Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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Tidings of change

When change happens in our lives — as it must if we are to grow — what determines our response has a lot to do with what, or to whom, we have given ourselves, and what has overmastered us. The coming of the Light in the birth of Jesus is tidings of great joy, but also tidings of great change.

No sooner will Christmas begin than we will be reminded, in the feast of St Stephen the Deacon, of the disruption this birth will entail for the world, even to the most personal level. 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 just how ill-prepared we can be for the answering of our prayers for justice and peace, how poorly we tend to accept the Coming of God's truth in terms we have not specified. But Stephen's witness will not stop 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 bombastic and passionate as Stephen himself, watching as Stephen dies with words of forgiveness, without bitterness or contempt, 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 world, and thousands will follow.

The Order of Julian of Norwich

is a contemplative Order of monks and nuns in the Episcopal Church. Our aim is to help renew the spiritual life of the Church in three ways: by serving as a witness of the contemplative monastic tradition in the Episcopal Church, second by supporting a vibrant community of Oblates and Associates 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.**

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The Order of Julian of Norwich
W704 Alft Rd
White Lake WI 54491 USA

As Saul found out to his cost, Jesus's coming means change, and change first in ourselves. Change happens whether we want it to or not. The matter is seldom that we do not *want* change but that we want to be completely in control of it, in all possible aspects. Instead we are often asked to let go. And this is not really a passive work, but an active one: to accept the work the Holy Spirit is doing within us through our circumstances though it is beyond our understanding demands a very active — and attentive — faith. In a very real sense, it means accepting a state of essential insecurity, and there being at peace.

What is Jesus about? He said he had come to free human beings from captivity to the satanic powers of the world, so that, seeing who and what God really is, they may give him their allegiance in the perfect freedom of reciprocal love. This can be a very painful change if there are parts of ourselves we still want banished to the outer darkness. Left to ourselves, we attempt to control change and make security and peace by what we like, by whom we hate, whom we fear, whom we approve, whom we notice, or by whom we fail to see at all, and by those we push away from the company of the included. To effect all these things, we use the several currencies of loveless power, even violence. This is as true in our individual persons as it is corporately.

But the Holy Spirit of Jesus gathers us into one, not for any of these reasons or by any of these means — God gathers whom God wills into his household when he wills to do so, and we don't get to adjudicate these choices. The initiative for making community in Jesus lies with Jesus. What is required of us is a posture of courageous, humble, joyful and loving assent to be with the ones he has chosen and gathered; to love him by loving them — whether the "other" is the part of ourselves we have cast out, or another person made in His image — and giving ourselves to and for them whether we actually like them or not.

It is to those who are not the people, those outside the congregation, the otherwise un-blessed to whom Jesus insists upon going, insists upon touching, insists upon making a people included in God's blessing. If we are willing to let Jesus change us, we can be part of His blessing.

First, listen

Mthr Hilary OJN

In his *Rule for Monasteries* St Benedict of Nursia wrote that the life of a monk "ought to be a continuous Lent", but it is the brief liturgical season of Advent that best characterizes the witness of the contemplative monastic life in the Church and the world. Any one particular season of Advent may not be of great moment, just as the physical life of any given monk or nun is as ephemeral as anyone else's. What carries weight is repetition, the sign-value of the collective, Advent upon Advent and the quiet persistence of the monastic witness over time and geography.

What then does Advent, and by extension, the monastic life signify? The Church celebrates the season of Advent, turning each year to the particular and prophetic ministry of St Mary the mother of Jesus and St John the Baptist because it needs that regular re-orientation to a reality outside the immediate that at once invites, encloses, forms, challenges and draws us. This reality looks with concern and compassion upon the world and its present circumstances but is not taken in by agitations to fear or by the face-value of its claims.

In a world where it is normal to be perpetually distracted, where the news cycle has all the life span of an insect, where the spoken and written word are often so much particulate noise, we need occasionally to be confronted with the long view and the largest matters — how we are spending the gift of our lives, the fact that we will someday die, whether and how we have participated in creating good that will outlast us, and so on.

At the same time, these insistent Advent questions also help to allow a better focus on things near to hand. If the contemplative gaze is ultimately on eternal things it is not because the material world we live in is an empty shadow, destined to vanish into nothingness at some final revelation of an ideal existent beyond

time and sufferance. Materially- and time-limited as it is, the goodness of the jar of green tomato pickle I was just enjoying a few minutes ago participates eternally, in however small a way, with the reality of all that has had being. Not only is its goodness not nullified by Jesus's reality eternal in the heavens, it is Jesus's bodily Advent into the world that gives that jar of tomato pickle its legitimacy amidst the panoply of all that is and has been good. Because of Jesus, what is good and materially immediate can open, as a door, upon what is good and ultimate. What is the hinge that makes that door work? It is the quality of listening, patience, reticence, a stance of humble and silent consideration and observation that gives both Advent and the contemplative life its particular flavor. Advent directs us yearly to the witness of one who surrendered herself to the purpose of another and to a biological and spiritual undertaking greater than herself. Like all mothers-to-be Mary simply had to wait upon another life's timing, undergoing developments that she herself did not initiate but to which she leaned into, with wholehearted consent.

An image for this religious orientation to listening and reticence is related by an early Dominican friar, Humbert of Romans in his manual on preaching. "Bernard [of Clairvaux] says, 'If you are sensible, make yourself into a bowl, not a pipe. A pipe receives and pours out almost simultaneously, but a bowl waits until it is full.'"

This bowl — whether it is the person of St Mary pregnant with the Word of God, or we ourselves — is to be of a particular kind, not something like hard-fired porcelain, but something inwardly porous, allowing permeation and change by that very teaching as we carry it, tend it, wait for it to mature within and amongst us. And, of course, here we take the chance that the teaching of God may or may not be borne comfortably as it matures.

Our own patron Julian of Norwich lived quietly as a holy ruminant when, some "twenty years after the time of the showing short three months", curing and maturing together with the brief and quickly

written account of her visions she was prompted by an inner teaching to look again more closely at all the details of the central revelation of the parable of the Lord and the Servant.

The gift of the season of Advent, that orientation to listening, patience, reticence, deeply characterizes the contemplative monastic enterprise, and is one reason many monasteries of the western contemplative tradition are named after Our Lady St Mary. In a world where talk and printed word are too often held cheap, laying bold claim to that listening and reticence (which also characterized our patron St Julian) is one reason we have named our new monastery after St Mary.

Another nuance of Advent, and thus of pregnancy, is the idea of protected bounded space. The Advent season itself is relatively short, but while significantly concentrated it is also significantly fertile. A protected and bounded space is that too, which despite the everyday activity of the mother, a developing human being experiences during its nine-months gestation in the womb.

Let me return to that excellent jar of green tomato pickle for a moment. Those tomatoes were grown here at home, planted from seed, weeded, watered and matured in a certain protected spot until the frost came and they were were picked for kitchen use. So it is with Christians, and even more so with contemplative monks and nuns. We mature in the Holy Spirit of Jesus within a certain religious tradition, among communities of people who have a given material place and a given identity — our families,our towns, our parishes, our monasteries — and each of these makes some distinctive imprint upon us. While these communities may, do, and indeed must change throughout the course of our lives, together they form the global context in which as human beings we come to fruition.

Over the last year we have refashioned the family home that we bought and are building a new guest accommodation alongside of it. We have chosen to work with the domestic landscaping a

little differently from those who were here before us; we've harvested some of the surrounding forest, and are imprinting a little of ourselves onto the land. We have made a number of friends and are getting to know our neighbors in a wider and wider circle. But just as, or even more surely, this land we live on and are stewarding and the people nearby will make their own imprint upon us, on our hearts and our prayers, and have their own effect upon our monastic life and its quiet ministry. So it is we have named our monastery not only after Our Lady, but after the specific place we have now been planted, the Northwoods of Wisconsin. There were times, I am sure, when Jesus was inscrutable to his Mother. One time, it is said, Jesus's family stood outside a home in which he was teaching and asked for him so they could take him in hand and bring him home from there. But then there was also the Wedding feast at Cana, when St Mary was so in tune with the purposes of Jesus that in their dilemma she could turn to the servants standing by and say to them, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary, who was most attentive to God, is the best one to teach us to listen to Jesus, and the long line of monasteries dedicated to her through the centuries bears witness to this role that the Church cannot do without. With Julian, with Our Lady, we want to that attentive, able to listen that well to Jesus. In the midst of the Northwoods Our Lady is our model to learn to attend to Jesus and with her to follow Him.

You have arrived

Sr Cornelia OJN

There are days when one wakes up cheerfully, looking forward to the day and its duties, when suddenly for no apparent reason, things start to go wrong. The shirt is put on backwards and has to be taken off; a sock falls behind a temporary stack of books which in their turn topple over. The toast at breakfast burns and there's no jam. In the office there are not enough envelopes to complete a task and the copier spits out double-sided printing when one wanted single-sided.

And we realize that in many of these hassles, the fault lies with us: inattention, clumsiness, lack of organization and so on. Yet it goes even deeper than this — how many of these things are really "wrong," and how many simply what we don't prefer? How many are simply occasions where it is our response that is amiss, where it is we who are "out of tune"? And what if — just what if — instead of resignation or dismay, we responded to these little pinpricks with a smile and gentleness?

The shift from the optimism which started our day to the pessimism which is assaulting us has its roots here, in our preferences, our determination to be anxious if things do not go precisely as we desire. We might echo Julian's analysis: "It is our Enemy who sets us back with his false fear concerning our sinfulness because of the pain with which he threatens us. It is his intention to make us so gloomy and so weary in this that we would forget the fair, blessed beholding of our everlasting Friend" (Chapter 76).

Julian's writing is full of reminders of how cherished we are by our everlasting Friend. Enfolded and enwrapped in love. Watched over patiently when we are in the throes of getting things wrong (or responding to things in a way that does not help us). Reminded that (the present notwithstanding) God takes heed to the tiniest things as much as to the great, and all manner of thing shall be well. This is not a fleeting mood of optimism, but a steady thankful reminder that we are constantly cherished, and have constant opportunities to respond in that reality.

In a life where we are governed by desires for what we want and discontents over what we can't have right now and resentment that there are some things which we can never have — a self-centeredness which makes for a life of distrust — there is always a greater freedom waiting for us. Julian on her sick bed was privileged to see that her wishes (small in comparison to ours, we think) disquieted her perhaps just by not making the sense her keen mind demanded. And so the second shewing had been given to her to start her off on the right track as she went about the business of writing the rest of her Revelations. That was the task she had to convey to her evenchristens in each page of her book: to trust in God's loving care for them.

There is a fine lesson for all of us here: that everything in our day can be a means of grace, whether it be distraction from what we planned to do or our failures to do the good we are called to. If God loves us, so we can love ourselves, not only as a return for His kindness but also trust in His judgment on our "small" things as well as our "big" things. Then we have "arrived"— not at being perfect or doing everything perfectly, but at believing we are loved.

Guesthouse funding update

With the completion of logging there has been a little more to add to our goal of raising one quarter of the total cost. 25,000 of 90,000 has been raised so far.

Book Note: *Stewards of God's Delight*

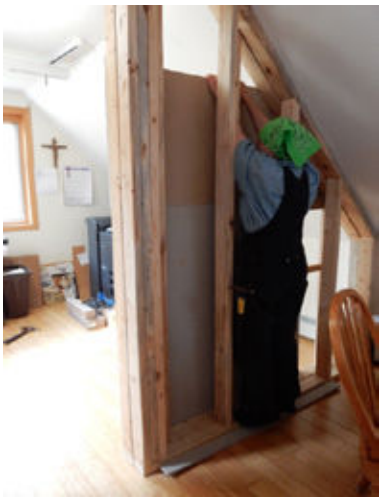
Title	**Stewards of God's Delight: Becoming Priests of the New Creation**
author	Mark Clavier
Publisher	Wipf & Stock
ISBN:	97981-4982-2543-4
pp	99

Stewards of God's Delight originated as a series of retreat talks given to Welsh ordinands in 2014 in a deliberate attempt, says the author, "to re-enchant the ministry" for ordinands preparing to serve in a Church suffering from "ecclesial amnesia". Clavier, Dean of Residential Training at St Michael's Theological College in Llandaff, Wales and Lecturer in Theology at Cardiff University, offers very grounded "enchantment" and encouragement without making light of the challenges on the institutional level.

This slim book takes into account the familiar critique of the Church as consumer-lifestyle-option (joyless and moralistic to boot), burdened by organizational models that don't fit the Church's calling. Clavier acknowledges that new ordinands will be confronted with this, but then moves quickly to open the scene on ordained ministry as something both nourishing and life-giving: a corporate vocation to bless and serve the whole creation in the name of God, to take delight in it — and in its *people* — as God does, and how priests and deacons may grow into this.

Gathering about him a great cloud of witnesses, from Augustine and Aquinas to Tolkien and Rowan Williams, Clavier begins at an appropriate place for a dilemma of this size: the beginning, going back to see what God is actually up to in Genesis Chapter One. God has created everything that is out of sheer effervescent delighted self-gift. We and everything else are so completely unnecessary to God we can rest securely in the fact that we are wanted, delighted in. Following from this, Clavier makes clear that the Church is not about management and troubleshooting, but a community to be cared for and delighted in. What would happen, Clavier asks, if we were to engage not only ministry but our whole relationship with God on this basis?

Community Notes



No sooner did the logging wrap up in early October than the excavating equipment arrived; we enjoyed two quiet days without trucks on the driveway. Work on the guesthouse has proceeded quickly so far. As of the beginning of November, the foundation is complete, the floor poured, framing work is beginning and the masonry heater is being built where the front bathroom used to be. We will post photos on the website as work progresses. In the house, we continue to work (slowly) on new walls and doors.

A very rainy September did not seem to affect fall color too much in our area; it has only been a little faster than usual due to the warmth. The logging has left us with many branches to cut for firewood, which we will be able to use to heat the monastery beginning next winter.

We have enjoyed various harvests from the bounty of the land: first crabapples, then apples — a few bushels more than last year since we got to them before the deer did. We were able to fill half the freezer with apples in various forms. Despite starting a month later than planned the garden surprised us with not only an abundance of cucumbers, winter squash and beets but several eggplant, some ripe tomatoes and many green ones, and even a few peppers.

Normally we have little trouble with wildlife, but at this time of year ruffled grouse tend to fly at top speed into windows. No windows broken yet this year.

Clockwise from top: Mthr Hilary helping put up walls in the office and scriptorium • The subfloor being poured (viewed from the office) • Mthr Hilary and Sr Therese with the building plans, beside the guesthouse foundation

Our Lady of the Northwoods Monastery
The Order of Julian of Norwich
W704 Alft Rd
White Lake WI 54491-9715
USA

Non-profit Org.
U.S. Postage
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Waukesha WI
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