Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality

The Order of Julian of Norwich

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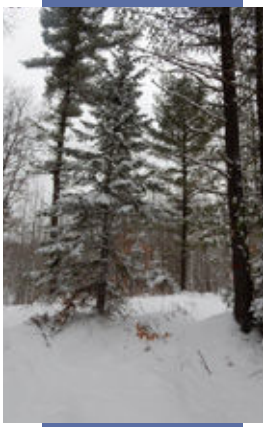
Means and Ends

The grace and peace of Jesus be with you as we begin the season of Lent, a peace that can neither be made nor marred by any manner of personal circumstance, nor by any manner of civic unity or division.

The readings appointed for the First Sunday of Lent pitch us in at the deep end. The first man and woman are wrestling with the question of desire: what is it they want, why do they want it, and to what length will they go to see that desire met? We know how the story falls out, for the moment. The woman takes up the temptation offered by the serpent, eats of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and gives some to her husband and he does the same. Their eyes are opened, but not to sight. Their eyes have been opened to fear, to disunity, to unmet desire, to a distorted view of how the world works, and finally, to a darkened, distorted view of the face of God, with whom only so recently they communed clearly and delightedly, face to face.



Subsequent to his baptism, Jesus is driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, the ancient serpent. What is it Jesus really wants, why does he want it, and to what length is he prepared to go to see that desire met? We know how the story falls out, for once and for all. The ardent desire of Jesus is for all of us to have the peace and unity of communion with God the Father that he himself has enjoyed from

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, by supporting a vibrant community of Oblates and Associates who are a bridge between the monastery and parishes, and 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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before the world was made. And we know the length to which Jesus has gone to see that desire met.

In the service of Holy Baptism from the Book of Common Prayer, candidates for baptism who can speak for themselves, or their parents and godparents, are asked six questions that include three turnings-from, three renunciations; and three turnings-toward, three movements of repentance, trust in and obedience to God's reign of grace and peace and love embodied in the person of Jesus the Messiah.

The renunciations are these: *Do you renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God? Do you renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God? Do you renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God?* And the three turnings-toward: *Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Savior? Do you put your whole trust in his grace and love? Do you promise to follow and obey him as your Lord?*

Following Jesus in the wilderness we are turned out into the desert of Lent to take inventory of the wilderness of our own souls, where wild things are, to take stock of our own desires, needs and fears. What is it we most want, why do we want it, and to what length are we prepared to go to see that desire met? As Christians we do this work of repentance and renunciation individually and corporately in ways both contemplative and active, in our hearts, in our families, and in our ecclesial communities.

As residents of our various countries, we must also do this work in the public square, in ways both contemplative and active, for in the command to "love our neighbor as we have been loved by Jesus" we are given the responsibility of seeing to the welfare of those with whom we live. Whatever good end we may have in mind we must use the same methods Jesus uses to accomplish his work: fearless love, patience, mercy, truth telling. Using the tactics of fear and exclusion, untruth and hate to get what we need will not bring us to the peace of Jesus, much less the peace of civic unity. These are the tactics employed by the evil that Christians have definitively renounced. In the last analysis, we are owned by the methods we use.

In a matter of months our new guesthouse will be complete, and we will begin to welcome guests again. A monastery — which, as St Benedict points out in his Rule, is not the property of the monastics but the place where they are appointed stewards — must by definition be a place of radical hospitality, where we may offer to all of those who come the same gentle and gracious hospitality God has given us.

Both good hospitality and good civics begin in the country of our own hearts, beginning with bold investigation of what is still unconverted to love within ourselves. It is always tempting to blame the shadowy, frightening parts of ourselves on the actions and words of others, but this leads only into a hall of mirrors where there is no clear way forward, or out. We cannot, with justice, raise our voices at public injustice if we have refused to deal with the injustice perpetrated within the confines of our own heads and hearts.

May the peace and love of Christ be your rule and guide as you travel through this season of Lent.

M. Hilary, OJN

Guardian of the Order

An Inside Job

Mthr Hilary OJN

Years ago, on a particularly dark evening at our little branch house in rural western Wisconsin, I was standing by the front door just about to open it and go outside when suddenly there came a loud snarling, growling and a thumping that was definitely not our neighbor's footloose dog. In the space of a heartbeat, several centuries of modernity fell away and there I was, shivering with fear as might have any of my ancestors in the wolf-harried fields of Europe.

The fright didn't last half a minute, and the noise turned out to be two stout raccoons arguing over something on the doorstep, but this started me thinking. How much of our interior security is based in artifact — modern material and social construct — and how much is dyed-in faith? And of the latter, what proportion of that is boil-fast, and what will only fade with repeated scrubbing? How is it a person comes to a wearfast, adult, grace-filled faith — in other words a life of trust — that can stand up to the hard use of daily life?

Maybe I think too much; but as I have opened the Sunday newspaper week by week over the last year the question recurs. The new year has not, for many people, dawned bright and shiny and promising, but they look out onto a prospect that is only confusing and fearful, if not actually life-threatening.

Julian of Norwich tells us that, toward the end of her experience of the showings of Jesus crucified, in the night she was beset again by the fearful presence of the Fiend "with his heat and with his stink" and his incomprehensible chattering. To endure this, Julian says, "My physical eye I fixed upon the same cross where I had been in comfort before that time, my tongue I occupied with speaking of Christ's Passion and reciting the Faith of Holy Church, and my heart I made fast to God with all my trust and with all my might." (Ch. 69)

Julian occupied herself with reciting the Faith of Holy Church — the *Our Father*, the Creeds, and so on — the basic and potent texts that in a few words limn and encapsulate a whole tradition. Today there are so many words all about us, so much text, so much conceptual and visual noise that these short passages can seem pitifully small and over-familiar. The *Our Father* and the Creed can be written together on a single three-by-five index card, and what is that next to the bad-news count of the average daily newspaper?

What seems at first to be a weakness is actually these texts' greatest strength. They are, for one, eminently portable. They are wonderfully compact, all the better to allow the thin, keen edge of themselves to penetrate the interstices of the brain more deeply with each recitation. Imagine the centuries of all the tongues reciting these texts in time of fear and terror, in time of celebration, in time of death, in time of health and the daily round of ordinary, mostly uneventful life (and this last, surely, the bulk of most peoples' experience). Incited and sustained by the Holy Spirit, this is the Church at work doing belief, century by century laying down as with a great three-dimensional printer — tongue by tongue, heart by heart, sound by sound — nano-layers of realized faith, however fearfully becoming itself, becoming Jesus.

Well, one might say, this is all prosaically poetic, but isn't this repeating of small prayers just a lot of whistling in the dark? And what does any of

this have to do with building faith, let alone conquering fear? Only everything, because God seems to take particular delight in the small and subversive. Consider God, the Word made flesh come among us, a tiny, almost invisible blob of Holy Text, the God who, as the Te Deum has it, did not shun the Virgin's womb, but for the sake of love dared "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune". This is the one who, for the joy of being one of us and presenting us whole and well before God, set at naught his own terror of what was to befall him at our hands, and who spoke the word of faith, "Thy will be done." It is this God whistling in the dark who is now "seated at the right hand of the Father" in heaven, resplendent in glory, whose "kingdom shall have no end."

St Thomas Aquinas tells us that in each smallest particle of the Host at the Eucharist is the presence of Christ whole and complete. In each act of recitation of a text of the faith of Holy Church, however brief, is the Faith itself realized in time and space, whole and complete.

Jesus once told a parable of someone who goes and scatters some seeds on the ground, "and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he knows not how." (Mark 4:26-27). Perhaps we are accustomed to hearing this parable in the terms of a pictorial calendar of Iowa or Nebraska, green fields stretching wide and wider in every direction. In the present case, though, we need to see the parable from a different perspective, that of the small. Think of the laughing blades of grass springing up through the cracks in the sidewalks, seeding, rooting, sprouting and growing we know not how, mocking the cement companies, the suburban aesthetes and the serious urban planners. For just such as this is the Faith of the Church, laid down by every smallest act of faith, every text whispered in the dark that will one day be shouted from a rooftop. And meanwhile, Julian gives us this text to persevere by, "[Our Lord] said not 'You shall not be tempted; you shalt not be troubled; you shall not be distressed,' but He said, 'You shall not be overcome.'"

Capacity

Sr Therese OJN

In Matthew's gospel, at the end of a discussion on greatness in the kingdom of heaven, compassion, and the danger of judging others, Peter brings to Jesus a question about how far he should extend himself if someone wrongs him. To his suggestion of what probably seems to him a generous limit, Jesus replies that this is not far enough, and tells a parable to illustrate just how far Peter must be prepared to let go. (Matthew 18.21-35)

Simply at a literal level Jesus's story about the unforgiving slave, with its implications for forgiveness, seem shocking enough. But what if what is most shocking is something his audience avoids: the reality that forgiveness is what they do to themselves as much as to others? And that such an extreme example must be experienced to be understood — that it can only be grasped by those who have pushed the refusal to forgive to the limit of their capacity, who have lived out the parable in their own lives?

Even if one takes "70 times 7" to its logical, not mathematical, extreme, if any wrath remains in the heart there will always be one more person to forgive: the one who is asked to offer forgiveness. The servant with the greatest debt is freely pardoned, but he doesn't realize it or understand he must also pardon himself — and pardon himself, simply and without undue drama, for the simple fact of his failure. If he had understood this, if he had really grasped the forgiveness he had been granted and he was truly free, he would not have immediately inflicted his own unforgiven wrath on someone who mirrored his previous powerlessness only to a paper-thin degree. The consequence of this is that his wrath then imprisons and torments him. In effect, offered salvation, he has not let himself be saved.

This pattern is repeated in many of Jesus's parables: the wrath of the vindictive or fearful character, even if framed in the most moral of terms, is reflected back to them in the end, while the smallest offering toward peace or reconciliation is likewise reflected back to those who offer it. The final answer to the question "How many times should I forgive…" is "As many times as you want to be freed from your own wrath."

Only those who refuse to forgive, who have gone to the end of what they are capable of forgiving, can really know what is meant by "torture" in this verse; they alone understand the sheer torment that their own refusal is to them, from which they even refuse all divine assistance that is not vengeance on their enemy. This means they also refuse to love, which is the only thing that can free them from this wrath, and so they have shut themselves out of receiving the love that is God's offer of forgiveness to them. This is because it is impossible for them to give something that they refuse to receive or to possess. To be imprisoned by one's own wrath is real torture, the torture Jesus's parable speaks of. That he frames this torture in the terms of what the Father does ("so will my Father do to you…") is not expressing a divine tit-for-tat, since he has already made clear that judgment comes directly from our own freedom from sin or lack thereof. It is simply repeating what he has said elsewhere: "Out of your own mouth you will be judged" and "The standard you use will be used for you" — because, quite simply, that is all one would be *able* to receive. The peril we put ourselves in when we refuse to grow into freedom has consequences greater than our pain of the moment, just as the good we make possible for ourselves and others extends much further than any reconciliation in temporal terms.

The beginning of freedom from this torture is the very desire to forgive, even if it cannot be realized for years. Forgiveness is not a one-step process. There are layers of wrath within ourselves to uncover and we will be surprised by work we had believed was finished and done. The essential thing is humility — the willingness to be gentle with the discovery of our incomplete work — because anger at ourselves will only exacerbate the problem.

For the one who has begun struggling to forgive, there is hope, however small, since there is forgiveness received freely; the stranglehold of one's wrath cannot endure because it has already lost its prior justifications. To know one has received forgiveness is to have the entire paradigm of "enemy" wiped out; it is to stand on entirely new ground where all are the same in Love. There exists no more spectrum of "goodness" on which they can place themselves or anyone else in regard to this Love. It is to be open to the possibility of the freedom that love offers, to be open to the possibility to love.

Julian's Notebook

Reflections on the *Revelations*

"Endless joy." That phrase and the word "joy" appear over and over again in Julian's text. It is tempting to think that she was overflowing with the comfort she wrote about and merely writing what she felt. When our world is as troubled as it is, and we often do not know how to deal with our anguishes and distress, having to read about joy can be yet another source of pain.

But true joy is not a private emotion, and the joy that Julian writes about does not stop, or even start, at feelings, but is the fruit of a living faith. True joy is visible and a force that gives life to others. Julian certainly felt joy in the midst of some of the Shewings God gave her, but she didn't write them down for her own joy but for others — ours — for her "evencristens." She had received joy and had to spread it so others could share in it.

In *The Book of Joy*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes that a joyful person "becomes an oasis of peace, a pool of serenity that ripples out to all around it." That is a beautiful portrait of the Julian whom Margery Kempe consulted and wrote about, and whom countless people have encountered in her writings.

A joyful person, as Julian surely was, is not one that does not know darkness and pain, confusion and doubt, but one who lives in contact with a source of unending, immutable joy. For Julian, that source is Jesus and His life:

"God accepts the good intention and the toil of His servants, no matter how we feel, wherefore it pleases Him that we work both in our prayer and in good living by His help and His grace, reasonably with good sense, keeping our strength for Him until we have Him whom we seek in fullness of joy, that is, Jesus."

Community Notes

The winter has been much snowier than the last, though still not much like Wisconsin winters of a century ago. We can tell the impact on wildlife by how thin the arbor vitae around the house have got: everything that the deer can reach, they have eaten.

This year, heating the house has been helped by the installation of a masonry heater (Kachelofen) in the refectory; it heats much more efficiently than a fireplace and also has a bake oven. Because no treated wood is being used in the guesthouse, we have been burning the offcuts from the construction. Our contractor has also kindly supplied us with hardwood for the rest of winter. One of our gifts at Christmas was a new chainsaw which we will be employing to prepare wood for next winter.

As construction has progressed, we have watched the work outside the front door enclose the front door, so that now we exit into the new foyer. Most of our activities this winter have been dominated by addressing questions by the builders and subcontractors, as well as watching, through the front window, the guesthouse come together. The roof and insulation were completed by early February, and the interior walls should be plastered by the end of the month. The completion of the guesthouse, part of which will serve as an extension of the monastery, means both that we will again be able to receive guests, and postulants.

A new layout for Julian's Window is in the works. The new format should appear in the next issue.

Clockwise from the top: Snow buntings, some of our winter visitors • How to get a shower module up the stairs: discuss • The masonry heater in use, where the front bath used to be

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