The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

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In this Issue

We Shall Find 1
Sr Cornelia OJN

The Cost of Being Human 3
Mthr Hilary OJN

Losing 9
Fr John-Julian OJN

Julian's Notebook 11
Reflections on the Revelations

Book Notes: *In the Heart of the Desert*
Elephants in the Rush Hour 12

Community Notes 13

On the cover: Some intrepid robins on the Crown of Thorns sculpture

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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We Shall Find

Sr Cornelia OJN

"We do what we can, and humbly ask mercy and grace, and all that we fall short, we shall find in Him."

WE DO. We have been built for doing, from opposable thumbs to keen minds. In that sense, it's not all that preposterous that our culture should seize upon this ability to *do* and turn it into an idol which is worshipped, sacrificed to and obeyed. Nor so strange that that worship should continue to matter so much to us here — for after all we *are* still children of our time, despite our longing not to be, and we *are* few here and there is indeed much which has to be done.

WHAT WE CAN. But St Benedict and our Rule and the spirit of our Mother St Julian begin to teach us that there is more to life than just *doing,* that doing shouldn't destroy the balance in our life. This creaturely ability to *do* in its modern American format has somehow to diminish in importance and to be transformed as we get ready to return home to our Creator where we will have to know instead how to *be*. What served us well on earth will have to be very different in heaven. If we co-operate with this process of transformation (an embarrassing and painful one whether it is connected to our own aging process or not), we slowly begin to realize that, with respect to doing, *more* is not the answer — WHAT WE CAN is much closer to it. *What we can* is a little phrase which hides much wisdom. But that phrase still goes mightily against our current grain, so we . . .

HUMBLY ASK MERCY. Ah, but what mercy! The mercy we actually get is not at all what we had in mind. It turns out that what is given us *to do* when we begin the transformation process is to put up with the imperfections in quantity and quality of doing in ourselves, in others (and so it would seem, in things as well) without faltering in love. We had hoped that mercy would build us up but, alas, what a monstrous amount of self-diminishment is concealed in that simple statement of "putting up with without faltering"! And how rich in opportunities for diminishment a monastery turns out to be! So it is vital that. . .

WE HUMBLY ASK MERCY *AND* GRACE. As we settle into this very *un*settling environment, our Lord gives us (if we will *only* accept it) the grace to perceive in our soul that the very frustrations involved in all the diminishments of *doing* are the catalysts which somehow or other actually start to turn us toward the new life of *being* — we have inched a toe-tip into the long, long home stretch — and that moment of perception is worth a shout of joy. And that perception is the gift of all gifts: that diminishment of the drive and ability to *do* according to our own standard is part of the divine plan, not careless failure on our part. . . . But what about

ALL THAT WE FALL SHORT? Indeed, a toe-tip's length may be all that we can manage for a very long time and if we carry on judging ourselves by worldly standards, we realize that we surely may seem to others to be a sham. But that sort of judgment is exactly what we are *not* to pass on. What we pass on is that we have at least briefly glimpsed a vista into the new ground of *being* and that we have a message which cannot be conveyed by what we *do* but simply and terrifyingly by what we *are* — that is: we are now not only willing to be in private, but to be seen to be in public, (like St Paul) fools for Christ. Because we know that ALL WE FALL SHORT, WE SHALL FIND IN HIM . . . WE SHALL FIND IN HIM.

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The Cost of Being Human

Mthr Hilary OJN

One of the privileges of life in the monastery is getting to accompany people in prayer — all sorts of requests come to us by all sorts of means. Sometimes they are invitations to share in a thanksgiving, or come alongside expectant parents or alongside others making other significant life transitions. But mostly these prayer requests concern suffering, and of just about every kind and variety.

Showing himself in his crucifixion to Julian, Jesus tells her quite matter-of-factly, "Whatever you do you shall have woe." As the story in the Book of Genesis has it our forebears understood this state of affairs as curse. But is there a way to begin to understand the suffering which so acutely shows up our contingency as something else instead? Is it possible to discern any good in these matters of God's inscrutable allowing?

Julian did not discount the reality of suffering and yet she understood that when we come up to heaven "we will see clearly in God the secrets which are now hidden from us. Then shall none of us be moved to say in any way, 'Lord, if it had been thus-and-so, then it would have been all well', but we shall say in all one voice, 'Lord, blessed mayest Thou be! Because it is as it is, it is well'". Julian understood that, not only will our present travail be resolved in the end, but the very fact of our contingency, even its content has become part of the means of our return to God. In one of his Christmas homilies Dr Rowan Williams spoke of the scandal of the Incarnation — how "when God chose to come speak face to face with humanity we were met not with a being of eloquent power but with the cry of a helpless infant. In the face of that," he said, "all our best theological language is the noise of stumbling over things in the dark".

Participation

When we celebrate the Eucharist, lifting up the cup of wine we come to the place where Jesus says "Drink this, all of you." And we will, every one of us, drink of Jesus' cup one way or another. Is it possible,

then, that we might join our suffering of whatever kind or cause to that of Jesus whose suffering redeemed the world?

If you wade at all in the Anglo-Catholic stream of our tradition you have perhaps heard the deacon of the Mass say at the admixture of water and wine, "By the mingling of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." It is said that "what has been assumed by Christ has been redeemed by Christ". This being so, the human frailty taken up by Jesus has been redeemed by Jesus. In Jesus contingency itself has become holy, and a means of redemption.

Toward deeper understandings

One of the central truths of Julian's *Revelation of Love* is that the Passion and death of Jesus exists simultaneously with what Julian calls the eternal bliss of the Holy Trinity. These two movements are inseparable in the life of God — always in the background of the Crucifixion is the deep blessed joy of the Divine Life.

The Host of the Eucharist is an icon of this fact. For love, Jesus who most supremely 'is' inhabits this life-giving bread which in outward form is most fragile, ephemeral. God the limitless one accepts the limitation of containment.

The redemption of all creation which was accomplished by the entirety of the life and death of Jesus continues in specificity in me and in you. Julian says that out of Christ our Mother we are endlessly born, and the from the protection of the blessed side of Christ we shall never come — that all our life, all our becoming, all our experience is in Jesus, never leaves those bounds. As St Paul says, "in him we live and move and have our being." (Acts 17:28)

All this is to say that whether we discern it or not we have the most intimate connection with and participation in Jesus' death and resurrection and in the bliss of the Divine Life of God. Where we live is exactly in that space made by the two halves of the Host broken in the Eucharist, exactly in that tension between the reality of human suffering and the reality of eternal blessed joy. We are with God there, right here where we are and as we are.

The eternal bliss of the Trinity in which we participate is not sensate, not something going on at the level of human emotion and feeling. It is Julian's way of speaking of the life of God as God is in God's self, the love that is given and shared by the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and which, as it were, in mindful delight spilled over and created all that is. In other words, the bliss of the Holy Trinity is more a basic fact, like the gravitational pull of the earth which we usually experience without conscious sensation or comment. Even so, we are sometimes given the gift of experiencing our life in God as a kind of unshakeable knowing, as deep peace or deep contentment regardless of what might be going on at the surface of our lives.

Sometimes, however, events or experiences are so overwhelming that we can't immediately recognize that we are with God here, where we are. This double truth of the simultaneous Passion and bliss of God and the truth of our participation in them is very often only realized in hindsight.

If you have ever had the experience of culture shock you understand you've been suffering from it only from the distance of eventual acclimation to the culture or of exit from the situation. In much the same way, there can be a great deal of distance in our every day experience from any given suffering and its resolution in understanding. The task at hand is to gain the skill of seeing our contingency in all its many manifestations and our life taken up by Jesus into the bliss of the Holy Trinity as concurrent, simultaneous movement. We get to practice, again and again, the skill of living into present circumstances as Present, as gift, as yet another Presentation of Christ to us. As always, we have the choice to refuse this assignment.

We could refuse dramatically, for instance, like Job's wife who kept telling Job to curse God and die. But it is much more common to get stuck in a cul-de-sac of feeling undeservedly singled-out, or trying to figure out why this or that thing has befallen. "Why is this happening to me?" is a perfectly legitimate question. But if we are going to persist in asking it, we have to be prepared should the universe answer us back with the perfectly logical response of "why not?"

While the question "why" has its time and place, in the longer term it is probably not going to be the most fruitful way of proceeding. The question "why is this happening to me" has at some point to become something more generative, say, "What kind of food is this?" In this way of looking at things, to ask "Where is God in all this?" becomes both question and adventure — not because God is not there but because God is.

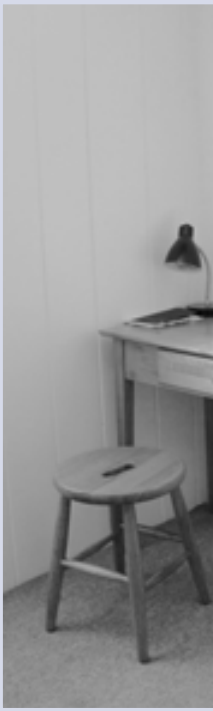
In this adventure we don't get easy answers to spiritualize or explain our pain away. What we *do* get is Jesus-with-us, Jesus nailed to the cross. The Incarnation tells us the answer of value is going to be the existential one.

The poet Gilbert Shaw wrote of the crucifixion and of contemplative participation in it, what can be called intercession, this way:

> In stillness nailed
> to hold
> all time
> all change
> all circumstance
> in and to
> Love's embrace.

To paraphrase St Paul, though our outward body is in decay, our inner heart expands, sees, knows, joys and lives. Can we begin to be conscious of that living expansion concurrently with our suffering?

When we look deeper into this matter of contingency and its holy uses (for God never wastes anything) a



strange thing begins to happen. There are things and events in our lives that conventional wisdom has taken to calling "good" and other things and events that it has taken to calling "bad". The strange thing is that a closer inspection of contingency, particularly a theological one, requires that we begin to re-evaluate some of these labels.

One of the collects in the Office of Morning Prayer spells all this out wonderfully. In it what we ask to be delivered from in the course of the day is listed in order of importance. "Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord." (BCP 100).

Sin — our willful participation in what Julian says has no substance of its own yet clogs up our capacity for receptivity to Divine Love — sin is more dangerous to us than adversity, which only affects what is bodily and temporal.

We already know this, at least in our heads; we are after all joined to Jesus who has been through death and has proved it to have no lasting substance. But it is only with practice that we begin to take on the confidence that where Jesus is, there we are, that "whether we live or die, we are the Lord's". We get that practice by living Eucharistically, resolutely inhabiting that space that encompasses both the reality of our suffering and the reality that our life is most truly going on amidst the eternal joy of the Divine Life.

Making concrete what is understood

One thing we can undertake to help bridge the apparent distance between the truth of our life held in the eternal bliss of God and the truth of our own pains and passions is the practice of worship. Deliberate, even dogged worship in the face of trouble keeps open our capacity for receptivity even when there is no immediately

sensible return on our efforts. This is because liturgy is subversive in its working, meant to be a kind of slow-release medicine. The strength and good of regular, ordered worship lies not so much in its immediate emotional content as in its cumulative familiarity. Liturgy, so to speak, stocks the larder. From time to time, bits of it fall into waking thought, ready to hand when we are able to hear it.

Another practice hand in hand with a commitment to worship come-what-may is the cultivation of a capacity for silence, some kind of disciplined distance from event and word and image. Ready apprehension of the fact that "where Jesus is, there we are" requires the discipline of holy, compassionate detachment, even from ourselves — the ability, as someone has said, "to look over the shoulder" of overwhelming events to something beyond them. This is to act out Gilbert Shaw's poem, "In stillness nailed/ to hold all time, all change, all circumstance/ in and to Love's embrace."

One of the fruits of this dispassion is the freedom of humility, freedom from the illusion that we are and must be our own sole support. The storyteller George MacDonald put this wisdom into the mouth of one of his characters, that "Things are unbearable only until we have them to bear — the possibility of bearing them comes with them, for we are not the roots of our own being." We are rooted in the eternal, unassailable, all-sufficient love of God; our prayers with and for each other help us remember this.

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Losing

Fr John-Julian OJN

One of the signs of being human is the ability to communicate with others in words. But that is too simple a statement, because very often the very words we use to communicate are responsible for mis-communication. And this is doubly true when we deal with translations from another language. I bear emphatic witness to that after having spent several years translating from Latin, French, and Middle English.

And when we come to biblical language, translation is a double challenge since the meaning may have serious implications for a Christian's faith.

One of the words from the New Testament that has been a serious challenge ever since the King James Version was translated, is the Greek word *psyche*. It is of course, the root of our English words *psyche* and *psychology*. It has usually been translated as "life"— as it is rendered in the verse from Matthew chapter 10, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." But it has far deeper meanings of "heart" or "soul" or "mind" or even of "self". And I like to think that our Lord is speaking here of something greater or deeper than mere earthly life.

Father John L. McKenzie — probably, with Raymond Brown, one of the premier Catholic biblical scholars of the twentieth century — wrote about our verse: "The word should be rendered 'self' rather than 'soul' or 'life'. The preservation of the person is achieved only by yielding the person entirely to Jesus." Walter Bower's massive and definitive New Testament Greek lexicon even speaks of our line from Matthew and says: "Since the soul is the center of both the earthly and the supernatural life, a man can find himself facing the question in which character he wishes to preserve it for himself."

As I studied this passage, I came to realize that in substance it is quoted twice in Matthew and twice in Luke — so it must have been seen to be an important teaching, but what does it mean?

"Those who find their life will lose it" — the Greek verb here is *eurísko* which has the sense of "to find," "to gain," "to obtain," "to preserve" or "to discover." And the only reading I can think of that seems to make sense to me is "Those who seek only to preserve themselves will lose their souls" — that is, those who go out of the way to protect themselves, who choose to compromise anything and everything for their own well-being or their own preference or even their own defense will finally lose the very well-being they have striven to gain.

And the second part of the verse: "…those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Here the Greek verb for "lose" is *apóllumi*, which carries the sense of "ruin" or "destroy" or "lose" or even "kill", so for me the line would read: "Those who forsake themselves for my sake will gain their souls." And so: "Those who seek only to preserve themselves will lose their souls; but those who forsake their very selves for my sake will gain their souls."

What interests me most about the idea lying behind this sentence is that it is only by personal sacrifice that one can gain full personhood — full humanity. It is not, as most commentators would have it, that sacrifice makes one a good person — but that without such sacrifice, one cannot be even a whole person at all. When asked to define the uniqueness of humanity, I have often said that on this earth humans — and only humans — can truly reason, create, and sacrifice. And I think St Matthew is agreeing with me that "sacrifice" is an essential ingredient for human nature, and without it, we would in some spiritual way be not-quite-fully-human.

And this accords with my conviction that the *following* of Christ, the living of the full Christian life is *the* way to be fully human, and that avoiding any dimensions of the Christian way does in fact compromise one's humanity. In other words, I always want to suggest that the pattern of life offered by Jesus does not make one only a better person, it makes one simply more fully and truly a *person*! In that sense, Jesus asks nothing of us except the perfection of our created humanity. He wants us above all to be human! The preservation of our personhood requires giving over our own selves utterly to Christ. So, in Jesus's words: "Those who seek only to preserve themselves will lose their souls; but those who forsake their very selves for my sake will gain their souls." ✠

Julian's Notebook

Reflections on the *Revelations*

Julian a desert amma? Her choice to live as an anchoress made her one. Enclosed, a life of disciplined prayer, simplicity in worldly needs, offering counsel to those who sought her out — she was the medieval counterpart of those ammas in Egypt.

In considering the life of the desert Christians, the correspondence with Julian's life at times becomes quite clear. One topic particularly: in the *Shewings* Julian says that "sin is behovely". How that word troubled Julian at first! But she comes to the same conclusion as the abbas and ammas, that such humiliations are a necessary part in the life of seeking God — humiliations and worldly aspirations make an inner story that "fits", is "just so" — because it is *our* story.

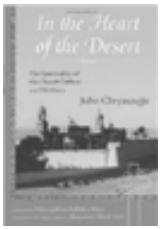
"I will totally shatter you," says God, "and then put you back together". That happens in the spiritual life. God's love for us is from without beginning and if we are imperfect by nature and by nurture, His love for us is not changed. In our self-help age we feel compelled to "fix ourselves" rather than accept our life story and let God work with it. In the monastery, though we must work to grow beyond them, we are invited to accept our own faults as 'behovely'. The contemplative life is not an easy one, but it brings great peace once we trust in the process.

But what of the hard teaching about bringing not peace but a sword, and the betrayal of family members one against the other? Such very *un*-Julian sentiments. No. She makes us think deeply as she spends page after page after page working such teaching out. For example, in Chapter 48 she says: "ever as our contrariness makes pain, shame, and sorrow for us here on earth. . .we shall thank and bless our Lord, endlessly rejoicing that ever we suffered woe. . .because of an attribute of blessed love that we shall discover in God — which we might never have known without woe going before."

Jesus's teaching tackles all the human emotions, and ranges from the beautiful, the thoughtful, the memorable. But the stern rebuke and the painful story have their part to play, as Julian realizes.

It is no wonder that Denys Turner begins his marvelous book on Julian as theologian with "sin is behovable". Or that Brian Thorne's essay "The Quality of Tenderness" suggests a very Julian remedy. *We* need to think as deeply as Julian did.

Book Notes: *In the Heart of the Desert* *Elephants in the Rush Hour*



In the Heart of the Desert: The Spirituality of the Desert Fathers & Mothers (Revised)

John Chryssavgis
World Wisdom 2009
ISBN978193331656-7
pp 180

The author's purpose in this very fine book is to "make our time and ways relate" to the Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers rather than to make them "relevant" to our own times and ways. The Sayings essentially present us with one profile: what it means to be human. And to find our own humanity we too must enter our own desert of stillness and retreat.

While the author provides commentary on early monastic history and about the way in which the Sayings were collected and transmitted, he wants the reader to understand what the Abbas and Ammas were really doing. Love and charity were what mattered to them most. But when passions are distorted, as we can recognize that our own so often are, our soul is divided and we are no longer integrated or whole. A single vivid experience of authentic, passionate desire for God is sufficient to advance us much more in the ascetic life than any extremes fasting or vigils. The author's insistence on this point causes us to recognize how all of us need to submit all our passions to the source and end of all desire: to grow into the humanity which Jesus showed and taught. The inclusion of Abba Zosimas' *Reflections* (in the first translation into English) shows this approach more fully than the stylized and familiar Sayings. This Abba shows us what the time-consuming process of "saying a word" really involved!

Also Recommended

Elephants in the Rush Hour by Jenny Hawke [TLM Trading Ltd, 2012. ISBN 978-0-902731-98-1] pp 56

This little book, with artwork by the author, is a month's worth of a Biblical verse for meditation, each with a story rarely more than 250 words, a prayer of about 50 words, and a painting. The stories, about simple everyday happenings, are either from the author's own childhood in India or about her children and family (including pets); and the prayers and evocative paintings pick up the point of each story. The combination is spiritual without being at all "spiritual" and does indeed touch the heart.

Community Notes

Summer has come with lots of rain and the garden has so far produced an incredible thicket of tomato plants, buckets of purslane, turnips as big as melons, endless kale, abundant summer squash, and one zucchini boat.

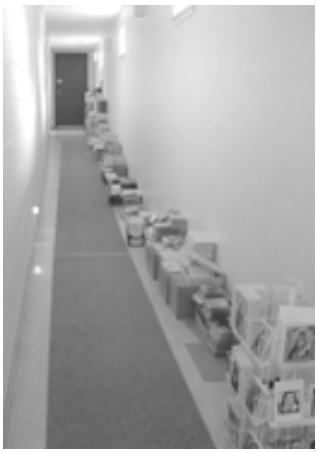
At Julianfest we had the treat of welcoming back a speaker who had first addressed us in 1994. This year Fr Brendan Pelphrey spoke about a possible connection of Celtic spirituality to Julian.

In June a few more trees and bushes moved in. Apart from planting for the future, some of these new residents will provide shade in the north pasture to help keep out invasive plant species.

We are happy to announce that our new website is in development and will be up in a few months. In the train of renewal work on the ground, Julian Shop also had a turn and we painted, refurbished, and put it back together looking brand-new. The newest part of the Shop is the E-commerce page that will appear with the new website.

The newest item in the Shop, our castile soaps, will go on sale beginning 15 September. They will be available for ordering at the same time.

This year our annual ecumenical picnic fell in August, and we had a glorious day without rain for work on the grounds, feasting, and fellowship.



Clockwise from top: Using one of our favorite mowing machines • the crew from Piala's Nursery hefting a birch for planting • the entire inventory of Julian Shop, which was in statio for almost *always (at least to the end of July)*

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