Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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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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The Order of Julian of Norwich
2812 Summit Avenue
Waukesha WI 53188

Our Choice

Deborah Lang ObJN

"...and while they were sailing he fell asleep. A gale swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, "Master, Master, we are perishing!" And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased, and there was a calm. He said to them, "Where is your faith?" They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, "Who then is this that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" Luke 8:23-25 NRSV

Each of us has waited out a storm of one type or another. At times a storm is a pleasant interlude, a refreshing rain shower followed by a birds singing and a fragrance like no other. Other times, a storm is a powerfully horrific force which leaves nothing but devastation in its wake. We sometimes refer to storms to describe our lives: we weather a crisis of family, health, employment or finances. Perhaps some us find ourselves in the midst of such a storm and are waiting for an end, a resolution. The problem with storms, however, is that they are so darn unpredictable. We wait for we know not what. How long will it last? What will things look like when it is over? Is the worst part over? Or is the worst yet to come?

Despite the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of storms, we can't help but try to gain the upper hand. We wait within the confines of our mind and there we are subject to the phantoms and desires of our own making. We "set the stage" for specifics: determine what should be, measure possible outcomes and responses — then wait for our imaginings and pretendings to become reality. We wait for what we imagine. This waiting is rife with fear, anxiety and disappointment.

We make the same mistake as the disciples. We think that our Lord is unaware of our storm. How is that possible? How can the Author of Life be unaware? It could be argued that He is the storm itself. He knows, yet He lies sleeping. In the midst of our storm we shout "don't you care that we are perishing?" And all the while stay locked in the frenzy of pulling our oars and tugging our ropes. If we were but to

wait and listen He will answer. He will rebuke the storm and there will be a calm of sorts; but He will rebuke us also, “Where is your faith?” When the storm had passed the disciples asked of each other, “Who then is this?” They had learned nothing. They were no closer to knowing Him.

We can wait within our mind or we can wait with Him. With Him there is a certainty that something is to come but it is a certainty with no boundary or structure. It is a peaceful, assured rest — a time of waiting in hope that God will act, is indeed acting now. This waiting allows us to be present to the moment, with all its trials and consolations, and rest in the Will of God. Our Lord lies sleeping; He does not even pray. It is the rhythm of His breathing that whispers, “Thy will be done”.

Our boat is tossed and torn by storm and wave. Our Lord lies sleeping. What if, rather than shouting “deliver us!” we simply rest by His side? In the midst of our storm, what if we brought our entire being to Him and rested by His side? No pleading for deliverance; nothing but the calm silence of self-offering.

The Tension of Faith

Fr John-Julian OJN

One of the first unusual aberrations on Julian and her teaching that I heard years ago, and which continues to surface right up to the present day, was that of Julian as a Universalist -— that is, that she believed that literally everyone would be saved and would end up in heaven.

The argument ran, "After all, what else could the 'Great Deed' be that God was going to do? And how else could the Lord tell Julian that 'All shall be well?'"

I mentioned this in the introductory preface to *A Lesson of Love,* and the question I asked there is the question I continue to ask: "If you believe in the integrity of Julian's revelations and her teachings, then why don't you listen when Julian explains that this Great Deed '…is hidden and sealed from us…for that is our Lord's secret purpose, and it is proper for His servants, out of obedience and reverence, *not to wish to know His purpose*.' In other words, it is not our business to know that 'Great Deed' until it is revealed to us in God's good time". It is patently clear that Julian did not intend to fantasize about what that "Great Deed" might be, and that she considered it none-of-our-business until God saw fit to inform us. It does seem to me that if that solution was one that satisfied Julian, it ought to satisfy us as well, and, following her, we ought to keep our hands and minds off the matter. In passing, it is exactly this willingness on Julian's part to live in the tension of issues and unexplained problems that endeared her particularly to Thomas Merton.

I mention all of this because it is characteristic of much modern, non-academic thought about Julian, primarily on the part of those who see her as an apparently radical feminist 14th century writer. It seems almost impossible for a person to read Julian's work without projecting on to it all of the reader's own prejudices and values. In fact, I have often said that Julian's *Revelation of Divine Love* is very like Holy Scripture in that aspect: it is prolix and condensed and complex enough that one can pull out a thought here or a phrase there and make it seem to fit into whatever religious or theological program one is promoting at the moment.

One of the hardest tasks for a Julian devotee is to find a hermaneutical approach to Julian's work that would make it relevant and applicable to our lives as Christians in the 21st century. It is difficult to translate Julian's Middle English *language* into contemporary terms, (and every now and then, considering my own translation, I have a twinge when I realize that a word could probably have been better translated). And if that is a difficult challenge, it is vastly — sometimes immeasurably — more difficult to translate Julian's *thought*. The reason for this is that in spite of all her freshness and unique and valuable spiritual insights, Julian was a 14th century English Catholic woman — and as we read her, we must never forget that.

It is this fact that stands at the intersection of what I think is the biggest, broadest, widest, most cosmic of issues that our Mother Julian confronts in her book. If I had to summarize what I think is going on as Julian is writing down her visions and her reflection on them, I think I would say that it is the mega-confrontation between personal experience and theological verity.

The first part of her book is primarily about the experience of her showings, her visions of the crucified Lord. After all, one of her requests was that she could experience the crucifixion of Jesus in the same way as those who were historically present at that crucifixion experienced it. And that is the grace that God gives her in the answering of her prayer. That is precisely what the showings do — in fact, they do it so deeply and so powerfully that Julian is almost sorry that she

asked for something that caused so much sympathetic pain. She says that if she knew what she was asking for, she would not have had the courage to ask it.

So far, in her work, she adds little to the mystical and ascetical work of others before and after her. The crucifixion is made graphically clear to her, and she sees deeply into the sheer humanity of the suffering Savior. In that way, she complements the centuries-long Christian traditions in an almost archetypal medieval way — that is, she experiences the Christ not as ascended, glorified, and divine (as had been the mainline Christian tradition up to that time) but she now has impressed upon her the *other* side of the Incarnation. Now the true *humanity* of the Savior rises to the fore, and for a time, like many of her late medieval confreres she is lost in the historicity of the Incarnation, the flesh-and-bloodness of it, the "carnal" part of in-car-nation, as it were. So, albeit her showings are in some sense midrash on the historico-biblical accounts of the Passion, and although her immersion in the physicality of the crucifixion introduces projections and suggestions about physical details that may not exist in previous accounts, she is much in the mainstream of medieval thought with its then-new humanization of Jesus.

Consequently, if her fame depended upon the showings alone, there would be little there that is unique. However, what *is* unique is the second part of her book — the part which has to do with comprehending the implications of the visionary experiences she has had — with delving into the tension between what her experiences and intuition tell her, on the one hand, and what she knows to be true from the teachings of her Church.

The tension is striking: she asks herself, and she asks her readers to consider, how one reconciles the utter, immeasurable, almost inconceivable ubiquity of God's love with the church's absorption with sin, punishment, wrath, chastisement, and the like. How does Julian handle the monumental power of her personal experience when it is set beside the faith of the Church, the historical, traditional, universal creeds and beliefs in which she has placed her confidence?

Often, the answer to the question for the modern ascetic or contemporary theologian is to maintain adamantly that personal experi-

ence is utterly central and absolutely primary, and that the tradition must bend and give way, or even evaporate, in the face of that experience. To oversimplify for the sake of contrast, the implication is, "What I experience is true, by virtue of the fact that I experience it. And what I do not or cannot experience is *not* true, by virtue of the fact that I have not experienced it."

This sort of error reflects the cultural, social, and economic developments which inexorably lifted the individual entirely out of the context of the community and deified that individual, making the *self* the uttermost authority, sturdily denying what used to be considered objective in the name of the all-absorbing subject, the "I".

But what is the uniqueness of Julian's way of dealing with that tension between the corporate tradition and the personal experience? Her answer to this conundrum seems a strange one to the modern scientific mind because Julian's answer is that *there is no solution!* And that is a mind-blowing conclusion — almost totally intolerable to the modern mind which glories in its ability to find solutions to all problems.

Julian says, in essence, that the power of her visions seems in some ways contrary to the teachings of the Church. It is a tension that she would like to see resolved. Indeed, she asks God to resolve it in more than one place. And no resolution comes. God does not point a cosmic finger at one side of the problem or the other.

Again, the modern mind can say too easily, "Julian was really just scared of coming to conclusions which would be seen to be Lollardry and heretical, and she just protects herself by not coming down on one side or the other." And I believe, again, that that is the projection of the modern mind.

Julian's genius is that she sees the tension, recognizes and understands it, *and accepts it*. She is not driven to say, "Ah, my visions are right, and the Church is wrong!" or "The Church teachings seem con-

trary to what I have seen, and so my visions must be in error." She says, in effect, "This, on the one hand, is what I have seen, and that, on the other hand, is what I have been taught and have believed is true — and I do not understand how one can maintain both at the same time, but that is precisely what I am going to do."

And so she goes on, deep in prayer as she must have been during those twenty years of finishing her writings, and lives directly in the insoluble center of the problem itself. What I think she is saying is, "Both of these things are true, but how they fit together is beyond me — and I *intentionally give up trying to reconcile them*. And someday, in a way I cannot even conceive, God will clear up the tensions. In the meantime, I accept my limits, and live my life within both realities: that of the corporate teachings and that of the individual experience."

Her medieval worldview does not change — she simply recognizes the tension, and then lives within it. The Mass is still the Mass, her vows are still her vows, intercession for the departed is still her duty, and she does not doubt for a minute the validity of the theological structure in which she was raised and in which she lived, even though much of it is a mystery to her.

That, I think, is the utterly unique greatness of our blessed patroness — and, to my mind, it is the central message she was meant to provide for our confusing age. It is never either-or in this business of mystical reality. It is always both-and! Yes: "This thou art; and this thou art not," and how that can be, I do not understand, but that it is, I believe with all my heart. She said it herself so well in those paradoxical words from Chapter 10:

"And thus I saw Him and I sought Him, and I possessed Him and I lacked Him. And this is, and should be, our ordinary behavior in this life, as I see it."

That is Julian's gift to me and, I think, to all of us in the upheaving stresses and tensions of the contemporary Church. We live in the tearing middle of tensions, and I know that I must never take to my lonely

self the judgments that are too great for me to make; nor must I discredit myself and my experiences and insights and simply write them off as foolish. And sometimes those two — the teachings and the experiences — will not match exactly — and from there on in, it is simply up to God to work his unknown, and mysterious Great Deed. And *then* I shall know. And *then* all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

Theological Tea

David Zelinsky AOJN

Imagine a tea cup, a saucer, a tea pot, all placed on a towel. Imagine the tea cup is upside down. What happens when you pour the tea?

St Augustine said that conversion is turning away from the thing that will kill you, and towards the thing that will give you eternal life.

Turn the tea cup right side up.

Before pouring, consider the tea cup. First of all, it represents kenosis, the process of being emptied out. How can the tea cup function, and receive the tea, unless it is empty? Thus, we too must be emptied out, in order to receive the Holy Spirit, God's infinite grace.

Note also that the tea cup must not be cracked, but whole in order to receive the tea. The health of the receptacle matters. Likewise, we too must have healthy boundaries, we too must be spiritually well in order to retain the Life-giving Spirit poured into us. In addition, the tea cup does not receive the tea for its own sake, but for the sake of others. The tea cup's ministry is to quench the thirst of others. So too, we must share of the grace and Spirit that fills us, not for our own sake, but for the sake of ministry to others.

When we receive the Spirit, it is not something for us to hoard. Just as tea is best drunk soon after it is poured, the fruits of the Spirit are best shared soon after they have been received.

Next, imagine that you are serving a small circle of friends their tea. Before pouring, you place a little sticker on the side of the tea cup facing you. You ask the person across from you to describe the sticker. They cannot because the tea cup is solid, and they cannot see through it. What to do?

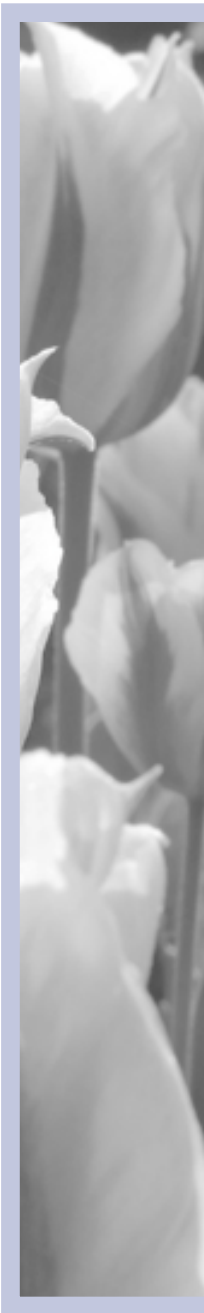
The solution is to ask for the perspective of someone whose position is diametrically opposed to your own. Your friend could ask you to describe the sticker. To paraphrase St Francis, it is better to hear than to be heard, to understand than to be understood. Respect is related to the word spectacles. To respect someone is to really see them, as the icon through whom you can see the face of Christ. The shadows melt away, and discernment begins, when we bring into our perspective those whose views are the opposite of ours.

Back to the tea cup. Ask each friend in the circle to describe the portion of the pattern that they can see. Sounds like the tea cup will be fully described? Now ask, instructing everyone to maintain their position, for a description of the bottom of the tea cup. To comprehend is to fully and completely grasp something. The “prehend” is like prehensile, as in a prehensile tail, that can grasp. A circle of friends, surrounding a tea cup, cannot fully comprehend it. How much more difficult it is to comprehend God.

Humility comes from the word “humus”, the living part of the earth. To be humble, means to be in touch with your roots, to be a son or daughter of the earth. In humbling ourselves, our perspective will be transformed, and even if we cannot see it, others when they look at us will see someone whose image is becoming conformed to that of Christ.

After Easter

Sr Therese OJN



Now that Jesus is risen, is everything really still the same? This question is going to come before the disciples as they take up their lives again after three itinerant years. As they do, another question will come: why are they still following Jesus? What is the difference this makes for them and for their world?

All who follow Jesus have encountered and have been encountered by Jesus, and in recognizing these encounters in their own lives they have begun to experience the mystery at the heart of the deceptively simple statement 'Jesus Christ is risen'. They have had to answer the question 'who is Jesus Christ to us?' with a response more meaningful than any amount of information, academic or otherwise, could possbily provide.

Because, in the end, what has captivated them is a relationship more meaningful, more powerful, than anything else they have ever encountered, and one they have the opportunity of recognizing in everything.

In their recognition of Jesus and in their response will be the keynote of their discipleship. When Jesus encounters his disciples on the water and is recognized, Peter responds at once; at Jesus's least word he leaps up and runs, he will do anything, he will act against all he holds as knowledge, if Jesus says one word. And Jesus tells him 'Follow me.'

Whenever Jesus gives someone this word, he asks also that they leave all else, every former source of meaing, nourishment, security. It is not for any idea, doctrine, or concept that Peter jumps out of the boat and hurries to Jesus, but because for Peter this relationship with Jesus has changed everything, and now orders everything else. He has found that for which he will change everything in his life, and nothing, as long as he follows Jesus, will ever be the same.

Julian's Notebook

Reflections on the *Revelations*

Julian's "Good Friday"? My long-ago first reading of Julian's description of Christ's Passion was intensely uncomfortable. But when Christ changed his countenance in Shewing 8, my mood, like Julian's, changed too. And I was Julian's forever with her parable of the Lord and the Servant.

When I looked again at her vision of the Passion, I noticed — really noticed — her color words: the blood was red, brown-red, bright red; there were frequent changes of color, browness and blackness, pale and deathly ashen, blue, dark-blue. And the temperature: the hot blood, a dry sharp wind and wondrous cold. Not far from the coast of Essex, the dry sharp wind as I walked from the train station to my house made even my teeth wince and tingle. Yes, that drying and shriveling in the cold — a dreadful ending of our Lord's Passion. Julian surely knew that wind from experience.

In her own passion, Julian changed her focus to look at the crucifix which her curate brought. She feels as if she is beginning to die; her peripheral vision disappears and she sees only in tunnel vision the bright circle containing the bleeding head of the Lord Jesus under the garland of thorns, a Shewing which was "alive, active, hideous, dreadful, sweet, lovely". This genuinely physical vision of the Crucified, in its different forms, is the background for all the ghostly understandings and spiritual insights which are put into her mind and heart during the Shewings. That constant bright circle is something we tend to forget, especially in the Long Text with its deep theological meditations.

Our own celebration of Good Friday almost is swallowed in the dark side of the Crucifixion. But Julian? She shouts aloud "Bless the Lord" and embarks on a paean of praise to the Trinity who "almost filled my heart with joy...our Maker, our Keeper, our everlasting Lover...who for love enwraps us, holds us, and all encloses us because of His tender love, so that he may never leave us". Our Lady, the vision of creation, her famous prayer, God's love of all that He has created the way He created it — we may get to this point sleepily on Easter morning, but surely reading Julian's first Shewing is a salutary exercise.

Book Note: *Elizabeth of the Trinity*

Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Unfolding of Her Message

Joanne Mosley
The Teresian Press 2012

Vol. 1: In the World and In Community, 470 pp.
ISBN 978-0-947616-11-4

Vol. 2: In The Infirmary and After Her Death, 549 pp.
ISBN 978-0-947616-12-1

If you already know Bl Elizabeth of the Trinity, you will welcome these 1019 pages as a treasure trove. If you are meeting her for the first time, you have a challenge in your hands. The work is intended to be an in-depth exploration of her inner life — her "inner wakefulness"— and of her fundamental message. The author's method is to quote and extrapolate from Bl Elizabeth's writings chronologically, in order carefully to track the development of her inner life. Mosley offers some help in two appendices: an overview of each chapter and a superbly detailed chronology of her life.

Though strongly influenced by the message of her contemporary, Bl Elizabeth is *not* St Thérèse of Lisieux all over again. Blessed Elizabeth, who grew from a child of violent tantrums to an adolescent prize-winning pianist, led a happy and busy social life while all the time inwardly determined to become a Carmelite as soon as she could convince her mother to let her enter. Indeed, the book presents her family and friends so carefully that the reader begins to feel them empathetically (not unlike Edith Stein's writing, whose biography Mosley has also written).

Blessed Elizabeth was by personality a dedicated teacher and one of her greatest lessons is to teach the reader the riches she found in St Paul — "his great and generous heart" since he wrote about "nothing but the love of Christ". But Elizabeth was foremost "the soul of one idea" — that of the Divine Indwelling, and it is this teaching, so dear to her heart that it could be called the one theme of her life, that these books bring out so forcefully, and with such detailed success.

Community Notes

After a few false starts in March spring at last arrived in Wisconsin in April. The end of the winter came, for us, with one last broken pipe — this one broken by age, and fortunately easily accessible through the library ceiling. Our old house provides our contractor with a constant stream of things to repair; they generously fit us in their schedule and had the problem fixed very quickly.

When spring did at last arrive we had a Garden Work day with weather made to order, and made a good start on the grounds and vegetable garden.

Among our projects this spring has been getting our prayer-bench production back up. We have been busy in the workshop and anticipate having our wares back in Julian Shop by this summer. However, the biggest project has been the initiation of a soapworks. We will be crafting pure castile soaps in four varieties to sell through the Shop. The first batches will be on sale by late summer. More details to follow in our next issue!

In May Mthr Hilary will be at the annual leaders' meeting of CAROA in Toronto, and in June we will celebrate Julianfest.

From the top: Sr Cornelia decorating Easter eggs • Mthr Hilary at work 'in the soaps' • Oblate Adwoa spreading mulch on our Garden Work day

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Julian House Monastery
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