Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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On the cover: Looking up the driveway toward the monastery

The Disorder of Lent

If life disappoints desire again and again, there is no underestimating the power of muddling. One may harbor vague and fuzzy hopes of something better someday, but it is nevertheless not terribly bothersome. It does not impinge. If hope is not yet realized, at least it does not require anything particular of us.

But at length, in the presence of real thirst, vague hope not only resolves to exacting focus, but becomes acute. At last we understand Israel's question, *"Is the Lord among us or not?"* What is it, then, that precipitates this thirst?

Three and more months along from their escape from Egypt, perhaps Israel had wandered in the wilderness just long enough for the relief and the novelty of adventure to have worn off. Five husbands along and the latest not even that, perhaps the Samaritan woman had wandered just long enough in a relational wilderness to ache for something better.

Even now, though — even if the Samaritan woman's religious milieu isn't personally consolatory or healing, even if she lives a life of quiet desperation on the edges of respectable society, the religious system still has a certain ordering capacity, something the woman can still manage. "Jacob gave us this well and our ancestors worshipped on this mountain", she says; "when Messiah comes he will make everything clear to us".

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.**

Julian's Window, also found on our website, is published quarterly. For permission to re-publish, please write to the Order:

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As long as we are content with what we are able to manage, Jesus will not be so attractive. After all, as the woman herself points out, sitting there by himself Jesus hasn't even got so much as a bucket.

But unassuming as he appears, Jesus nevertheless comes into this ordered system with holy disorder to meet the woman where she is and with what she needs. After her encounter with Jesus, the woman becomes an actual person again — restored to place in her society, and taken seriously by it.

How is this woman's Exodus effected? Presenting himself to the woman, asking for a drink, Jesus tests her degree of thirst, and searches her heart. The place of greatest wounding is going to be the place with the most protection and padding on it, of whatever kind. Whatever interior wound the woman was attempting to anaesthetize, that is what Jesus touched.

As some have come to understand it, the Gospel has a moral, intellectual ordering capacity, but it does not lead them out, it offers nothing to drink. Unable to recognize Jesus in the Gospel for his very immediacy and homeliness, many still lead lives of quiet desperation, on the outside looking in. To receive the Gospel as it is, one has to allow oneself to be seen, and to allow one's wounds to be found out and touched. In short, one has to become vulnerable to love.

When Jesus comes into our way and says 'give me a drink' we are going to recognize him to the degree that we allow ourselves to be thrown into disorder — in other words, to the degree of our capacity for availability, vulnerability and daring hospitality. The continual expansion of this capacity is our own exodus into freedom, and what our whole life in Christ is about. As we make our way through this Lent, may Jesus continue to inconvenience us, and make us know our thirst.

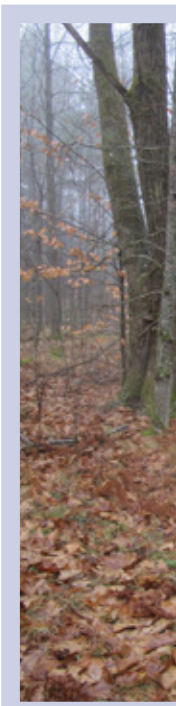
"Here Thou hast cause for Humility..."

Mthr Hilary OJN

During a particularly stressful period in my community's life, as I was standing behind the altar one day preparing to celebrate the Holy Eucharist I found myself praying "Please God, please don't do anything new this morning."

Yet it is part of the scandal of the Gospel that God is and will always be doing a new thing, a previously unimaginable, unexpected thing. John the Baptist was in the wilderness preaching in the spirit and power of the prophet Elijah that "the axe is laid at the root of the trees". But when Jesus did not hew to the line laid for him John was compelled finally to ask "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect another?"

In uncertain times there is abroad in the world a deep and desperate need that belies much talk of hoped-for change, and that is for things to remain as is. It is a movement reminiscent of Cold War geopolitics: if the world was perilous then, at least it was predictably so. This is just as true in the realm of the heart, a geopolitics of relationship that requires people to stay as they are despite much surface talk of hoped-for change.



What manner of judgments do we make of one another, carefully conserving in mind and heart a certain fossilized conception of how someone is? If they were suddenly to up and do something new one day would it not throw everything off, irreparably upsetting the balance? But Jesus will not cooperate with this kind of desperation; he is always there at the entrance to that tomb saying in a loud voice, "Lazarus come out", and to us, "Unbind him and let him go".

God takes our choices seriously. In the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, we see that in seeking a partner for the first man, "out of the ground the Lord God formed every

animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name". (Gen. 2:19-20) Likewise, the Psalmist says, "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's, but he entrusted the earth to its peoples". (Psa. 115:16). By the time we get to Jesus' astonishing words to Peter, "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16:19) the principle of meaningful human agency is already firmly established.

But there is a wonderful twist to all this. Do we not pray to be forgiven as we have forgiven others, to be unbound as we have unbound others? What remains bound then, by un-forgiveness or fossilized or unjust judgments is not the offender, but the one to whom the offender appeals. We know from Julian's *Revelations* that the mercy and forgiveness of God is "to abate and consume our wrath, not His". We are assured time and again in the Gospels and in the writings of saints like Julian that the penitent are forgiven before the word of their asking is even out of their mouths, without condition, for God is mercy and forgiveness itself. It is, rather, the unforgiving who will be bound inside a hell of their own making, for by the refusal to forgive they are radically defacing their own soul's likeness to God.

Julian likens humanity to a treasure, a delightsome food that Jesus the servant-gardener labors to dig up and prepare for the delight of his lord, who will have no other. This treasure is of course going to come out of the ground with soil and all manner of organic matter clinging to it, its unique beauty temporarily obscured. We ourselves are simply unable to see clearly what manner of prize is under all that dirt. Genuine penance and genuine forgiveness are each costly, but no one but God knows

the depth of the human and divine spadework that had to be done to get there.

Whatever temporal judgments we may make of one another, ultimately we and our inmost motivations are opaque to one another, and even to ourselves — there is an irreducible element of unknowability about every human being. This is not a mistake in our design but a mercy, another share given us of the likeness of God's own mysterious Being. A closely allied mystery is that, at the core of each human being there is something like a secret garden of infinite proportion and beauty that is for the delight of God alone, and known by God alone. If each of us is to become and remain truly human the integrity of every soul's garden must be protected, by angels with flaming swords, or dragons, or both.

There are things we just don't get to know. When Jesus bent down and wrote in the dust that day in the midst of a woman's accusers, what did he write? The authors do not relay it; we don't get to know. When Jesus stood conversing with Moses and Elijah on the Mount of the Transfiguration, what did they say? It is not reported; we don't get to know. Finally, there is the strange account in Mark's Gospel of the disciples alone in a boat rowing to the other side of the lake against an adverse wind. Jesus who had stayed behind to pray on the mountain walks across the lake on the water, but not so as to join the disciples in the boat. There are matters that this enigmatic Jesus was keeping to himself for it is written there, "he intended to pass them by".

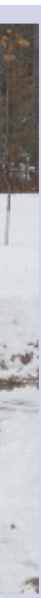
This is also a recurring theme in Julian's *Revelations* — there are works, new things, that God is continually doing in the world, and in each person that we don't get to know until the end, if at all. It is proof of Julian's strength that she is content to let the knowledge of these things be, and counsels us likewise.

Measuring

Sr Therese OJN

The parable of the publican and the Pharisee is one for all seasons but tends to get a lot of going over at this time of year. Jesus spoke this parable "to some who prided themselves on being upright and despised everyone else." However, this doesn't let "everyone else" off the hook. The hitch of this parable, like many others, is that the characters act as mirrors reflecting the listener's inner reality. Does the listener condemn the Pharisee and identify with the tax-collector simply because the latter was the one justified? Does the parable leave the listener measured and found wanting?

There will be a thousand subtle ways in which others may be despised and one's own righteousness maintained. A show of humility may well be among them, but also the more insidious habit of quietly and constantly finding fault in others, and on the most religious grounds. The narrative the Pharisee chooses to tell about the tax-collector is very revealing, as is the absence of any corresponding narrative from the tax-collector.



Sr Scholastica once pointed out that one of the simplest tests of the genuineness of one's own prayer is whether it is self-regarding or God-regarding. In Jesus's parable the carefully religious person was in himself the origin of his prayer, and his religious acts, his human righteousness, were the source of his offering. The religious outcast, having no goodness of his own, offered himself in prayer from his relationship with God, however inadequate. Thus he was aware, already standing outside of any recognizable righteousness, that he needed to keep his distance — to place his trust outside of himself — and that in prayer he was confronted not with human righteousness of any degree but God's holiness — and God's care.

It is easily assumed because of this that he was therefore the greater sinner, but the fact remains that *neither* man was without sin, and it is impossible to say whose sin was greater, or how that could matter before God. Both the Pharisee's and the publican's responses underline the impossibility of any real alignment between God's righteousness and that righteousness in human terms, that is not based on humility and trust.

Guesthouse Update

To update, starting with information that got missed in the appeal, last summer we looked at a few local contractors and settled on one down the road in Amherst, Gimme Shelter Construction. We were able to tour one of their building projects in July and asked many questions about method and materials. While the initial impression was very good, what pleased us the most was shortly afterwards to hear three separate, spontaneous, and very enthusiastic endorsements from others who had worked with them before.

We are working with Gimme Shelter for both design and eventual construction and are very pleased with the work so far done. The new construction will be joined to the existing building so that the guesthouse will take its energy from the current house, without adding any large appliances. We have planned for up to five rooms, a kitchenette, a small meeting room, bathrooms, and an open or enclosed porch (depending on cost). Renewable energy may come into play later, but options are limited by the site.

Architect's elevation of the south side of the guesthouse. The existing monastery is the building on the right.

Courtesy Gimme Shelter Construction

As we are learning again, with building, everything takes a little longer and costs a little more than planned. The surveying is complete and the initial bureaucratic requests and permits have been approved. We have a better idea of the actual cost, which will be about $325,000. The hope is to raise as much as a quarter of the cost through gifts and donations. The blue bar in the box at right represents roughly how much of that $80,000 has been raised so far:

All donations given toward the project have been placed in a fund that is acting as an endowment. We have a good start and will keep you updated as it progresses. In any event, we hope to begin building as soon as we can get in our contractor's schedule, possibly this summer. We know many of you want to come visit and there is no hope of bringing a tent for camping for several months!

Book Note: *Living Wisdom*

Living Wisdom: The Mission & Transmission of Monasticism

Cristiana Piccardo OSCO *Trans. Erik Varden OSCO*
Cistercian Publications 2014
ISBN: 978-0-87907-033-5
pp 174

The Italian title of this book is *Pedagogia Viva* and the author's approach is indeed "pedagogical". But it is also truly living wisdom, lived out in the author's community, and described here with sufficient potency to clear the mind of any romantic notions of what being a Cistercian nun involves. Piccardo states her subject in the Introduction: "Monasticism is a vision of man and of his destiny, of being and becoming, of time and its eschatological dimension, of space projected beyond contingent limitations" (p. xxii). However, that lofty description is brought down to earth by a very practical, specific method. She first gives an historical background of Cistercian teaching; then the history of her own monastery at Vitorchiano and its slow start towards growth; brief discussions of important twentieth-century Cistercian monastics (more than just Thomas Merton); and above all the relationship of monasticism to the Church.

Having laid this firm foundation, she discusses issues inherent to monasticism itself: teaching a community of differing ages and degrees of growth how to love one another; the issues around obedience and its part in growing to maturity; and practical matters arising from a monastery's particular mission — Vitorchiano founded eight new monasteries world-wide. Piccardo uses her own monastery as illustration of pedagogy in a frank, down-to-earth way.

In an Epilogue, Piccardo speaks poignantly of her own childhood and her process of being drawn into the monastic life. "We are called to live and die at the heart of the monastic community [in which God lets us live] ... at the heart of the Church. The point of our pedagogy is to accompany this habit of abiding" (p. 168).

Community Notes

First we must give our warmest thanks to those of you who have already sent donations toward the guesthouse and toward more immediate needs. It has been a great help for both purposes.

In January Br Barnabas moved to Villa Loretto in Mt Calvary WI and is settling in. Our workshops are still in limbo, but the library is (96%) put together. We have a beautiful new sanctuary lamp, and a tabernacle we have finished in our studio, and so the last chapel appointments are now installed.

People tell us we are having a mild winter in the northwoods this year; so far it is not too different from southern Wisconsin, except they tell us that spring means more snow. Our 1/2 mile driveway is plowed by a local excavating service — the snowblower hasn't had a workout yet. For those who have inquired about our on-site winter wildlife, here is a quick survey of what has been *seen*: of birds, chickadees, blue jays, crows, turkeys, golden-crowned kinglet, purple finch, mourning dove, snow buntings, various kinds of woodpecker, a barn owl; of mammals, squirrels (grey, fox, and flying), chipmunk, fox, many nocturnal deer. In the spring we will begin marking trails in the woods, starting the new vegetable garden, and with hope preparing for construction.

Clockwise from bottom left: M Hilary and the Oblate and Associate Priors at Our Lady of the Northwoods during their annual meeting last November. Not a utility work party, but hiking in hunting season. • Lighting the new sanctuary lamp, provided by a generous gift. • At work in the temporary soap shop.

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