Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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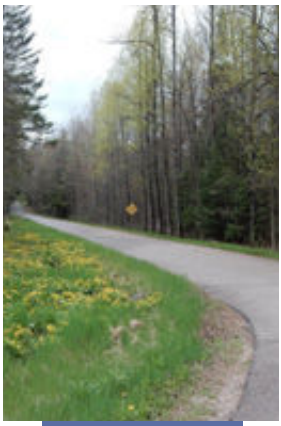

Julian's Gifts

Julian has many satisfying, apparently discrete insights, something that makes her one of those authors more quoted than read. Yet in her short book all her points tie together. This is partly because her "revelations" are really *one* revelation, that of Love. This revelation and teaching which pervades her entire book could be summed up in the famous phrase that is at once the most startling and obvious thing: that "all shall be well". It has been quoted so much that sometimes it seems to lose all sense. Nor does it come as Julian's own insight, but as a word from Jesus. Nearly the entire revelation Julian is given works toward and out of this central point. It is Julian's insistent questioning *how* this can be that elicits the response of divine courtesy in a vision-parable that also turns out to be intimately connected with nearly everything else she is told.

Her entire book is a gift of God to the Church, and it is overflowing with further gifts for anyone who would be immersed in it. But it has four central, unique offerings which set it apart from nearly every other book of spiritual writing or theology.

First, that there is no wrath in God; the wrath is in us instead. In the atonement it is not God's wrath that needs satisfaction but ours. Jesus asked Julian, "Are you well satisfied that I suffered for you?" She replies emphatically that she is. Jesus in turn tells her that if

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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it had not been enough, if he could have suffered any more, he would have.

Second, though neither the words nor the parable are hers, the message that sin is "behovely" yet all can be made well, as explained by the parable of the Lord and the servant, draw from her some of her most compressed insights on our innate relationship to God in love, and how in the atonement, sin is, so to speak, defeated at its own game. In a way that turns St Anselm's similar parable on its head, what Julian is shown discredits completely the power and agency of sin. She understands that "sin has no substance or manner of being", despite its real effects in the world. Denys Turner unpacked this marvelously in his book on Julian.

Third, Julian's understanding of the Trinity is deeply detailed and multivalent. She communicates her revelations in a way at once Trinitarian and Christological. She understands the Trinity to be present and in action wherever Jesus appears, most of all in the crucifixion. Her initial vision of the crucifixion may be off-putting in its detail, but the "joy of the entire Trinity" at what Jesus is effecting by it is also immediately there.

At the root of these understandings is a faith that is willing to "stand between" without abandoning "old" or "new". Julian neither discredits the teachings of the Church nor those of her revelations, but willingly and faithfully holds the tension of opposites. She does not try to fix or resolve what seems irreconcilable, living in trust that a greater wisdom than hers is behind all things, and with a patience that can withstand temporal contradiction. In *A Point of Balance,* Gerard Mannion wrote that, "Perhaps, in these times, dialogue with the ecclesial others in our own churches is one of the most important forms of witness to the Gospel in which we can engage." Julian, listening and trying to understand what seems impossible to her, stands in that gap of faith and trust. Her example of patience and humility itself may be one of the greatest gifts she has to offer the Church today.

A Motto to Live By

Depending on the translation, the words of our motto, A*wait, Allow, Accept,* and *Attend*, appear often in Julian's writing, whether referring to God or to us. As part of our celebrations for our 30th anniversary, we spent some time collectively reflecting on our motto and how we live it out. These four reflections are the result.

As we speak of them here, the four principles of our motto are all closely interrelated. The point of these four principles is conversion of life, which is worked out by becoming available to God's action in us. Each word is a step and each step involves both explicit and implicit choices. To take them up is to express the willingness for self-discipline and to undergo radical change from the inside-out.

Await

The first word of our motto is *await*. When we *await*, we live in expectation, with the activity of hope; we are directed and seeking. Hope is related to patience, and to the virtue of detachment.

St John Climacus wrote that "Unswerving hope is the gateway to detachment". Detachment is "the spiritual capacity to focus on all things, material and other, without attachment. It is primarily something spiritual; it is an attitude of life….Detachment is ongoing, requiring continual refinement" (Chryssavgis, *In the Heart of the Desert*).

Detachment may be thought of as a scale, with worry at one end and complete trust at the other. It does not mean not caring, but renouncing anxiety: we learn to live in the gentleness of trust, with the energy of hope. Such constant hope concentrates our strength and attention so we can live in the perspective of God's light and take the things of this world in proportion. Attachment is not simply an expression of preference for a person, thing, or state or manner of being; far from being expressive of a free heart, attachment signifies the impairment (or even negation) of freely-willed choice by something more like compulsion. In regard to whatever constitutes the attachment, emotional or psychological

need or any of the bodily appetites has taken over, and the adult human is no longer in charge.

Even a little detachment frees us to live with an open-handed attitude toward God, so that, whether we are moved to petition for one thing or another, or work for one thing or another, we await without clinging to anything but God's goodness. There is no impatience or frustration in such awaiting; instead, in the words of St Macarius the Great, we are "totally concentrated on asking and on a loving movement toward the Lord, not wandering and dispersed by [our] thoughts but with concentration wait expectantly for Christ." As we grow in detachment, among all the things that attract our attention we learn to discern what serves this movement, and what should be let go.

In awaiting, our hope is active, both seeking and trusting. This was Julian's life in the anchorhold: a basic stance toward life that is collected in a hope — a direction and a focus — that is being progressively purified through patience and trust.

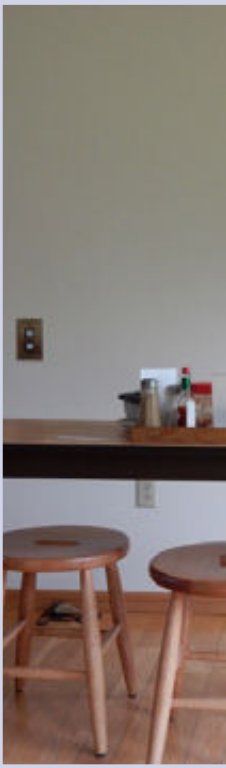
Allow

The second word of our motto is *allow*. To allow is where the hope of awaiting becomes a more specific trust. If awaiting teaches us detachment, *allowing* begins to teach us discernment. It asks of us a little more stillness and receptivity, and to listen for what the proper response to any one particular situation may be, yet it is not complete passivity. To embrace passivity as a practice is actually something something quite rare, and should only come when God

specifically asks it of us; most of all, that kind of discernment is seldom to be judged by oneself alone.

The kind of "active" passivity that *allowing* requires is that we be *teachable*. This means remaining receptive and responsive, permitting both inner and outer realities to instruct us. It is an essential tool for our purification. The willingness to "suffer through" our own inner annoyances versus aggravating them by resisting them, helps us grow into a condition where we can be purified further. This too represents a willed choice, thus, an act of love.

The same may be said of outer annoyances and sufferings that we do not choose. The desert elders considered things that provoked them as "the medicine of Christ", permitting their hidden illnesses to be exposed and healed. On the one hand we can resist and defend ourselves, venting and focusing our attention on our pain and on those who provoke us, or we can allow the bitterness of our feelings to be a kind of gift, not permitting them to sweep us away and control us. This letting go is still a deeper level of trust, asking us to renounce anxiety when it occurs. We also learn, over time, the critical discernment of when to let go and when it is better to resist.

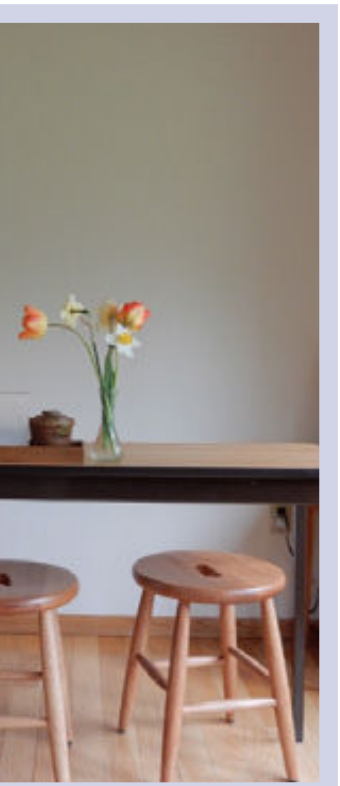


Allowing is to teach us, at length, that patience which can receive all things, regardless of their disguise of the moment, for God's work in the soul. This is *allowing* through a long process of patient trust, and slowly discerning wisdom.

Accept

The third word of our motto is *accept*. At this point, we are asked to embrace what we have *allowed*. In accepting, we are invited to a deeper degree of trust, a trust that can renounce anxiety and the impulse to control. We are invited to take up non-contractual, unconditional living and loving.

We often say we want this, but when it comes to the point, what seemed so attractive at distance looks different close up, and as a consequence we permit so much to hold us back. Yet it is not our littleness, our sinfulness or our helplessness that hinders God's work but our falseness, our insistence on our own ideas, our projections into God's work. What this step looks like in the negative, when it is refused by *not* accepting, is that we are never at home, never content except under certain controlled circumstances as determined by ourselves. We close ourselves off from God's action and give ultimatums — in a sense, we refuse to become free. In this regard, *excepting* could be said to be the opposite of *accepting*. Settling for a great deal less, we would rather hold on to our anxiety, fear, and control than surrender them and open ourselves to hope. But to accept is to choose to embrace, to choose to surrender. It is an implicit expression of love and an explicit expression of trust.



For those of us who, by virtue of friendship, conviction, promise or vow have bound ourselves voluntarily to another or to others, this word of the motto also has a definite, physical out-going quality to it. Caregivers and parents of small children will immediately recognize the kind of availability this demands. Regardless of how we may feel, because we have made these commitments, we take up that which love and duty require, remaining quietly patient with the fact that we might not be completely willing yet. And as Julian points out, "God accepts the good intention and the toil of His servants, no matter how we feel."

Attend

The fourth word of our motto is *attend*. At the first level, to attend is to be present, to pay attention to what is right here, right now. Again, the negative image gives an idea what attending is not: it is not "checking out", not living according to past fears or future fears. To

live bound by the past or by projections of the future makes us unable to live right where we are in the present. Our life in Christ is meant to lead us into the freedom that can live *now*, even if the growth into such freedom is worked out slowly over weeks and years of struggle.

To attend is to live in an attitude of expectant, active listening to each moment, to be alive to the tuition of circumstance and the small still voice of the Holy Spirit. We are engaged in being a gatekeeper for our heart and thoughts: actively choosing what goes in, what comes out, what we occupy ourselves with. This is "one-pointedness", desiring to choose the one thing necessary, and being awake enough to discern it in the moment we are in. The flip side of attending means, through allowing, being able to discern what is *not* necessary. The "wisdom to know the difference" is learned through the slow process of learning to pay attention to God's presence through each moment.

Attending also has a quality of thanksgiving. This is well expressed by Dag Hammarskjöld's saying, "For all that has been — Thanks. For all that shall be — Yes." There is a liberating, joyous freedom in choosing the one moment we have with all its possibilities. Everything is decided there, and there we encounter both God and our neighbor.

From the Refectory

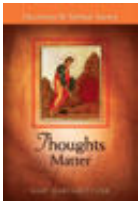
Over the years we've been asked many times for the titles of books read in the refectory, after the example of the monks at Three Rivers. Finally, we've remembered to jot them down. Not quite in the order they were read, here are titles from the past few years, minus some we've forgotten. All are excellent and worth reading again, some of them several times.

We start each meal with a short excerpt from Julian's *Revelations* before taking up our current volume. Typically we vet a book for reading aloud; there are many good books that don't read aloud well, and so don't make it to the refectory. It's also not a good forum for very long, dense books or fiction. Until recently, the longest book was a toss-up between Gil Bailie's lectures on Dante's *Inferno*, and an unabridged recording of *Gaudy Night* which took nearly six months, and was consequently difficult to follow (and impossible to solve). It was not the last novel, but we no longer invite fiction to the refectory.

The last book on this list broke all records, taking an entire year because of its length and because of our move, but because it comprised numerous essays addressed to various audiences, it bore interruption well and was never once tedious. (Tedious books get quickly replaced.) Expect another, much shorter, list next spring.

Peace Be With You	David Carlson
Shop Class as Soulcraft	Matthew Crawford
Where God Happens	Rowan Williams
The Shallows	Nicholas Carr
In Search of the Lost	Richard Anthony Carter
The Essential Difference	Simon Baron-Cohen
Infinitely Beloved	Brian Thorne
Enough	Bill McKibben
In the Heart of the Desert	John Chryssavgis
The Woods of Nova Scotia	Tessa Bielecki
Faith in the Public Square	Rowan Williams

Book Note: *Thoughts Matter*



Thoughts Matter: Discovering the Spiritual Journey
Mary Margaret Funk
Liturgical Press, 2012
ISBN: 978-0-8146-3525-4
pp 199

Thoughts Matter was originally published in 1998 by Continuum. Since then, Funk has not only revised it but completed a 25-year study of John Cassian that has resulted in a series of five books, all published by Liturgical Press.

Thoughts Matter is the first book of the new series and sets the stage for the work that must be done on the spiritual journey as taught by John Cassian and the desert tradition, and later by St Benedict. Cassian's teaching may be unfamiliar to many modern readers, but is as foundational to a serious life of prayer as many better-known approaches, and even more comprehensive. "The earliest training for a novice in the spiritual life is to notice that we have thoughts, and the major reason the work of the spiritual journey is so difficult is that we seldom notice these thoughts." Also called afflictions, the thoughts which tend to shape our response to the world were grouped by Cassian into eight headings: food, sex, things, anger, dejection, acedia, vainglory, and pride; later writers simplified this into a list of seven "deadly sins", yet before they become sins, they are only thoughts. *Thoughts Matter* looks at each carefully and how they develop to the point of mastering us, and the first stage of what to do about them: noticing and renouncing. This renunciation is essential for real growth: "a deep contemplative life devoted to prayer is not going to become a reality unless I do the interior work of controlling my thoughts." Funk is both comprehensive and realistic: "The realization that I must be mindful all the time is a turning point on the spiritual journey." What follows is a gradual process of growing in awareness, acknowledging the thoughts we have, and renouncing them.

Funk's careful analysis of the eight thoughts are refocused in each volume. *Tools Matter* deals with methods to redirect the eight thoughts, *Humility Matters* is about Cassian's teaching on the four renunciations of the spiritual life, *Lectio Matters* focuses on conversion of life in the context of *lectio divina*, and *Discernment Matters* looks making decisions with the Holy Spirit and at different ways of practicing Christian mindfulness.

Community Notes

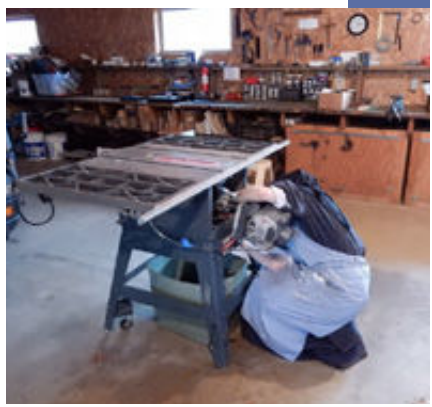
We might have included more photos of snow in the March issue; spring has been very leisurely in getting to this part of Wisconsin and we got to enjoy several more occasions of snow — and an incredibly slow-motion budding out of trees — before the leaves came out in mid-May.

In Easter week some neighbors invited us to visit their maple sugar shack. Those of us who normally cannot identify our winter trees were able to accurately ID the sugar maples along highway 55 by their blue sacks. Small-scale sugaring is a messy business but the dividends are incomparably superior to mass-produced syrup; being some years away from undertaking such work, we are very happy to enjoy that of our neighbors.

As for our guesthouse plans, we are still waiting on a word from the bank, and continue to save what we can.

Br Barnabas needed to move to another facility, so we found a place in Merrill which is much closer to us, and we are able to visit him more often. A local deacon also brings him communion on Sundays.

One of our oblates, Keith, is in residence with us for several months. Our neighbor George offered us the use of the vegetable plot by his barn: already fenced and with good soil. We hope to get the seedlings planted after the last freeze-date at the end of May.



At last, the workshop is set up, and the two saws nearly ready to go. The soapshop has been slower to get started but is in the works.

We are enjoying discovering spring now that it is really here: in the woods, it consists of millions of trilliums and billions of anenomes. We have also had our woods appraised for harvesting. A fraction of timber is ready and we hope to have it cut later in the year.

Top: Keith dismantling the old playset, which was in too poor a condition to sell
Bottom: Mthr Hilary assembling the table-saw in the workshop

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