The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

Volume V • December 2013 • No. 4

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The Order of Julian of Norwich

is a contemplative Order of monks and nuns 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, 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.

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Faith and Witness

Sr Cornelia OJN

The disciples' announcement to Thomas is the same announcement that Mary Magdalene made to them earlier. And Thomas will not believe *their* announcement, just as they would not believe *hers*. After all, Jesus had to appear to them, showing them his hands and his side in order for them to recognize him. In rejecting the merely verbal witness to the resurrection, then, Thomas is acting no differently from the other disciples. Thomas's demands are worded extravagantly, and the demand for concrete evidence is heightened by his insistence on touching Jesus' hands and side, but in essence what he demands as the conditions of his belief — *tangible* proof of the resurrection — is the same opportunity that Jesus gave the disciples. When Jesus returns a week later (when Thomas is present) he offers to give Thomas exactly what he had demanded, his words paralleling Thomas's. Jesus exhorts Thomas to move from a position of unbelief to belief — after all, the story is about the grounds of faith, not about doubt and skepticism. Jesus will meet the conditions that Thomas set for his belief; indeed, he explicitly identifies his *offer of himself* as the motivation for Thomas's move from unbelief to belief. Jesus's offer of himself to Thomas evokes the most powerful and complete confession to Jesus in this gospel: "My Lord and my God". In confessing Jesus as his Lord and God, Thomas acknowledges the truth of those words which Jesus had already spoken to him ("if you know me, you will know my Father too"). Jesus's return to the Father is now complete — his mission is completed and Jesus shares in God's glory. And so the language of this confession affirms the central truth with which the Gospel itself began: "The Word was with God, and the Word was God." Thomas sees God fully revealed in Jesus.

It is not touching *per se* that leads Thomas to this confession of faith, but Jesus's gracious offer of himself (*again* a mini-crucifixion as it were), giving him, a disciple, what he still needs for faith. Jesus promises that belief will not be limited to those who see what Thomas has seen and done what Thomas has just done. Jesus does not disparage

the faith of the first disciples which was grounded in the senses, but his promise is intended to reassure future generations of believers that having to have recognized Jesus by means of the senses — that is, being a first-generation witness — is not a prerequisite for faith. The joy of the first disciples at the sight of Jesus is acknowledged, but the story ends with the blessing of all the future generations who will know the joy without the assistance of those senses — it is a story of hope and promise, not judgment and reprimand.

A Home for God

Mthr Hilary OJN

In 1061 Richéldis de Favérches, lady of the manor of Little Walsingham, was given three visions of the Blessed Virgin. Our Lady's direction to Richéldis was to build for her an exact replica of the House of the Annunciation in Nazareth. This is a wonderfully concise icon of our entire life's work as Christians, and as human beings. We are each to build a holy house — a life — inside which Jesus and his family can dwell. In the course of the construction process we are at one and the same time receiving, offering and becoming the radical hospitality of God. This is also the description of our whole work as the gathered Church, Jesus's own body. The first of all the saints, Our Blessed Mother, began this holy work at the time of the Annunciation, and as Queen of Heaven she lives to assist and accompany us in the process.

Three times at Walsingham Richéldis was granted a vision of Our Lady. The story goes that, while Richéldis was gathering building materials, seeking the right place for the foundation of the Holy House, one morning she woke to find the House standing in its place, miraculously constructed during the night. This brings to mind Jesus's parable of the Kingdom of heaven, how it is like a farmer plowing and sowing seed in his field. The man goes to bed at night and wakes to find the seed sprouted and growing up, how, he does not know.

As for Richéldis, as for this farmer, so it is with us. While all the

ingredients of our lives are folded into and called upon in the house building enterprise — and nothing whatever is ever left out — our devotional life alone and with others constitutes a significant part of the raw material for the project. We work, progressively opening ourselves to the ministrations of the Spirit, allowing Jesus to inhabit us as he may choose. But in the end, we find we are not so much doing as being done to, not so much building as being built. Devotion functions in this regard something like the sacraments, *ex opere operato* — that is, worship does its work in us by virtue of its being done.

These lines from Eliot's *Little Gidding* carry the sense:

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid....

The bent knee of assent is itself the work, and what sets the work in train.

It is probably safe to describe the Shrine which honors Our Lady at Walsingham as that place 'than which no greater concentration of lace and smoke per cubic foot can be conceived'. Walsingham represents the apex of Anglo-Catholic liturgy and devotional life, and it seems to me the intersection of this with Our Lady's intention for Walsingham's Holy House is no accident. Far from being so much pious wallpaper, traditional devotional and liturgical practices, compounded daily, assist in forming the whole of the houses we are building, right through the lath and plaster even to the timbers. The words do something in us when we say them, the actions and gestures do something to us when we enact them.

This is because, of course, we not only enact the life of the sacraments here in church, but because we live in a sacramental universe.

Whether we know it or not, we have already been seized by it, or as Charles Taylor writes, enchanted. Stuff is good for ever and always, and stuff will forever and always assist us on the way.

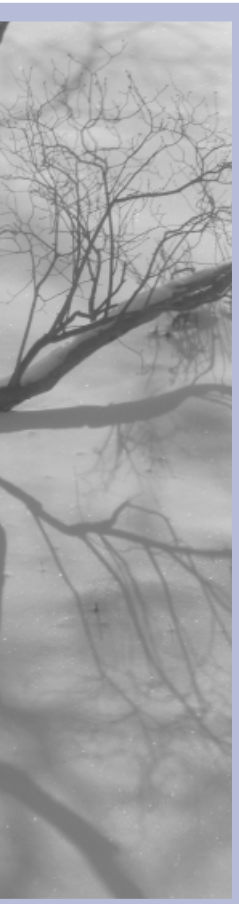
What sort of stuff is the most help, then? To switch industrial metaphors for a moment, the crucible inside of which metal is being refined has to be made of stuff that will not also crack and melt under heat and pressure, but can hold the proceedings safely. So with building the house of our lives: the stuff we use, our liturgical life, our private devotional practices — these must be of such integrity as can stand up to long use, bear significant weight, and not crack under the pressure.

And then there is the method of house construction itself: As St Paul says, it makes a difference in the end just how we build, and with what kind of stuff. Each Ash Wednesday we say and hear this, "My sister, my brother, *remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return*." Here is Eliot again:

Dust in the air suspended
Marks the place where a story ended...
Dust inbreathed was a house—
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.

How we build, how we choose and negotiate the materials themselves determines the kind of humans we actually become.

Our building materials, especially those made of our liturgical and devotional practice, do more than quietly lie there and suffer handling. They also question us and require things of us. If we let them, at the most elementary level they serve to pull us away from self-concern and direct our attention toward an other. Even better, they serve us as a kind of ongoing temporal rehab. Growing into a state of spaciousness



requires re-learning how to inhabit time, how to come to terms with the fact that time *is*.

The collect for St Augustine of Canterbury contains a bidding that we might 'do God's will, and bide God's time, and see God's glory'. That last bidding, to see God's glory, is conditioned by the first two, and these require practice. Like an animated 3-D printer, then, slowly by slowly, bell by bell, bead by bead, petition by petition, office by office, each event of speech and action lays down layer after micro-layer of intent, building up the structure of the house.

To say 'spiritual practice' sounds terribly exalted, like eating with polished silver off your best china. But spiritual practice is eminently suited to a Tupperware kind of life. The romance of the sacrament of the present moment can wear a little thin, say, if you are praying the BCP Daily Office on the evening of the fifteenth day. The trek across the vast expanse of Psalm 78 commences — all seventy-two verses of it — and presently there is no sight of land in either direction. And you are the monastery cook. And you are beginning to wonder if you remembered to turn off the oven or not....

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting...
(TS Eliot; Little Gidding)

....
Teach us to care and not to care,
Teach us to sit still.
(TS Eliot; Ash Wednesday)

Now: do our chosen devotional practices, or constellation of practices — do they result in expanding our hearts, or contracting them? Are

we becoming more hospitable, or less? Ever since the invention of microwave popcorn, we have had a particular need to learn how to re-inhabit time at a human scale, at a human pace. Are our devotions, particularly the more tedious ones, helping us learn to do that? Are our attentions to God in prayer and worship assisting us to become people of the proper size, not too large, not too small? That is, are we taking up more emotional and psychological space than we should, or not enough? Finally, does any given practice or action or way of being in the world result in us looking *more* like Jesus in the Gospels, or less?

Because Jesus has taken our humanity into heaven the possibility exists for us to become holy, to become saints, identified as fully as may be with the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, should we choose to assent to God's loving work in us.

But our sacramental universe is not universally friendly. Not every creature is interested in our holiness; some creatures there are who

actively oppose it. This, incidentally, is one of the reasons we have crucifixes in our churches and in our homes. They remind us of what we are capable of doing to each other should we fail to choose wisely, should we fail to choose love.

Now I would like to tell you another English story of another sort of house building. After that we'll put our materials-science hats on, and consider some methods of construction.

Once upon a time there was an old sow with three little pigs, and as she had not enough food to keep them, she sent them out to seek their fortune. The first little pig that went off met a man with a bundle of straw, and said to him, "Please, sir, give me that straw to build me a house." Which the man did, and the little pig built a house with it.

Presently came along a wolf, who knocked at the door, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me in." And the first little pig said, "No, not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!"

The wolf then said, "Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in." So he huffed, and he puffed, and he blew his house in, and ate up the little pig.

The second little pig met a man with a bundle of sticks, and said, "Please, sir, give me those sticks to build a house." Which the man did, and the pig built his house.

Presently came along the wolf, who knocked at the door, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me in." And the second little pig said, "No, not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin!"

The wolf then said, "Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in." So he huffed, and he puffed, and he blew his house in, and ate up the little pig.

The third little pig met a man with a load of bricks, and said, "Please, sir, give me those bricks to build a house with." So the man gave him the bricks, and he built his house with them.

So the wolf came, as he did to the other little pigs, and said, "Little pig, little pig, let me in." "No, not by the hair of my chinny-chin-chin."

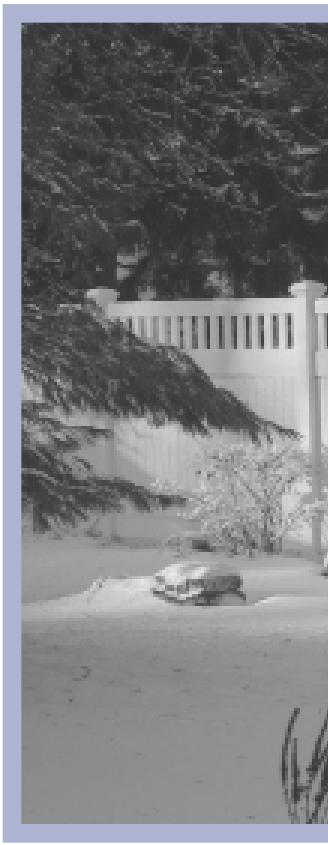
"Then I'll huff, and I'll puff, and I'll blow your house in." Well, he huffed, and he puffed, but he could not blow the house in. When

he found that he could not blow the house in, the wolf resorted to trickery to try to catch the pig...

Well, you know the rest of the story, how the third little pig outfoxed the wolf, prepared a pot of boiling water as the wolf was coming angrily down his chimney, boiled the wolf, ate him for dinner and lived happily ever after.

If nothing else, the first two little pigs were certainly victims of the low-hanging fruit of expedience. "Let's get this boring business over with and get on with more exciting things!"

Straw and sticks can present themselves in the most agreeably deadly shapes. Here are some: There is our pervasive culture of jaded but self-protective irony, attractive and corrosive. How about the sticks of hopeless apathy? And there is always the promise of mindless activity to fall back on if these two aren't immediately to hand. Does our physical and mental engagement with the life of the spirit push on any of these buttons for us? Does our rule of life, if we have one, help us examine whether we are settling for straw and sticks like these, or whether we are submitting to the hard work of building with good bricks? To take all this out of the realm of the safely theoretical for a moment, here is a real-life instance to put to thought. There are many cool, even useful, portable electronic devices available to us today. If we partake, do we know why we line up for the latest versions, or only that, well, they are the latest versions? Do these artifacts live up to their promises of connection and integration, or are they, after the excitement dies down, just another means of isolation?



Because we live in a universe where what is contingent is bound up with what is eternal, it is part and parcel of faithfulness to ask the hard questions about what we are building our life with. The wolf is at the door but with the help of the saints, we too can be that third little pig.

According to the order of the flesh, Eve is the mother of all who live. But according to the Spirit, Our Lady Saint Mary is the Mother of all, the Mother of the Church, the Mother of Jesus who is the Church.

Some three-hundred years after Our Lady of Walsingham appeared to the Lady Richéldis, another Norfolk woman, Julian of Norwich, was also gifted with a vision, that of Jesus crucified.

Ever since Eve, Julian said, our mothers have borne us for travail and sorrow and death, but our True Mother Jesus bears us in himself unto eternal life: "[W]e have now cause for mourning, for our sin is the cause of Christ's pains; and we have everlastingly cause for joy, for it was his endless love for us that caused Him to suffer."

Each of us alone and all of us together as the Church are situated not unlike the vision of St John in the Apocalypse. Like the woman clothed with the sun we live, suspended between earth and heaven, suspended between contingency and glory, ever in peril, yet ever kept safely for our end. Dying, we live, rising, we are born to new life in Jesus. As Julian says, "[W]e have in us our Lord Jesus arisen; [and] we have in us the misery of the misfortune of Adam's falling...thus is this mixture so wondrous in us that scarcely do we know...how we hold out...except for that same holy assent" with which we consent to God's work in us by faith.

This muddle, as Julian calls it, is an ever-present reality, but so also is this:

"When Adam fell, God's Son fell — Adam fell from life to death into the pit of this miserable world and after that into hell. God's Son fell with Adam into the pit of the womb of the Maiden (who was the fairest daughter of Adam)... And he mightily fetched Adam out of hell."

So an assignment: each of us has been given that of building, together with the Lady Richéldis, a Holy House — a life — which Jesus can inhabit, through which we can become the very hospitality of God. And come what may, God protects our labors and safeguards the image of himself that is coming to birth in us. The psalm for the feast of Our Lady of Walsingham says "the rich among the people seek your favor," but it is the humle, like herself, whom Mary will regard with the grace of her assistance. As we build this holy house for Jesus, in company with the Lady Richéldis, the Lady Julian, St Benedict and all the saints, pray for us, Holy Mary, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Witnessing Faith

Sr Therese OJN

The coming of the Light in the birth of Jesus is tidings of great joy, and in the martyrdom of the deacon Stephen is a reminder of the disruption this birth will entail for the world. Those who prefer to remain as they are at any cost will resist, and often violently, listening to the entire message.

Stephen's murder is an indication of how ill-prepared the faithful are for the answering of their prayers for justice and peace, how poorly they accept the coming of God's Truth in terms they have not specified. But Stephen's witness hardly stops there, nor at the distinction of being the first to die professing Jesus as Messiah. For standing by approving his murder is a young zealot as passionate as Stephen himself, watching as Stephen dies with words of forgiveness, without bitterness or contempt, addressing the Lord to whom he had given his life, and Saul will not be able to hold out forever against such a transforming witness. When Saul at last capitulates to the same grace that so empowered Stephen, he will himself be a seed for the transformation of the church and the world, and thousands will follow.

Stephen knew none of this, only that Jesus had claimed his life and given him his own, that the sufficiency of this Jesus was everything, and worth every bit of himself up to the instant of his death, that this faith could be dared in the face of anything, and the Christ he followed would keep his word. Those who follow still reap the fruit of his trust, and are themselves the fruit.

Book Notes: *Contemplative Provocations*

Contemplative Provocations: Brief, Concentrated Observations on Aspects of a Life with God
Donald Haggerty
Ignatius Press 2013
ISBN-978-1-58617-733-1
pp 200

While many books on contemplative prayer stress methods and practices to enable one to enter into stillness, few describe what happens when techniques fade and fail, and all that remains is "merely" being still with God. *Contemplative Provocations* offers practical insights about the nature of contemplation to those who live busy, active lives and are called to delving deeper into prayer.

Fr Donald Haggerty served as a retreat master for the Sisters of Charity, who are called to be deeply contemplative and highly active. Father Haggerty's retreats focused on prayer, and he received a great deal of thoughtful reflections from these busy, prayerful women and their personal journeys into contemplative prayer.

He describes their almost universal experience of the hiddenness of God: not a "dark night" experience, but a shadowy sense of God's presence and a continued deep yearning for The One who seems just out of reach. Rather than enjoying a more intimate familiarity with God, the soul advancing in prayer is likely to experience more intently the concealment of God. He further emphasizes that while being in sacred places and practicing acts of devotion are beneficial, God's grace is the sole source of the gift of contemplative prayer, and an open heart is what is most necessary, regardless of geographical restrictions or the external conditions of a life. The contemplative may not be aware of God's activity within, but the deliberate practice of silence with God yields the fruit of intense love for Him and those around us. This is the hallmark of true prayer.

This book offers wise guidance, gentle assurance and practical advice to those called to a deeper life of prayer. It is best read in random snippets and left to simmer, and will certainly encourage the heart and remind us that growth in prayer is ultimately God's work as we surrender ourselves to Him.

Community Notes

The end of summer gave us a nice crop of pears, many tomatoes, and perpetual kale. The yard also produced a hefty maitake mushroom which we have been slowly devouring.

This fall some of the order of the house was disrupted by the removal of carpeting in the halls and stairways. In its place is now a simple vinyl floor, and the stairs have sturdy treads. Our Annual Rest, deferred from the summer, was observed this fall.

The October Harvest Fest was first bumped by rain and landed in the middle of an early cold spell. Several local affiliates plus Br Barnabas arrived to help us pull up the vegetable garden and bed it for the winter.

Mthr Hilary attended the Diocese of Fond du Lac convention and gave a quiet day in Sheboygan at the Walsingham Pilgrimage.

Fr John-Julian continues to work on translating *The Book of Privy Counsel* and hopes to have the complete book ready by next year.

In Advent, the community will observe its annual silent retreat.

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