The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

Volume V • March 2013 • No. 1

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On the cover: New Japanese maple leaves, spring

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.

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To Suffer

Fr John-Julian OJN

When people ask me about Julian's spirituality, I usually reply that the primary evidence I have of the spiritual worth of Julian's writing is the fact that one can read and re-read and re-read Julian's work and come up with a new insight every time. It often seems to me that there literally is no bottom to Julian's mystical depths — or, perhaps, there is no limit to the truths the Holy Spirit manifests in the *Revelations of Divine Love*.

I have read and studied Julian's work almost daily for over thirty-one years, and I also spent seven years working on the translation of her book, and yet another two years in writing my commentary. And yet only recently I had an insight that I had missed entirely through all those years of close intimacy with Julian.

In my own opinion, there are two pieces that provide for me the core of Julian's theology and practice:

First, I think her most potent and valuable theological statement is found in Chapter 51 in the account of the Lord and the Servant, where there is an actual metaphorical identification of Adam and Christ as the same person — and where Adam is not blamed for his sin.

And, second, while Julian never gives practical directions about how-to-be-holy — in fact, she never gives direct advice of any kind — there is one simple statement in Chapter 10 which I have always taken as her most practical suggestion about Christian life: "…the constant seeking of the soul pleases God very much for the soul can do no more than seek, suffer, and trust."

I suspect that I have quoted that phrase — "seek, suffer and trust" — hundreds (if not thousands) of times. But recently I realized that I had overlooked a confusing cognate in my translation — and that was that the word "suffer" would have had many more common meanings in Julian's time than it does for us today.

So off I went to the OED — and, yes, there were 84 separate meanings for the verb "to suffer". And foremost besides the obvious "to undergo pain" was

the sense that I certainly should have considered — "to permit", "to allow", "to consent" — all of these referred to in that ever-familiar line from the King James Version: "Suffer the little children to come to me." (Mt. 19:14, Mk. 10:14, & Lk. 18:16)

Do you see what that does with the familiar phrase of Julian's? "..the soul can do no more than seek, consent, and trust" or "…seek, allow, and trust". There is once again an emphasis that so permeates the work of Julian and all the great mystics: the sheer necessity of letting God act, of simply being *available*. The willingness to "undergo", to "put up with", to "endure" rather than to "make happen". It is another support of the understanding that all that is done, God does it — and that our primary responsibility is to live with what God wills — without struggle and without the idea that we can improve our own spirituality with gritted teeth.

This counsel to quiet availability is already present in our maxim: Await, Allow, Accept, Attend. We are called not to be consumed and carried away by whatever is going on, but to recognize that the Divine Power is already and powerfully at work in all things and, whatever we ourselves are called to do in any given situation, that is the only thing that can and will make a difference. From our slightest prayer to our most noble martyrdom — it is all being done to reveal Godself to us so we can find that Presence in ourselves and recognize that, spiritually, we are already bound and wound and one with God, however poorly we understand or portray that unity.

So, I remind you of the last of our OJN aphorisms: "Attend". "Pay Attention" because God is working full-time, 24/7 to reveal that Divine Self to us, and the very best we can do is be available. And "the soul can do no more than seek, endure, and trust."

'A Holy Lent'

Donald MInor AOJN

Each year, as a part of our Ash Wednesday liturgy, we hear the familiar lines found in the Prayer Book: "I invite you, therefore in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting, and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word." As you hear these words spoken, I urge you to closely listen and reflect on the impact that this challenging invitation has on you and on others throughout the world.

This invitation to the observance of a holy Lent at first glance appears to be a somewhat gentle way to approach this most sacred season. But surely it is asking more than the commonplace suggestions we hear, regarding either giving up or taking on something as an act of self-discipline or contrition. This invitation is suggesting that we move from the mundane into the thin place in our existence where we feel the presence of our Blessed Lord even more closely. If this is true, then perhaps what one should actually consider as we listen to this invitation is not just to observe "a holy Lent", but to look more deeply at the observance of "a holy life". This is clearly what we are called to do as followers of Christ. Saint Ignatius Loyola wrote in his *Spiritual Exercises'* first preface, "We are created to praise, reverence and serve God, our Lord, and by this means to save our soul."

But again, as we hear the Lenten liturgy read from the Prayer Book, this invitation to a holy Lenten observance does in fact challenge each one of us to take full advantage of this solemn period of prayer, fasting and self-denial. One might say that this is a critical moment in time, a time that leads us on our Lord's final journey, a time to reflect on Christ's suffering, His death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. No doubt, we shall each approach our individual reflections from different perspectives. Actually, the rhythm of our prayers and the directions of our thoughts will closely coincide with where we are on our individual journey and our intimate relationship with God. Such a journey is a two-way encounter. It is indeed a journey where we meet God, but more importantly, a journey where God is joined to us. Blessed Mother Julian reminds us of this in one of her Showings as she writes of our Lord's desires, "How could you please me more than by entreating me, earnestly, wisely, sincerely, to do the thing that is my will? And so prayer

makes harmony between God and man's soul, because when man is at ease with God he does not need to pray but to contemplate reverently what God says."

As we continue to look further into the Prayer Book invitation, we are being urged to consider not just the Passion events that are finally culminated in our Lord's resurrection, but to also consider the conditions in the world around us. Sadly, what we see as we view this world is a chasm that exists between some who have much while many who barely have the basics to provide for their existence. In other words, we live in a world where comfort and convenience is the "watch word" for some of us, while daily survival and suffering is the "albatross" that weighs down so many others.

Having just finished leading a course on Old Testament, I am even more keenly aware that as I look at our current world condition, it is largely consistent with what has occurred throughout ages past. It is comfortable to know, however, that God always remains constant in spite of, or even because of, our changes, challenges, and actions. God is in the midst of our suffering and our joy. Thanks be to God for this! Still, we can look back at Israel during its bleak period of exile and despair, and cannot help but feel its sense of pain and loneliness. This is so eloquently expressed in the words found in Psalm 137, "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither. Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy."

We do not need to only look in the past to find examples of God's people living in a world where fear, anxiety, loneliness and despair are the unfortunate norms under which they regularly existed. We can also look at our modern world, to see that these hardships and obstacles sadly continue to be very much the norm for so many. God's people in Syria, Rwanda, Nigeria, and in many other villages, cities and countries throughout the world are experiencing the same hurts and fears as did God's people whose cries we hear in Psalm 137. Many of us, especially living in the western

world, say with confidence, "God is with us, God is among us", yet many who are less fortunate than we, are continually asking, "Where?" Where is God when we feel the need to have God so close by? These questions that conjure up feelings of concern are at the forefront of my prayers in this season of holy Lent. I believe that these same questions are also a good starting place for many when considering this invitation offered by the Church to the observance of a holy Lent.

Briefly allow me to share two things that influence my thinking as I begin my holy Lenten reflections. First I recall a crucifix that hangs above the altar in Peterborough Cathedral. The face of Jesus, hanging on that cross, is a face that shows the pain, the suffering and the agony He endured on our behalf. The body is clearly broken. The pain is clearly evident. The inscription above it reads, "Stat Crux Dum Volvitur Orbis", loosely translated as "the cross stands while the world continues to revolve." His human nature also shows through as he cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Very God, yet very human!

Next, I am reminded of words from Mother Julian's Showings, "He did not say: You will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured, you will not be disquieted; but he said: You will not be overcome". These reminders speak of a continuing yet never changing love, a love that transcends time and space. They shall be foremost in my thoughts as I engage in still prayer and personal reflections this year.

We have all been invited to observe a holy Lent. The question is, how will we respond? If we accept this invitation, some moments will be joyous while others may bring uneasiness, some will be revealing while others may be bewildering. My hope, however, is that each of us will consider this holy Lenten invitation prayerfully and with due care, and that it may lead us closer to Jesus our Saviour.

Conversion (for Paul, and us)

Sr Therese OJN

Paul is one of the best illustrations that God's thoughts are not the thoughts of men, and that conversion in Christ is a long process, however dramatic it may be at the outset.

Conversion is more like the development of a highly refined skill than an adherence to certain set principles — and as anyone who develops a skill to a high degree knows, at what seems to be the top is only the awareness that one has an immeasurable amount still to improve. This lifelong, patient growth of the followers of Jesus requires the utmost attention to His Spirit over every other authority, for to be like nothing else perfectly but Him is their true salvation. There can be no greater witness than the Spirit of Christ, and the Spirit never leads to fear or condemnation. It would be a travesty of conversion and a mockery of the greatness of God if the followers of Jesus were to single out any one lesser witness, however authoritative, as the culmination of what the Spirit has to reveal to the new creation that are the people in Christ.

The movement and change that conversion always requires will be slow and many-layered, yet when authentic it will always be a movement away from every trace of fear into a greater and deeper trust, both of each other and of God. It will not always be straightforward. It may even involve overturnings as shocking as being blinded on the road.

Like anyone in their unedited correspondence, Paul in his letters will be a host of contradictory sentiments and principles, most more cultural than spiritual, yet it is his conviction of being loved by God in Christ beyond all measure or condition that most shapes and drives him. He will still make mistakes and act or speak in ways contrary to the love and trust God shows him. His great security in the midst of this process of conversion that will turn him inside-out, is the promise of Christ to be with him always. All Paul can do is trust, which may be the hardest task of all.

from a manual on forgiveness,
with exercises, and diagnostics

you live with bearing your own wrath
wanting the enemy to be destroyed by it
your wrath is the god of your wanting

wanting things to be different
can happen like lightning, or
takes time, sometimes

sometimes all you can do to begin
is want it, want it, want it
even when you think it might kill you

it might kill you, but never to begin
is to guarantee that it will
to want is to begin

to begin and keep going means one day
to arrive; and to keep going, desire
more, tell the truth, deny nothing

deny nothing but the hopelessness
of change; and work on this: define
enemy, define *hope*

hope a notch higher, leave the door
ajar to hope, and try, practice
the thought, *X is not the enemy*

the enemy, instead, hides in your seeing

your seeing tells your want
your want spells the key, the lock, and the door
and whatever has mastered your want

and whatever has mastered your want

—a Julian monastic

The One Thing Necessary

Mthr Hilary OJN

Before one gets very far in discussions of Christian vocation it is inevitable that the words "active" and "contemplative" will surface and begin to circulate. These signify certain modes of life and are commonly understood to stand as opposites in a polarity: the active life versus the contemplative life. Get a little further into the discussion and just as inevitably, St. Luke's story of the two sisters Mary and Martha of Bethany will be summoned in support of one or the other of these adjectives, adding to the polarity the notion of relative value.

> "Now as [Jesus and the disciples] went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to come and help me.'" But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'"

Following the trajectory of Jesus' word that *"Mary has chosen the better part,"* a frequent take on this story is that what Mary has chosen is the contemplative life, a life of apparent simplicity and peace that is somehow of greater intrinsic worth than that chosen by Martha. In her turn Martha is understood to have chosen the active life, a life of unremitting, usually unsung effort that, albeit lived in aid of the kingdom of God is for some reason not as good.

But for all that I am writing as a licensed member of the apparently-winning side, to leave the interpretation there does the story a disservice.

Despite its brevity, there is a lot going on in this story. First, notice that Martha is not really completely there. She is, so to speak, somewhere in the neighborhood but not at home, for Jesus with the most loving intensity sees the need to speak her name not once but twice. Martha is not at ease but is a bustling bundle of unpeaceful resentment.

Martha's difficulty is not that she has too many responsibilities, nor that she has chosen an inherently lesser form of life in which a certain amount of distress is only to be expected. Martha's difficulty isn't even her sister Mary who in this story is really just a bystander to the narrative drama. Martha says, *"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to come and help me."* In these two short sentences Martha has exposed the state of her soul; something is amiss. However domestically it is being expressed, Martha is exhibiting the symptoms of a malady that Julian of Norwich calls "wrath." In all the visions given her, Julian tells us,

> "I saw no wrath except on man's part, and that [God] forgives in us. For wrath is nothing else but a departure from and an opposition to peace and to love, and either it comes from a failure of power or from a failure of wisdom, or from a failure of goodness (which failure is not in God but it is on our part — for we, because of sin and miserableness, have in us a wrath and a continuing opposition to peace and to love — and that he showed very often in His loving demeanor of compassion and pity." (Ch 48)

See how Jesus responds to Martha: he doesn't bite on any of the several hooks that she is fishing about with nor does he give her a program for organizing her life — say, Martha Stewart of Bethany. What Jesus does do by his loving demeanor of compassion and pity, ever so deftly and ever so gently, is to redirect Martha's attention to truth: *"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things."* What is in focus here are not things, but worry and distraction.

Julian says that along with wrath, there is in us "a divine will that never consented to sin nor ever shall" — that is, there is in each of us an

indestructible inclination to God never characterized by wrath, opposition, or resentment. (Ch 37)

These two wills within each of us, the one inclined to wrath, the other inclined to peace and to love — do these not recall this episode in the life of Mary and Martha, two sisters abiding under the same roof? What "better part" has Mary chosen but to act in concert with the divine will in her that has never participated in wrath and never shall? Jesus sits with this "Mary" in each of us, reclining peacefully in our soul and imparting to us the food of his own blessed presence. For even in the home of our own soul he is Host and we are guest.

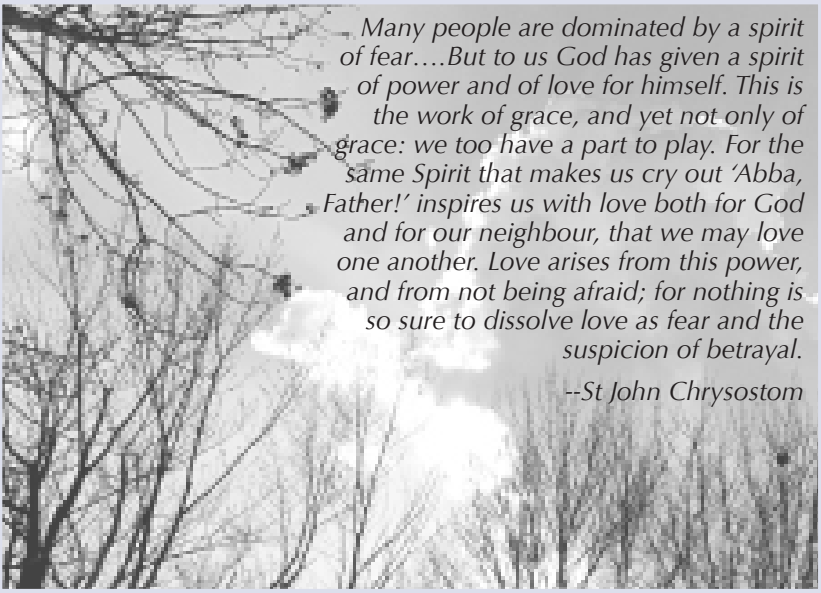
And what can we say of Martha? St. Luke says, *"Jesus entered a certain village where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home."* Martha begins well. She responds eagerly to the divine hospitality manifested in Jesus and welcomes him into her home. In Martha too there is a divine will that has never consented to sin and never shall. But when her frailty overcomes her and Martha becomes unsure of her place with Jesus, in a desperate bid for security she resorts to contention. Then Jesus looks upon Martha most tenderly, as Julian would say, and naming her difficulty reveals to her the true state of things.

Julian says, "Our Lord of His mercy shows us our sin and our weakness by the sweet gracious light of Himself, for our sin is so vile and so horrible that He of His courtesy will not show it to us except by the light of His grace and mercy...courteously He protects us and lets us know when we go amiss;… He waits for us and does not change His demeanor, for He wills that we be transformed and oned to Him in love as He is to us." (Ch 78)

"Love speaks everywhere" says St Bernard of Clairvaux. Of his endless courtesy Jesus calls our name not just once but twice, *"Martha, Martha."*

Jesus invites us to see the truth of our distraction and resentment, then waits for the time when the contrariness in us can assent to his cure. Meanwhile, our experience of sin and miserableness births the contrition that makes us receptive to mercy. Julian says, "And if we do not feel ourselves eased very quickly, we may be sure that [Jesus] is practicing the behavior of a wise mother, for if He sees that it would be more benefit to us to mourn and weep, out of love He permits it with compassion and pity until the best time." (Ch 61)

If there is a polarity in the story of Mary and Martha, it is not one that opposes the contemplative life to the active life. If there is any distance between Mary and Martha it is measured by the degree to which Martha has not yet understood her own condition of wrath, and the degree to which she has yet to consent to the merciful action of God in its exposure and cure. For in the end, these two wills in us, one divine, one contrary, are meant to be oned and reconciled. Whether engaged in unremitting activity or in contemplative repose, this is the one thing necessary, to consent to and act in accord with the courteous hospitality of Jesus dwelling peacefully in our soul, attaining to the same joy in him that he always and already has in us.



Book Notes: *Peace Be With You*

Peace Be With You
David Carlson
Thomas Nelson 2011
ISBN 978-0-8499-4718-6
pp 275

"Going to church" can be a disheartening activity sometimes — if we compare what Jesus said and did with what goes on in the world, even the small world of the pews surrounding us. What has happened to Christianity? The spreading of Christianity away from its Jewish roots affected its doctrine: it picked up the warrior ethos of those whom it converted. (See A. Bartlett's *Cross Purposes: The Violent Grammar of Christian Atonement*, for the on-going effects of the change.) A religion that is predicated on violence in God Himself (ie where God is perceived as turning on His own Son) as the mythologies of Northern Europe saw the gospel — how then could such an interpretation not spawn further violence? Is there anywhere that Jesus's teaching of a loving God who has nothing to do with violence might have been preserved?

David Carlson sets out to see. He undertakes a project of visiting a number of monasteries, contemplative organizations and individuals with a genuine "test case": how did they respond to the event of 9/11 at the World Trade Center? Did their response advocate forgiveness and hope — or revenge, which seemed to be the general reaction in our country? "I began a journey to monasteries across the country in search of a "word of life" for our troubled age. . . . By the end of this journey, I had to confront my impoverished understanding of forgiveness in order to make room for the radical power of that holy act. . . I woke to a new reality, where the divided worlds of enemy and friend have been replaced by only one category — the neighbor who has sacred value (pp. x, xi). His survey proved his case; and, most interestingly, tells how it changed his own life. For those of us who are contemplative monastics, it is humbling to read that what we say we believe and how we are living is perceived as of radical value in the world today.

Community Notes

In late fall we began the annual review of the vegetable garden with the move and expansion of the garlic bed. Winter garden work has commenced with the hopeful sorting of seeds, designing of plots, and dreaming of green.

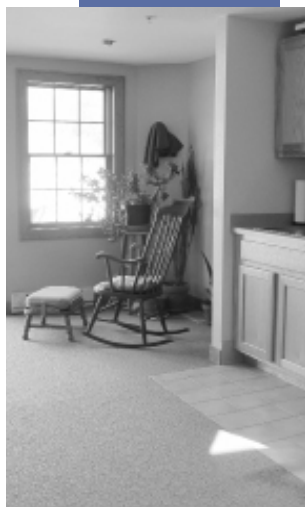
One of our black cats, Murphy, died in November; past visitors will remember him as the feline guest steward. The remaining two cats (Whitby and Tessa) keep their respective corners of the house, and their distance.

Our community retreat in Advent was led by Sr Leslie of the Community of the Holy Spirit. She had come from a snowless NY hoping to find a snowy WI, but we were not able to accommodate her with more than a flurry.

After the customary delays, the remodelling in the entryway was at last begun in mid-November, which seems longer and longer ago. So far, we have some new walls, a larger parlor, and a great deal of dust to show for it, as well as general upheaval and serial displacement of several common household items which were 'always' in certain locations that no longer exist. However, we have the same excellent contractor that conducted our extension a few years ago, and anticipate completion sometime in Lent.

The winter has not been very snowy, though in 3rd Advent we shared in half of a blizzard (mostly the wind half) that tore a few sizeable pieces out of the giant silver maple out front. Despite this good start the snowblower did not get further exercise until February, when much wet and heavy snow gave the new swivelling mailbox opportunity to prove its durability against the onslaught of the snowploughs.

General and Senior Chapter were held in January, and in February we had our first Visitation with our new Bishop Visitor the Rt Rev Wendell Gibbs of the Diocese of Michigan.



The wintertime spot for catching color: the floristry • Mthr Hilary at work on hot cross buns • The 'Lenten Triangle' arrives in the Great Room after the equinox

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