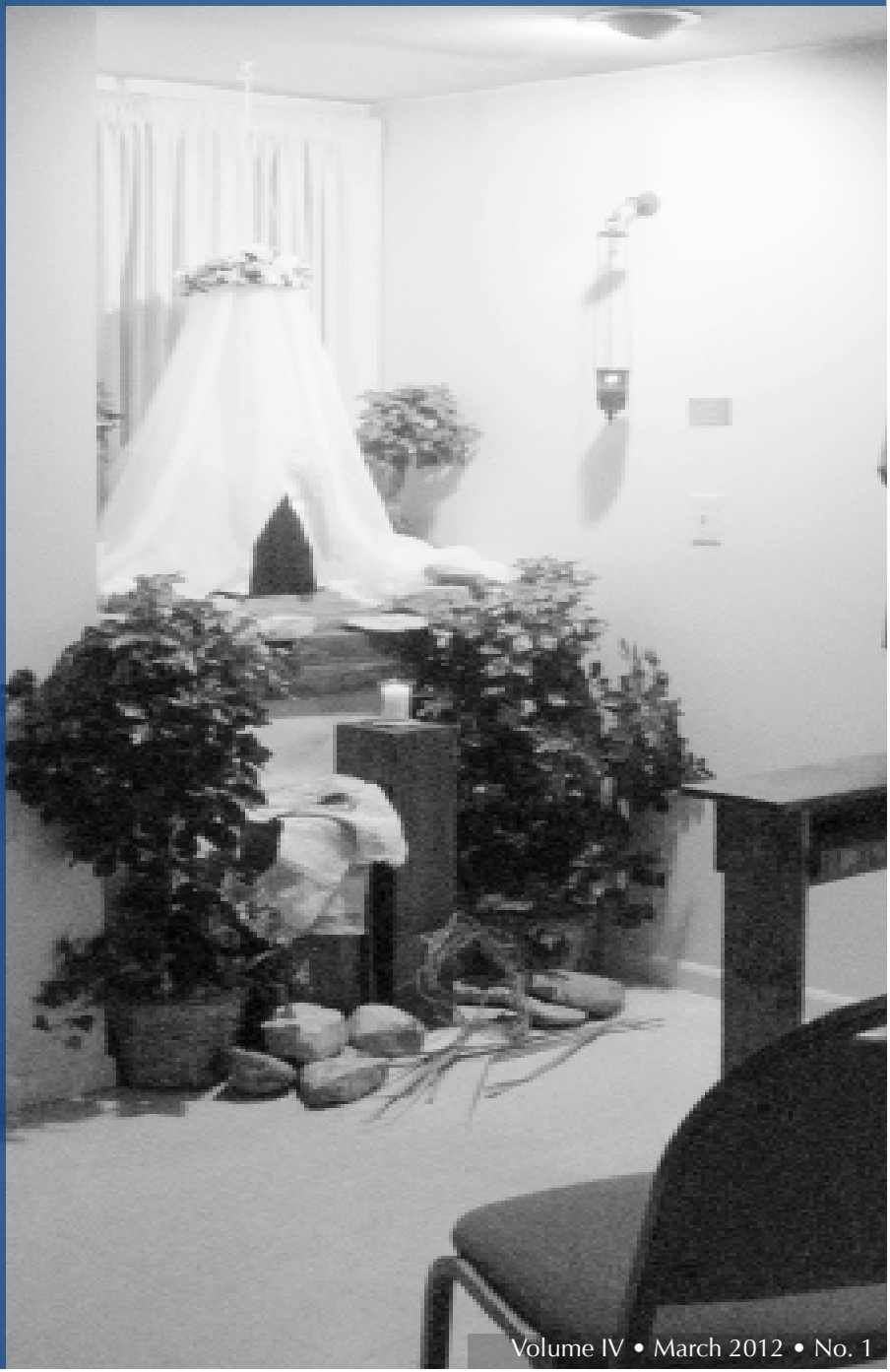
The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality



Volume IV • March 2012 • No. 1

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In this Issue

Counsel on Judgment 1
Fr John-Julian OJN

In Peace, with Love 3
Lides Cynric Rowan ObJN

Discretio 6
Sr Cornelia OJN

Authority 8
Sr Therese OJN

The Goodness of God 10
Br Barnabas OJN

Poem: Thank you for small beginnings 11
a member regular

Book Note 12

Community News 13

On the cover: The altar of repose, Good Friday

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, liturgical resources, and audio recordings.

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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Counsel on Judgment

Fr John-Julian OJN

We have an account of the very same Parable of the Vineyard in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 12:1-12 and Luke 20:9-19), but there is one very peculiar (and very significant) difference in the account from Matthew's Gospel (21:33-46): that is, after Jesus had told the chief priests and elders about the owner of the vineyard sending several groups of slaves and finally his son to collect his produce, and all of them being killed, he turns to the audience and asks, "Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" and his audience responds: "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at harvest time."

Hold it! Don't let this slip by you — Mark and Luke both have *Jesus* declaring the sentence that will be visited on the vineyard's tenants — but Matthew has Jesus *ask the audience* to make the judgment! He asks the *offenders* to judge their own offense. And they do so — without realizing what they are doing.

And perhaps that rings another bell for scripture lovers: remember Nathan speaking to King David, telling him the story about the rich man who stole the poor man's lamb — and then David saying, "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die…" and then those horrendous and appalling words from Nathan to David: "*You are the man!*"

When I try to think about what the Church has said about sin, judgment, and salvation over the last 1700 years, I find myself wallowing around in a thick mire of confusion, projection, and redaction — and I find myself being driven to scripture, reason, and my own spiritual experience to try to make sense of it all. There is little I know about it for certain — but I *do* know that what is commonly taught about sin, judgment, and salvation is wrong. And passages like this Gospel are a clue to me about that. Who judges the sinfulness of the chief priests and elders in this account: God? Jesus? The Church? Apostles? Bishops? Who carries out the process of judgment? None of these. The sinners themselves do.

And I am sure that is a hint about divine judgment as a whole. I think that what God does — whenever we are willing to give God the chance to do it — is merely very subtly give us the clarity of vision to see our own faults and flaws. And then, how we react to that new vision, that new perception of ourselves is the equivalent of "judgment" or "salvation". And the very powerful thread underlying that is the fact that, if we have made a commit-

ment, then the vision is already ours, and we experience the forgiveness of all sin — that is, we have the spiritual vision actually to see our own sin, and the moment we have seen it and regretted it, we experience universal forgiveness. We don't have to do anything else, because the forgiveness is already there — we are always, at every moment of our lives, awash in forgiveness, enwrapped in forgiveness, clothed in forgiveness. Forgiveness (like Christ himself) is not something we need to search for, or labor for, or strive toward, or go anywhere to get. We live within — inside — permanent and total forgiveness ever since Calvary. And if we *want* it, we automatically *have* it. That's all we need to do to validate our forgiveness — just recognize it and want it.

So, I find that mystically, my judgment, my forgiveness, and my salvation are all in my hands. By the grace of God (and sometimes that comes from scripture or some other reading, or in someone's words) I am given a view of my sinfulness, and when I see that, then my faith makes me repentant, and that activates the forgiveness that has always been there.

So, how does God "judge" me? God simply lets me see my own sins, and leaves it up to me.

As I was searching for materials for this sermon, I came upon a familiar verse of Scripture that seems to speak to this. In John's Gospel, 5th Chapter, 24th verse, Jesus is quoted as saying:

"Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has already passed from death to life."

In Peace, with Love

Lides Cynric Rowan ObJN

"To the soul this was a mighty wonder ... that our Lord God, as far as He is concerned, cannot forgive — because He cannot be angry — it would be impossible. For this was shown: that our life is all based on and rooted in love, and without love we cannot live. And therefore to the soul ... it is the most impossible thing that can be that God would be angry, for wrath and friendship are two opposites .... Thus I saw that God is our true peace and He is our sure keeper when we ourselves are unpeaceful, and He continually works to bring us into endless peace." [*The Revelations of Divine Love*, Chapter 49]

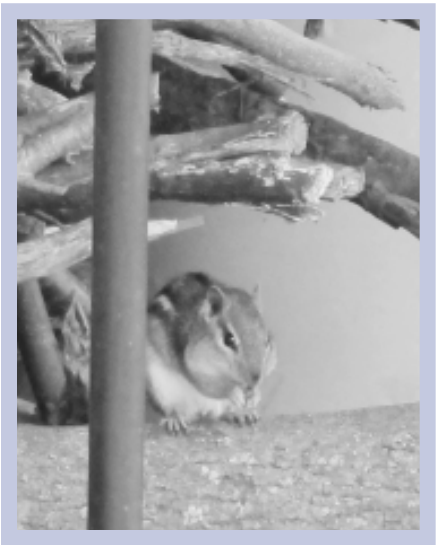
Here, amidst the tumult and noise of the domestic life, merely reading these words of Julian's quiets my mind, lowers my heartrate, slows my breathing. The quiet assurance of Abba's love in all circumstances does not suggest that we can do as we will and 'get away with it', so to say. Rather, that that incalculable Divine love gives us strength. It gives us the emotional and spiritual wherewithal to get up and try again, and again, no matter how many times — or how hard — we fall. Motherhood, as much as any other life task or role, requires a mindset of beginning again. Day by day we are given the opportunity to renew our mothering vows — sometimes, many times per day! We are called to love one another as Abba loves us; to love one another as we love ourselves. Yet it can seem, at times, more challenging to love those close to us — our children, for example, than those far distant — those to whom we donate money or food or clothing. How does Abba love us? Wholeheartedly, without wrath, with the infinite purity of His divine

love. That we are walking under a loving and peaceful God, as opposed to a vengeful and punishing one, is rain in a dry season.

I think of my children and how I love them — for oh! how I love them. I think on how my Abba loves me. I bask in the sure and certain knowledge of His love. His love washes over me without the faintest taint of anger or wrath. There is only love and unadulterated peace.

How then must it be for our children? Do we, their earthly parents, continually work to bring them into endless peace? Children are, of course, frequently fractious, discontented, frustrated — with their siblings, with the socks that wrinkle so uncomfortably inside the shoe; in the face of the refusal to be read "just one more" book or chapter, or the injunction to finish their vegetables before being allowed a promised ice cream. (Yes, I am that mother.) I am not suggesting that Julian was writing a child-rearing manual; nor am I under any delusions that I am Divine. We are not Divine, but *of* the Divine. Who and what we are is called to love one another as ourselves, the implication being (as I have always seen it) to love others as God loves us, at the very core of our existence, to the very best of our ability. And if that Divine love is wholly without rancor or wrath, well then. Well then, anger has no part in the love we carry for our children. Now there's a concept to ponder over tea!

I think of Jesus in the Temple, overturning the moneylenders' tables and driving them out with whips. Jesus was wholly human of course, as well as wholly Divine, and humans lose their tempers with startling frequency. My children have always delighted in this particular story, they say because it makes Jesus seem more accessible, familiar: more knowable than our Abba, who at times can seem so distant. Does anger (or wrath) in Julian's lexicon mean what it means in ours? Did it mean the same thing to her in her earthly life, as it did within her understanding of the Divine as was shown to her? Are these emotions merely trifling human concepts, when set beside the unknowable wonder and glory that



is God? I think not. I think not to both queries. For where there is anger, and hatred, and rancor, and wrath, there is a divide between ourselves and those whom we are called to love. We cannot love in the manner in which we are called to by our Abba when our veins course with wrath.

"Day by day I will renew my vows," writes the psalmist and a certain tension held in the neck relaxes. God in His glorious wisdom created the great cycles of life and time, knowing just what we needed. With every good-morning kiss shared with my children in the spreading light of the rising sun I renew my vows. Vows pledged in secret from one heart to another when they were yet in the womb: "I will love you as I love my own self; as God loves me so will I love you." And with that love I give them strength. With that love I give them joy and wonder; I give them the emotional and spiritual wherewithal to face each day anew, assured of my unending love. My unbreakable love with which I hope and pray to draw them ever deeper and deeper into peace.

I saw that God is our true peace and He is our sure keeper when we ourselves are unpeaceful, and He continually works to bring us into endless peace.

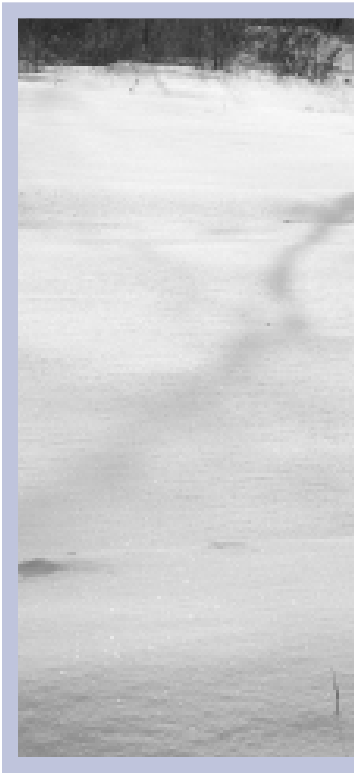
Blessed Julian of Norwich

Discretio

Sr Cornelia OJN

Monasticism was very much in the thick of new developments arising from the spread of the Christian Church, the transformation of the fervor of a small group of devotees into the formality of a state religion. It was certainly nice not to be persecuted, but the believers felt that something important had been lost in the resulting safety. As a consequence, many experiments with living the solitary life, or community life deep in the desert, or enclosed community life alongside the priestly life of a cathedral were undertaken. Various observations or rules to govern all these experiments were written down. The Rule of St Benedict is a crowning point in this widespread movement of the early church.

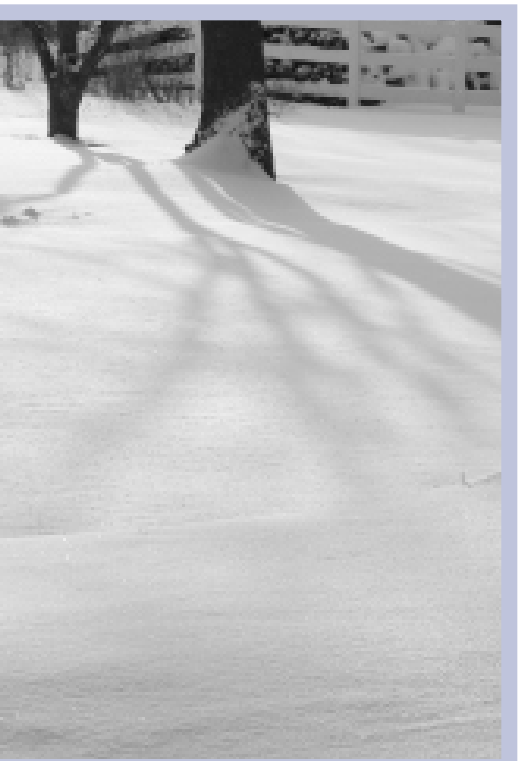
One of the terms used to describe and praise the Rule of St Benedict is 'discretion'. The Rule is praised for its discretion in contrast, say, to the earlier Rule of the Master, which tries to prescribe a solution (in the form of a rule) for every situation which might arise in a monastery. What is discretion?



St Paul uses the word to indicate discernment of spirits or discernment of good and evil: a gratuitous gift from God (and the one which King Solomon prayed to God for!), the supernatural virtue of prudence, and the skill gained by experience to judge whether a person is acting under natural, supernatural, or diabolical influences. 'Discretion' settled down to mean principally the ability to judge with moderation and prudence. In Cassian's *Conferences*, Abba Moses speaks of discretion at the end of the first Conference, and devotes the entire second Conference to the subject. Discretion is still a gift from God, but that gift is increased in power by careful judging of every person or situation, sifting one's thoughts principally by making them known

to one's Abbot or a spiritual elder. Unless advised by such an elder, one can err by being too lenient or too severe. What sounds as if it would be a highly praiseworthy exercise may be an excess of zeal which could have worse results than by being too casual. While a leader gains experience and wisdom as he grows older, a simple increase in years does not guarantee 'discretion' — the spiritual gift of the ability to judge with prudence. Reading the Sayings or the Lives of the Desert Fathers is an interesting exercise in seeing how a strict keeping of any rule can sometimes be a less good solution than allowing leniency: zeal must always be tempered by mercy.

St Benedict certainly had the experience to be a charitable rule keeper: first as a semi-solitary, then as the leader of a small group of associated communities and finally at a large monastery on Monte Cassino. In his Rule, the sections on the Abbot show particularly the tempered wisdom gained from having the spiritual and physical welfare of a large group of men under his care. The sick, children, the monks' insistence on having their allowance of wine, the criticisms offered by guests — these topics could be handled controversially or with grace and prudence, and St Benedict chooses grace and prudence. He admits that his Rule is a small one for beginners, but in fact his Rule accommodates all levels of experience by not pinning down too minutely his restrictions and privileges.



Although Julian is not thought to have been a Benedictine, her *Revelations of Divine Love* radiate grace and prudence, a skillful analysis of experience, a descrying of a simple, median way through difficulties, all gifts of love which have been humankind's from without beginning. Her own experience in dealing with her spiritual 'shewings' is written down to give ease to herself and to give edification to future readers.

For The Order of Julian of Norwich her book sets up a challenge (one among many, perhaps) which partic-

ularly interests me. Jesus is "our courteous Lord" to whom we must accord the reverence which his place demands. But He is also homely, even meeting the reader down to his or her lowest need. How do these two extremes get along together in a practical way? At what level must prudence step in and make an adjustment? Our Order has been constructed to be a large gathering of "family": our Associates, Oblates and Members Regular are on a continuum of commitments. As a family we are interested in each other's doings, struggles, mishaps and triumphs. In the light of the secular world's "tell it all" frame of mind, the Order's "familiness" might indicate that we should keep nothing back. But there is also the influence of "courtesy": a formal relationship in which love and honor are shown by each member of the Community to the other but a seemly reticence is maintained as well: there are in fact quite a lot of things that it would be unseemly to talk about. This is where discretion comes into play, sometimes coming down on the side of revelation, sometimes coming down on the side of reticence — and different members of the Community will not necessarily have the same standards for silence or disclosure. Yet perhaps the discretion required on this particular topic makes our monastery seem quite alive even though quite silent.

Discretion is the mother of virtues, thought St Bernard. It is a virtue in short supply in our modern age. How can it be best supplied?

Authority

Sr Therese OJN

And at once in their synagogue there was a man with an unclean spirit, and he shouted, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are: the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked it saying, 'Be quiet! Come out of him!' (*Mark 1.23-25)*

Jesus has this authority not because he is powerful, righteous, the correct one, but because he is the Beloved. He has trusted entirely that He is beloved of God and nothing in the world, no amount of talk or reputation, no degree of following or misunderstanding, will be able to divert him from that trust. Hence he can speak with the authority of one who is loved and who thus incarnates that same (trustworthy) love. What is not of that love will

recognize it only as threat and destruction. It is this trust in God's love that gives him the authority that so astounds those around him.

The demons recognize who Jesus is, and it strikes terror in them: there is ultimately no escaping the reach of this love that would reveal what they really are. What about the disciples of Jesus? Do they know who Jesus is? Do they secretly cling to small demons of false security, worldly esteem, religious ideas of sacrificial self-worth? Do they take their own value from having their efforts valued and appreciated?

They are given so many opportunities, in ways meted out to the measure of each, to recognize and welcome this cleansing love in all his secret comings — to accept their own mistakes, and also those of others, humbly and without condemnation; to trust in this love for their worth when tempted to take events as an affront to their own value.

Yet there will come a time when this cleansing love appears in their lives all at once, without warning and full of blessing, and will they then recognize him for who he is in gratitude? Or will they also cry out in resistance 'what do you want with us? Have you come to destroy us?'

The Goodness of God

Br Barnabas OJN

"But you", Jesus said to Peter, "who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Peter has just acknowledged, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus as the Messiah and also the Son of God. This second title is not found in Mark or Luke. (Jerusalem Bible footnote D)

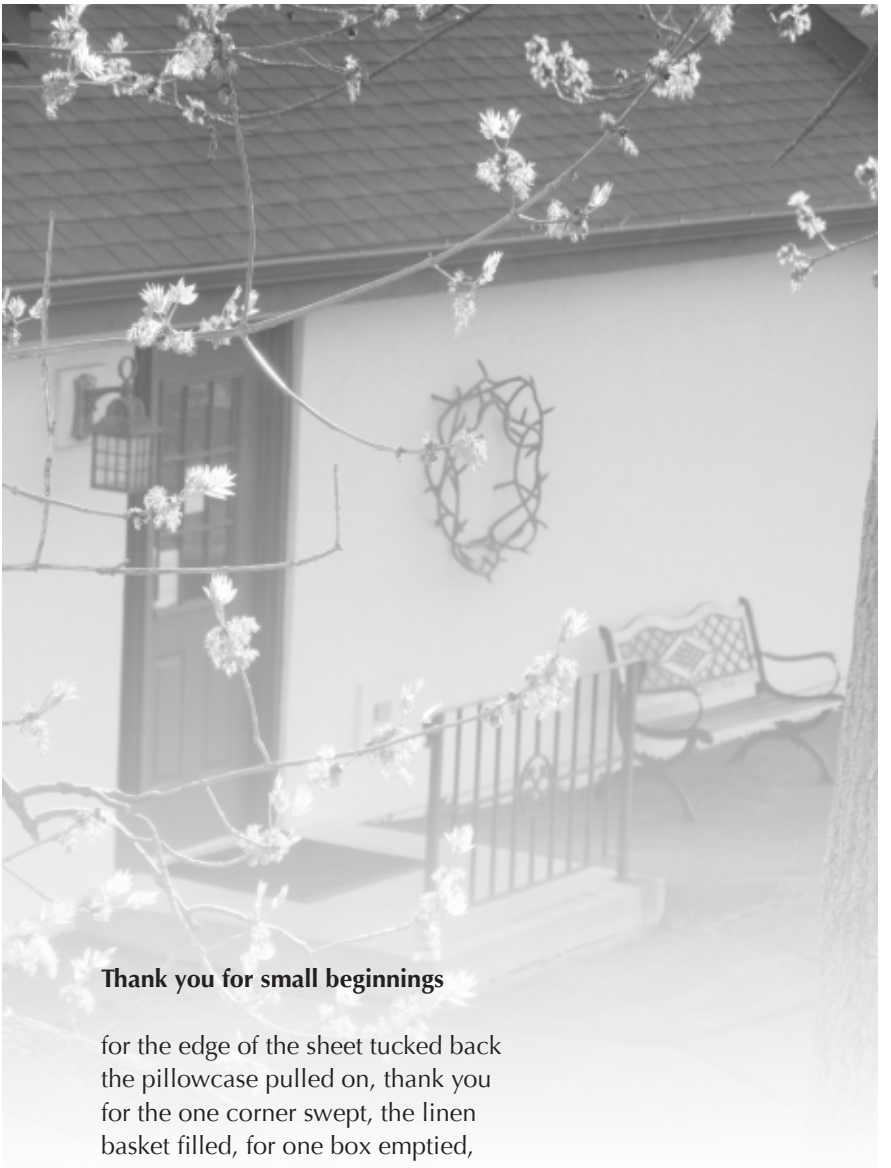
And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and on the third day be raised. Jesus has just elicited from his disciples the first explicit profession of faith in him as the Messiah. At this crucial moment he tells them for the first time of his coming passion (or suffering): he is not only the glorious Messiah, he is also the suffering servant. With in the next few days this teaching method will be pursued in a similar situation: the glorious Transfiguration will be followed by an injunction to silence and a prediction of the Passion. It is Jesus's way of bracing the disciples' faith for the approaching crisis of death and resurrection. (Jerusalem Bible footnote K)

And now Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." By blocking the Messiah's appointed way, Peter becomes an obstacle to Christ and becomes, though unwittingly, the tool of Satan. (Jerusalem Bible footnote L)

Are you like Peter? I visualize myself getting a piece of God's puzzle right (once in a while); then, unwittingly letting the puzzle fall to the floor and starting over again and again. Like you and me, many people do the same. "Going through the motions doesn't please You, a flawless performance is nothing to You." (Psalm 51:16, The Message).

God loves us no matter how we perform. Psalm 118 says," Thank God — he is so good. His love never quits!"



Thank you for small beginnings

for the edge of the sheet tucked back
the pillowcase pulled on, thank you
for the one corner swept, the linen
basket filled, for one box emptied,
one letter begun, for one spoon washed,
one verse of a poem written down,

for one shoe placed
neatly by another, the needle threaded,
the first page read, thank you, thank you,
thank you

a Julian monastic

Book Note: *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*

Julian of Norwich, Theologian
Denys Turner
Yale University Press 2011
ISBN: 9780300163919
pp 288

In 1981— when I became reacquainted with Julian of Norwich — I was both attracted and perplexed by the density of her writing and by what appeared to be inconclusive and unsystematic elements of her theology. The first commentary I read was Fr. Paul Molinari's 1958 book *Julian of Norwich: The Teaching of a Fourteenth Century English Mystic* that put my broadest theological concerns to rest, followed by Brant Pelphrey's 1982 publication *Love Was His Meaning: The Theology and Mysticism of Julian of Norwich*. But although here and there one came across articles, or Thomas Merton's encomium: calling Julian "…with Newman the greatest English theologian," or the truly commendable work of Grace Jantzen, it seemed the commixture of the theology with the mysticism often meant that the demands of systematic theology were not being met. Until now!

Denys Turner, Professor of Historical Theology at Yale Divinity School, has turned the trick in his new book *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. This work is the first attempt I know of to organize and systematize Julian's theology in orderly, responsible, and scholarly fashion — and is a triumph.

Turner heads directly into the "unfinished" nature of both Julian's book and her theological reflections, recognizing that it is not a closed-end system. Then, with bold and incisive perception, he raises the core significance of that single Middle English word of Julian's — *behovely* and its correspondence with the Latin *conveniens*. He strides directly into the free will/predestination bramble bush and takes it on: "God's causing my free actions ex nihilo is therefore precisely what makes them free."

The book matches Julian to the work of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Saint Bernard, and even Dante, drawing from each comparison new insights into her own theological understandings. But her theological system is not merely an adoptee — it is born of Julian and remains her own — with every bit as much respect due as is due the work of the great and more famous theologians. In fact, Turner claims that Julian's very refusal to be tight and neat, always obvious, and invariable are the real strengths of her unique, and creditable, insights.

It must finally be said that the book is not an "easy read" or a "pop classic". Turner is a serious and severe theologian. There are those who will find the book too complex, too complicated or too difficult, but for anyone willing to do the necessary theological work, the book can only be called a treasure. — *Fr John-Julian OJN*

Community News

Our waiting in Advent was intensified by waiting for snow that would not come. Winter began very quietly and mildly in Wisconsin. A new snow fence has done very little work.

The waiting, and the work on the December newsletter, was assisted by a guest on sabbatical who happily took the brunt of the labelling of the printed newsletters. The production of the labels themselves, which is provided by one of our affiliates, was complicated by the implementation of USPS's new electronic address system, and during the process a few names were missed from our maililng list. We apologize for any inconvenience, and are working out the bugs.

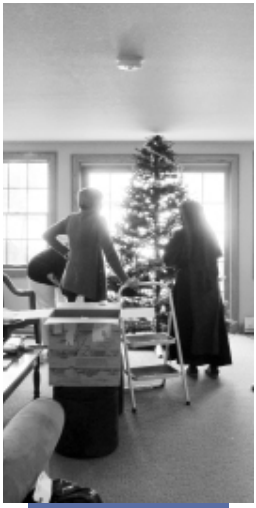
Thanks to the amazingly generous gifts of our affiliates and friends, we were able to pay off all of our construction loan in advance of the due date. In celebration of that, and out of necessity, we gave ourselves the Christmas gift of a new kitchen stovetop since the former one had become unsafe. Elsewhere in the house, rooms are being painted and prepared for the arrival of two postulants later in the year.

After the payoff of the loan, one other exciting event of this winter was a small flood in the new basement that was traced to the disconnected sump-pump pipe just outside the house. We repaired the pipe in record time, and the flood receded and has not returned.

Our junior Sr Ignatia has decided not to proceed to life vows. We have been blessed by her time with us and wish her well in her new occupation.

Annual General Chapter came quietly in the midst of our quiet winter. Many of our affiliates have been increasingly giving retreats on our behalf, though Mthr Hilary will be conducting the regional affiliates' retreat in New England in mid-Lent.

Last but not least, the community wishes to send belated thanks to the person who gifted us with homemade cranberry chutney at Christmas. The box bearing the giver's name and the gift inside were accidentally separated during the decoration of the house, and we have not known exactly whom to thank.



At right: guests helping trim the tree on 23 Deccember; 'A cold coming we had of it, just the very worst time of the year...the ways deep and the weather sharp, and the cat-doors...'; breakfast in the refectory

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