The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

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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.

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God Makes it Grow

Sr Cornelia OJN

Gardeners today are "high-tech planters" — they know the genetic details of the seeds they sow — all their physical needs as far as soil, light, moisture and so on; market gardeners have laboriously researched the preferences of the consumers who will eat the food that comes from the seeds; and they know all the practical paraphernalia required for getting their products to the consumers — we know so many, many facts. But we do not know how the miracle of this growth comes about. No matter how far back we can push our discoveries there is still the undiscoverable Divine Impulse: it is God who makes it grow.

In the same way, there is a great mystery about our soul, how our spiritual life grows (or doesn't seem to grow). But if we were able to be as knowledgeable about all our soul's details as we are of seeds, we would still be just as stymied. God has chosen us, and God loves us — most of the time we can acknowledge this intellectually — but how on earth does real growth get into our soul! Will our soul ever grow so great that the birds of the air will make their nests in and under its luxuriant safety? Sometimes I get an inkling of one part of the process, through the kindness of His Majesty (as St Teresa would say) and offer it to you: the process of Julian's "ghostly understanding" as it has appeared to me.

So. . . here I am, busy about the normal activities of the day when suddenly one snippet of the present moment's activity is brought to my attention: a moment while sweeping the kitchen floor; or climbing the stairs; or putting a book back on its shelf in the library. There's no obvious reason why that bit of activity should be especially interesting, but it turns out to be a seed which has fallen on good soil and is in process of sprouting. For it calls to mind some other activity from another time in my life, perhaps only tenuously similar to what I am doing now. But with a strange twinge of excitement, I see the earlier event in a completely new light because of this new connection — and it is usually a light which has a favorable aura around it even though the original event may not have been a favorable one at all. All of a sudden, a new growth has taken place, in that strange way for which

"ghostly understanding" is the best term possible. "So THAT is what was going on back then!" I say to myself, seeing the two pictures side by side; "I would never ever have guessed! How on earth could anything have come to fruition out of all that!" Ah, but it has, and so has the right-now moment too, as memories and facts between then and now readjust themselves according to this new light. All this quick-as-a-flash process lacks the careful observation and interpretation of psychotherapy — it is much too un-pin-down-able and, particularly noteworthy, it lacks my active participation. I have done nothing to earn this new awareness, nor have I even asked for it. It comes as a gift. And the result of this gift? Without any doubt at all, and I am not ashamed to admit it, it is an increase in charity, tiny perhaps, but nonetheless charity: charity for and in the past, the present, and the future.

I realize that it is decidedly childish and secular to make the statement "what I like best about God is. . . ." But I would certainly fill in that blank space with the phrase "ghostly understanding". The idea that the present moment (whatever it might be) can grow things both past and future and that I am — for that brief brightness of God's gift — aware of it through this faculty of "ghostly understanding" comforts me that I am really a child of God, even though on many occasions this might seem dubious to other people. And all of us should take confidence that the gifts which arrive through ghostly understanding tend to spread, just as ordinary plants spread — a single lily-

of-the-valley plant can spread into a forest of fragrance in the west garden — and so can charity begin to spread throughout the soul, even mine, even yours.

The Real Thing

Fr John-Julian OJN

My maternal grandmother lived an amazing lifetime — her years on earth extended from the horse-and-carriage days all the way through to the jet plane.

And when silent movies first came out, she was enthralled. She went to the moving pictures with great enthusiasm — and especially liked "The Perils of Pauline." In one of the movies, there was a young woman who became ill and died, and my grandmother wept her eyes out over the death of that young woman. But then, the next week, when she attended the movies again, there was that same young woman playing another role! She wasn't dead at all! And my grandmother could never forgive her for having faked that death — she had sobbed and sobbed at what turned out to be a make-believe death. Grandmother was so offended and felt so hurt and so taken in, that she never went to another movie in her entire 92-year lifetime! The problem for her, of course, was that she had taken for real a thing that was unreal. She had confused true reality with motion picture reality.

As we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, what we are celebrating is reality! Because the saints are the most real human beings who have ever lived — unlike the rest of us who are only make-believe, only halfway there. If you want to know what a real human being is, look at a saint.

But one of the problems with that is that the Church has tended to treat saints as though they were different from the rest of us, far away from us, living lives hopelessly different from ours, so we are left with the idea that saints are totally unlike us, almost a distinctly different race of people, and that they live lives completely and utterly contrary to our lives. Their life stories have to be crammed with "miraculous" occurrences: the first thing they say at the age of nine months is the Lord's Prayer; and at the age of two they

raise a neighbor from the dead, and so on. Today, most of it only succeeds in turning us away from saint-hood and making us feel alienated from saints.

But the truth is very different. The fact is that saints are not merely unrealistic models of impossible piety and unlikely other-worldly devotion, but they are a clear and perfect definition to us of what a human being was made to be. You see, the very definition of a saint is "a perfect human being," and we can define real humanity by looking at the saints.

One of the problems we face with this, however, was pretty much invented by Saint Augustine and perfected by John Calvin in the 16th century — it is the theological idea of the depravity of human beings, a doctrine otherwise known as "Original Sin." Calvin believed and taught that human beings are totally sinful wrecks, and that their only natural future is to get thrown on a celestial trash heap.

I remember an instance not long after we moved into Julian House. We had some troubles with a new copier machine and I called a serviceman. When he finished working on it, he came to me and said, "It can't be repaired." In other words, he was saying that the copier in and of itself was simply no good; it was not repairable. That is a parable of one way to understand human beings: that we are simply no good, and are not repairable. Well, the company sent another service man, and this man was able to repair the machine with very little trouble. In other words, the reason the machine didn't work was only because something was out-of-adjustment. And that is a parable of the right way to look at human beings! We are absolutely repairable. We are entirely redeemable. In fact, we have already been redeemed. We are good material, good stuff. Our problems do not arise because there is something wrong with our nature — with what we are — but simply because we are out-of-adjustment.

And that is what sainthood is about: the saints are simply human beings who got the

right adjustments as needed. They are human beings who were reclaimed, redeemed from their mistakes and weaknesses. So, saints are not a separate race of beings, they are merely perfected human beings — in fact, they are merely true human beings.

Because, you see, we are not basically flawed material. We are God's good raw material for his kingdom — indeed, in mystical truth, we already ARE his kingdom, only we don't know it and so we don't act like it. When we pray "Your kingdom come" we don't realize that we are the essential ingredients for that kingdom. We are like the little bits of yeast that, if it is properly warmed, will make an entire batch of bread rise; we are the tiny pinch of salt which gives perfect flavor to the whole pot of soup. But if we are yeast which does not rise or salt that has lost its flavor, then we are useless and without any purpose or reason for being.

Either we are saints or we are sub-human. If we do not maintain our saint-hood (that is, unless we remain the perfect human beings we were created to be), then we will remain little more than high-class animals. Why do you think humans are capable of the horrors of war, torture, murder, etc?

Many people tend to think that saints are way, high up "up there" somewhere and have little to do with us. We think we are so much lower than they that there's not much hope of ever reaching their level. But that is just not true! We are the most unique, most magnificent, most awesome, most

glorious creation that God ever thought of. And just because we happen to be a little messed up right now doesn't mean that we have to stay that way or that we don't have any other choices. If we want to know how to avoid being just an animal and how to be a full and true human being, we must look to the saints as models — models of love, and sacrifice, and selflessness, and commitment to ideals.

Like the great snow geese, we were meant to soar gloriously across the sky — but we choose to walk instead. Like the nightingale, our throats were made for magnificent song — but we choose to mutter and curse instead. Like the gazelle, we were meant to leap with impossible beauty and flight across the land — but we choose to crawl instead. Like the stars of heaven we were meant to shine brilliantly — but we have chosen to be dim bulbs instead.

It is not that in their nature the saints are any different from us at all — it is just that we have refused and turned our backs on the sainthood that was built into us as part of us when God designed us.

There is an old story told by the ancient Jewish rabbis. They say that whenever a human being walks down the street, that person is surrounded by a whole invisible crowd of angels who are crying out, "Make way! Make way! Make way for the image of God."

That is who we are — and that is what we celebrate on this Day of All Saints. The saints are simply human beings "on course"— the rest of us are simply human beings who took a wrong turn and just need to get back on track — back on the Camino Real —"The King's Road."

By Him, With Him, In Him, For Him

Mthr Hilary OJN

In our noon prayers every day we have the privilege of praying for expectant parents, and over the spring and summer the prayers of petition have steadily been turning to those of thanksgiving as the parents deliver, family by family. Consequently, we have also come to share in the knowledge that babies come when they will, not any sooner and not any later. However much the parents may guess and hope, even plan for a baby's arrival on a certain date, babies seem always to run on 'time, not our time.'

Thoughts on the gamble that is the scheduling of babies led to thoughts on the tenuous nature of human self-determination and — inevitably for this amateur theologian — to the workings of salvation and to the mercy that we are accustomed to call the Communion of Saints.

At the end of the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist in the Book of Common Prayer there is a phrase said by the priest as the people prepare to make their "Amen": *"By him, and with him, and in him, in the unity of the Holy Spirit."* This particular saying has been nibbling away at the edge of my wonderment for a good while now, always threatening to break out into…well, *something* coherent, but never quite. Since the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist is the outline of the process and progress of our salvation, what does this mean when we say, through the priest, that all this is done by Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus and in the unity of the Holy Spirit?

Again and again in the scriptures we are given to know that God is the begetter of all, the beginning of all, that God is instigation itself. How many

times does a passage of scripture begin *"The angel of the Lord appeared"* to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to Moses and so many others? And if the voluminous witness of the Old Testament to the unbidden in-breaking of God were not enough, there is St John the Evangelist writing to tell us, "to all who received [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of flesh, or of the will of man, but of God".

How much say does any one of us have in this business we know as salvation? How much of the way of salvation is down to our initiative and effort at seeking God, and how much is sheer response to the ever-growing, loving pressure of God seeking each of us? And how do we understand the nature of that relation that for short we call *the Communion of Saints* — the ones Mother Julian refers to as "all those who shall be saved"? Sometimes of a Sunday, praying through the Creed on the way to The Life Everlasting Amen, that phrase *the Communion of Saints* might stand out a bit, momentarily lit up as the sign of a mutual aid society of those in heaven and those on earth, but mostly it flows past nearly invisibly, seamlessly joining with the list of other things which as Christians we proclaim.

But what if the Communion of Saints turns out to be something more than an abstract propositional notion, even something more than a thing? What if the Communion of Saints is actually more like a verb, a dynamic unification that happens to us when we are swept up by the thirst of Jesus and pressed to his side in love? What if it turns out that the Communion of Saints is not so much a thing existing as the sum of and for the benefit of its members but is more like a result, a happy by-product of a more elemental movement quite beyond the control of its individual parts? In the course of her *Revelations of Divine Love*, Julian of Norwich seems to suggest that this is indeed the case.

When Julian talks about the anthropology of salvation, about causes for the Incarnation of Jesus, she sets the story as Salvador Dali does in his famous painting of the crucifixion, *The Christ of St John*, telling it from the point of view of heaven and not of earth. Whereas one understanding of salvation has it that Jesus became human to fix the sin-broken conduit between earth and heaven so we might at last assuage our thirst for God, Julian tells it the other way around. She says that God became one of us in Jesus in order to assuage the thirst of God for us. Julian says of Christ, "Therefore, this is his thirst: a love-longing to possess us all together wholly within himself for his bliss, as I see it" and that we who shall be saved "are his joy, his recompense, his honor and his crown." Moreover, this joy is not accidental to our salvation, for Julian says that from before the beginning humanity was expressly made for this by God.

The great thirst that humanity experiences for God is all response to God's own thirst for us. Everything Jesus does is ordered to assuaging this, and the gathered communion we become in and with Jesus is a result of its fulfillment. Remember his lament over the people of Jerusalem? It speaks as much to the yearning of God for us as to our own need of being gathered up: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing, but you would not."

While popular Christian culture abounds with sayings such as "Try God," offering the divine as a kind of analgesic for human distress and brokenness, the reality is another thing entirely. We are made for Jesus and his joy and the joy of the blessed Trinity; our healing and happiness, our gathering up into the blessed side of Christ, as Julian says, is not so much end as by-product, the sign of the fulfillment of God's determination and desire for us. Even in this, however, also lies the courtesy of God, from which comes all the self-determination we may have. As desirous as God is for us, God will not demand or take, but woo us and teach us wisely to respond.

A new mother learns by degrees to read the signs of her body, anticipating as well as she might the time of a baby's arrival. Embodied together with all those who shall be saved in the Communion of Saints, we also learn to read the signs of the time, what is to be our Amen to God the begetter, Jesus the Maker, and the Holy Spirit the sanctifier and toucher of souls. Julian says that, "because of the strength of this yearning [and thirst] in Christ, we must

yearn also for him (without which yearning, no soul comes to heaven)… Thus he has pity and compassion on us, and he has a yearning to possess us, but his wisdom and his love do not permit the end to come until the best possible time."

Swept up as we are in love, pressed together as the Communion of Saints to Jesus' delighted side, this patience of Jesus is a mercy, for there is a great deal to learn. When Jesus tells the disciples, "you did not choose me, but I chose you" he is also saying, 'neither did you choose your brothers and sisters, but I chose them for you'. Had we no need of anything beyond our own sufficiency, we may never have approached some of these others, nor even wished to. This choosing of Jesus accounts for a great deal of awkwardness Christians often experience with each other that will take time to overcome. In the meanwhile, the continual mercy of God for our frailty is the very means of access to this larger society in which we find ourselves. (With admirable economy, not only does this awkwardness assist the process of our salvation, it also almost effortlessly provides half the copy required to fill our weekly Church newspapers.)

When Julian mentions any particular saints by name, the mercy of God is almost always the context:

> "God brought cheerfully to my mind David and others in the Old Law with him without number, and in the New Law He brought to my mind first Mary Magdalen, Peter and Paul, and Thomas and Jude and Saint John of Beverly and others also without number and how they are recognized in the Church on earth along with their sins, and it is to them no shame, but all of the sins have been changed to honor." (Ch. 38)

When Sunday by Sunday we say in the Creed, *"we believe in the Holy Spirit,"* everything that follows afterward — the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins — is consequence of that Spirit's working, of our being gathered up by the mercy of Christ into his side and made into his body. And so it goes to the end, by him and with and in him, to 'the life everlasting, Amen.'

St James of Jerusalem

Sr Therese OJN

Jesus comes to his home town, or to the local church, or somewhere everyone knows him, and teaches them, and at once there is trouble. He is a so-called known quantity, defined, labelled, branded, and now, it seems, the contents do not match the package.

And so the people ask 'Where does he get all this from?' At this point, when the people of Nazareth, or those who call themselves Jesus's followers, reach the end of their understanding, that is the end of their faith, and 'so they turn against him.' He has transgressed their comfort zone. He is not reliable according to what they have decided about him. God wouldn't send out a prophet like this, that makes them uncomfortable. This cannot be of God. Yet, God approaches in a way they had not taken into account, and their shrink-wrap faith is scandalized.

Somehow James, who was in a position to be most scandalized, got beyond this adolescence of belief. This brother of Jesus may be, at the very least, a witness to the fact of God always disregarding definitions and tribes, that he will not be boxed in and tamed and tagged even when he comes quite close to. James's witness stands as a warning to any who would define God in earthly terms, and so imagine they had understood the divine.

The Grounds Work Day, clockwise from top left: lunch! • The kitchen crew • The garden being tamed • Mthr Hilary knows hopscotch • The youngest crew member hard at work

Community News

May was a beautiful month this year in Wisconsin, and the Rogation procession, though abridged, had the happiness of falling on one of the loveliest days of the month, in the midst of a prolonged spring.

After thus blessing the garden, which was already full of eager and thriving weeds, our LDS friends from down the road in Wales took over the grounds a few days later and worked some major groundskeeping. Branches were trimmed, invasive bushes cut and dug up, sprouting stumps removed, and the vegetable garden left neat as a pin. Once again, we ended the day with a cookout teamed by one of our neighbors and some close friends and affiliates.

We have not done justice to all the labor our visitors put into the vegetable garden, but the produce has not noticed our neglect. The ground produced volunteer crops of tomato and butternut squash. Another surprise crop has been a rampant mat of purslane that has overtaken most of the garden, and we have duly, and happily, added it to our menus.

The last great event of the spring was the long-awaited arrival of four new trees and three bushes, installed by Piala's in the wooded lawn out front. Since the drought began, it has been necessary to water them on a daily basis. Up to the feast of St Swithun there was no rain but a great storm arrived on the feast, boding well for the rest of the year.

Fr John-Julian is working on a collection of essays on liturgics, putting to paper his vast reservoir of knowledge on the subject. Those interested in this work are welcome to contact him at his address.

Finally, we have had a spate of visits from Julians. One was the very young daughter of a local parishioner, who felt the birds on the fountain were the coolest thing. Another was Julian Colette, who has cycled across the country gathering research for dissertation work on monasticism today and emerging communitites. We gladly recommend a stop at his blog:

www.emerging-communities.com

Mthr Hilary and Sr Cornelia pinpointing the transit of Venus on 5 June; Sr Therese and the flock of new refectory stools; reforesting Waukesha one tree at a time (at least in our yard)

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