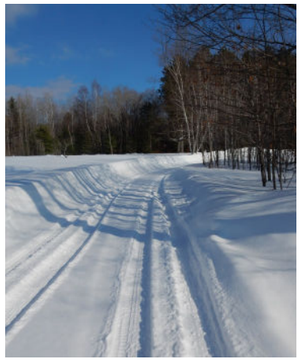
A Note from the Guardian

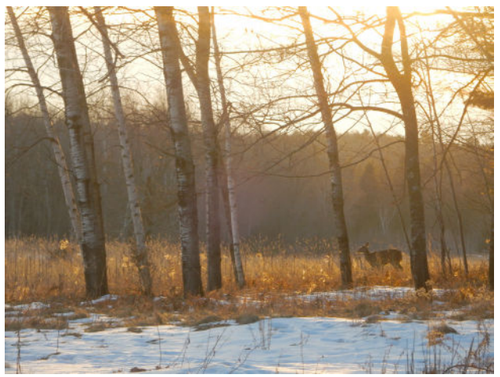


There is a verse in the Psalms that never fails to astonish me when we sing it each month, that is, Psalm 115:16, "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's, but he entrusted the earth to its peoples." It is amazing to think that we humans have been given the privilege and the responsibility of caring for the world we live in and everything and everyone in it. Julian of Norwich takes up this theme, saying, "Our Lord looks upon us in love and wishes to make us partners in His good will and deed, and therefore He moves us to pray for that which it delights Him to do."

You, too, are beloved of God. You, too, have the privilege and the authority of prayer. You, too, can effect change upon the world, and it begins in the heart and works outward from there.

In Lent we get to practice this essential human privilege of active participation with especial intensity, honing the skills of repentance, of mending, of patience, of reparation and reconciliation. And we get to look inward to see what needs our attention at soul-making: tilling, weeding, feeding, planting, or letting lie fallow. This is the greatness of the work that Jesus, human as we are human, has privileged and trusted us with, to pray for that which it delights him to do.

We wish you a blessed season of Lent that you may welcome the risen Jesus with joy.



Yours in Jesus and Julian,

M. Hilary, OJN

Guardian of the Order

The Order of Julian of Norwich is a contemplative monastic Order of monks and nuns of the Episcopal Church.

Our widespread community of Oblates and Associates, of diverse Christian denominations, is committed to prayer, intercession, and conversion of life, supported by Julian's teaching of God's love for us in Christ Jesus.

Come and see!

www.orderofjulian.org

Julian's Window

Volume XI • March 2019 • No. 1

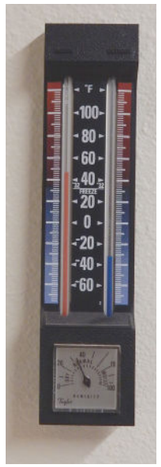
the newsletter of the Order of Julian of Norwich

Electronic Address Service Requested

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

Community Notes

With many of you in the States we have had extreme cold temperatures and snow in quantity this winter, snow on snow on snow in February alone. During January's polar freeze, on the coldest night, the digital thermometer produced this reading (at right) which is its highest. The mercury (below) produced the actual temperature. This was also one of the days the furnace quit, as can be seen by the reading on the left.



We decided that, if one has a choice, winter is the preferred time for the refrigerator to stop working: you can just put food outside, or very close to it, and not worry about bears, insects, or heat. There was just enough left from your gifts at Christmas to purchase a new, non-frills fridge, which arrived within several weeks. M Hilary and Sr Therese were able to get the old one outside, where it sat for a week.

While waiting for the new fridge to arrive we were able to finally do a long-deferred job and trim the kitchen counter, to make more space between the fridge and the counter. Our neighbor Patrick expertly took things apart and put them back together.

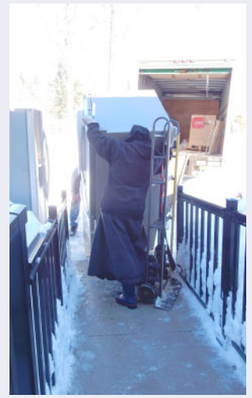
We have given some attention to the library and put up as many shelves as can fit on empty wall space that was left, in order to put up books that have been in boxes since we moved. After four years we have also finished our revised chantbooks and have begun the process of checking for errors by using drafts, and plan to print them this year.

Winter is also when we get to indulge the birds, and the feeders have been very busy with chickadees and red nuthatches. The red squirrels have also discovered the feeders and spend a lot of time hanging out by the refectory. They made a network of tunnels in the deep snow between trees and the house. We have also been visited by an enormous flock of goldfinches, a cloud of evening grosbeaks (on the back cover) and a shrike (who had not come for the birdseed).

Apart from birds we have also welcomed guests from near and far during the winter, some of whom had to brave snowstorms, but have very much enjoyed the seclusion the snow affords. The guesthouse will be very busy this spring and we are already booked through the summer.

We anticipate spring to come to the Midwest around the beginning of May.

Dear Readers and Friends of the Order of Julian,



We are supported financially by the generous gifts of our Oblates and Associates, by friends of the Order like you, and by the income from a pension account. Altogether, this allows us to keep up with regular current expenses — for this we thank you! — but does not currently provide for unusual expenses or to undertake community development projects without taking from that required for regular operations.

Due to unusually sustained below-zero weather this winter our heating costs have been correspondingly unusual, with the added expense of two rounds of furnace repair, and the replacement of an ageing refrigerator.

Would you prayerfully consider a special, additional, financial gift to the Order at this time to assist with these expenses? At this time we have no endowment, but operate on a pay-as-we-receive basis. Consider remembering the Order of Julian in your planned-giving portfolio such as IRA-mandated contributions, wills and estates.

Your regular gifts really do allow us our daily bread, but they also encourage us to persevere in the vocation to which God has called us. We ask your prayers, and you may be assured of ours!

Clockwise from the right: M Hilary helping with the new fridge • Patrick and Sr Therese finishing the trimmed counter • Our thermometers and their differing interpretations of the temperature

Brian Edgar, *The God Who Plays: A Playful Approach to Theology and Spirituality*
141 pp. Eugene OR: Cascade Books, 2017.
ISBN 978-1-5326-0761-5

Jesus claimed he had come to ensure fullness of life. Is this to be identified only with obedience to God's laws, duty, responsibility, and other serious concerns? In other words, does the Church too often take itself too seriously and cerebrally to communicate the liberty of spirit which that promised fullness of life seems to offer?

Brian Edgar believes that this is the case, and that we have largely lost touch with a non-intellectual aspect of both our humanity and our faith that is rooted in creation itself: play. Identifying "play...neither [as] a diverse set of activities nor any one particular behavior, but rather *a state of being"* and one which is the fruit of a rich spiritual life, Edgar illustrates how play at its most healthy and authentic is not only an essential part of human flourishing but of a realized eschaton. It is, in the words of scholar David Miller, "the true 'enjoyment' and the delightful hilarity that is supposed properly to be the end of Christianity's salvific grace." This book of "playful theology" is written because of "the conviction that God wants to play" and that the intimacy and freedom it offers makes play "the essential and ultimate form of relationship with God."

The topic may be play but this is still theology, and Edgar's approach is as theoretical as practical. Nine short chapters consider play in relation to Christ, Faith, Worship, Spirituality, Theology, Grace, Love, Redemption and Kingdom, and touch on questions of sensuality and beauty, liturgy, work and the work ethic, pain and the cross, eschatology, and human development. Each chapter concludes with a brief section encouraging the exploration of aspects of play in one's life, and both intellectual and practical engagement.

The many facets of play explored here will be recognizable to almost everyone; the invitation and the challenge of this book is to live such playfulness, with the possibility of one's life becoming "a positive and enthusiastic embrace of life with God."

Hope or Optimism?

Mthr Hilary OJN

One thing Julian of Norwich is known for is her famous recording of Jesus's words, "All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of thing shall be well."

What does this saying mean? On the face of it, just what it says, that *all shall be well*. Some readers take this, then, as an invitation to revere Julian as an optimist, happily following her brighter teachings and leaving aside the more difficult ones as incompatible with a cheerful outlook on life.

Others hear *all shall be well* and ask how this could possibly be when so much about the world is so unwell, the problems just too large and intractable, with too many moving parts. For even Julian herself says, "from our point of view, there are many deeds evilly done and such great harm given that it seems to us that it would be impossible that ever it should come to a good end; and we look upon this, sorrowing and mourning because of it."

Since Julian goes on to repeat the saying, however, one might get the impression that Julian is actually—even obstinately—schooling her readers to deny real-world problems and even their own pain, since everything is supposed to turn out fine in the end anyway. On this basis, some would dismiss Julian as a lightweight, a proponent of positive thinking, at the very least out of touch with reality. But Julian repeats this saying of Jesus not as a statement of optimism, or mental evasive maneuver, but as a firm assertion of Christian hope. What is the difference?

A judgment of optimism (or pessimism, for that matter) is made based on observation of available evidence, what seems apparent about a situation, and upon the interpretation of that evidence. One can find any number of books on the bestseller lists today to support a judgment of pessimism about the world, and a good number to say that, wait, things are not so bad as all that. As far as it goes optimism is a good thing, but it is not designed to carry ultimate weight.

Julian's hope, and ours, is based not on the appearance of present conditions (for they are subject to variation upon an instant) or upon a particular interpretation of evidence, but upon the trustworthiness of Jesus who gave us his word that all shall be well. Julian counsels neither optimism nor pessimism but hope indelibly tied to a person, and steadfast trust in that person.

At one point during the showings made to her, Julian is sorrowing and mourning, "full of great fear," she says, "considering the great damage that has come by sin" to God's creatures, and she asks Jesus for some kind of explanation. Jesus's reply was that "Adam's sin was the worst harm that ever was done until the world's end," but since he had already made well this worst harm, he wills Julian to know that he "will make well everything that is *less* bad."

Further, Julian is told, "See, I am God. See, I am in everything. See, I do everything. See, I never lift my hands from my works, nor ever shall, without end. See, I lead everything to the end I ordained for it from without beginning by the same Power, Wisdom, and Love with which I made it. How would anything be amiss?"

What is required of us in the meantime? Can we just sit back, eat spiritual bon-bons and let Jesus get on with it? Not quite. Julian indicates there is work for us to do in practicing often courageous trust: "Thus powerfully, wisely, and lovingly was the soul tested in this vision...I saw

truthfully that it was appropriate that I needs must assent with great reverence, rejoicing in God." Hope requires of us a certain detachment from what is apparent, a critical distance from both optimism and pessimism, and trust in what cannot always readily be seen; this is a spiritually muscular skill that has to be worked at.

Julian says that "This life is our natural penance and the highest, as I see it, for this penance never goes from us until the time that we are fulfilled when we shall have Him for our reward. And therefore He wills that we fix our hearts on the transition—that is to say, from the pain that we feel into the bliss that we trust." In hope, we are offered not the ending vision, but the in-process work, and the trustworthiness of the one who has promised.

Encounters

Sr Therese OJN

One day Jesus encounters in turn, a gentile woman of Syro-Phoenecia, coming on behalf of her daughter, and a deaf man brought by others. He encounters two different people, and he treats each very differently, as he does not usually respond to two people in the same way. This suggests, among other things, that he has some insight into their real needs.

First, the gentile woman. Jesus has responded to requests by both gentile men and women with more respect than this. Speculations about Jesus's fatigue, justified anger, and/or growth of ethnic awareness in this encounter may well be true; there is room for many interpretations. However, if in these remembered and recorded stories Jesus is speaking to individuals and their needs, then something else is going on.

Jesus's words would be the wrong thing to say to a harassed and impoverished mother, which the woman may be in any event—and if this were her sole condition, there is very little he could teach her about "humility" by humiliating her further. But if the woman is a narcissist and termagant, running her world by bullying entitlement and emotional blackmail, such a rebuke from the famous miracle-worker might be just what is needed for a miracle of another order. The woman has come to Jesus because her daughter has a demon; curiously, neither Mark nor Matthew, usually more careful with such details, specify this demon's symptoms, and perhaps the symptoms are most clearly visible in the mother. Jesus practically tells her, "You are not worth my time," to which she replies, "Perhaps not..." It may be that the way to healing has been opened by her willingness to embrace her own impoverishment, and Jesus's strange, otherwise insulting reply—"For saying that..."—suggests this may indeed be the case. A miracle occurs right under the disciples' noses, under cover of a cultural slur, and no one notices. The miracle that the woman goes home to may well be more than the one she set out to obtain.

As with the deaf man brought by others: what just happened? Why so much theater? Jesus undertakes a rather lengthy, dramatic, and private process for something that has been handled differently with other deaf persons. Perhaps this was the only way this man's ears could be opened, with this kind of demonstration and human touch: to experience that he was worth that kind of attention and care.

These encounters do not end there. Each of the disciples has these characters in their keeping. The "gentile woman" in them may be allowed to tyrannize them with past fears and emotional blackmail. The "deaf man" in them may be cut off from emotional reach, ignored and counted as worthless. Jesus will heal both in ways suited to each, whenever they really want them to be healed.