A Note from the Guardian

"Our help is in the Name of the Lord; the maker of heaven and earth"

This verse forms the call and response between teacher and students to open the day's classwork in a Benedictine monastery; it is the first part of a bishop's blessing of the people; and it forms part of the opening of Compline, the night prayers of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

Call-and-response, a bidding for an imminent blessing, a grateful day's acknowledgment of our creatureliness—all these have in common the notion of meeting, and engagement in a common enterprise. At the deepest level of all, this includes the notion that humanity is met with, bound up with God, and that God has chosen to identify with us in Jesus, closer than close.

This is the Jesus of whom we say in the *Te Deum* that he "did not shun the Virgin's womb": God does not come to our help by reaching in periodically from heaven, but has joined us from within our human family, from diapers up. From here, as one of us, Jesus reorients us to God, and shows us how to be a truly human being. "Love one another as I have loved you" Jesus says. As we seek a way through the many interlocking difficulties besetting our world do our actions, as individuals and as communities, match that? The articles in this issue of *Julian's Window* get at the inside and outside of that question, the inner disposition of heart that must ground our action, and at love's necessary reach and breadth.

God with us in Jesus is the mode and model of all our life together, simply that we are together, inescapably met with one another, and engaged in the common enterprise of being human. A fundamental acceptance of this necessity is the thing that can save us amid the many difficulties that beset us—and it is the only thing that will.

Together with you, in Jesus and Julian,

M. Hilary, OJN

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

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the newsletter of the Order of Julian of Norwich

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Community Notes

Julianfest was held in June at Oconomowoc; this year our speaker was Derek Olsen, who illuminated for us Julian's pictorial and liturgical world.

This year summer in northern Wisconsin has been both wet and hot at times, sometimes both at once. People often ask how our garden is; we don't have a vegetable garden at present, but we are subscribers to a local and prolific CSA, and we have neighbors who happily supply us with bags of zucchini and buckets of tomatoes. The meadows and the fallow field produce wildflowers for the honeybees who have been our close neighbors since May, and we discovered a veritable "monarch preserve" in the meadow at the top of the hill, thick with blooming milkweed.

Our time at the farmers' market has been erratic, but sales have been excellent. Mthr Hilary's three varieties of bread—wheat, white, and gluten free—have a good local following. However, since it depends on real muscle for kneading, and prompt eating, it cannot be mass-marketed. We hope to continue this effort next year with more hands on deck.

In June one of our visitors included a dog from a nearby campground, whose frantic owners were happily found thanks to the number on the dog's tag. All the local campgrounds were closed in late July to due extensive damage from the derecho and violent storms of 19 July. We had a few trees down from the wind, but no real damage, and are grateful we have a generator which kept the well and elevator (and other things) going when the utility power was out.

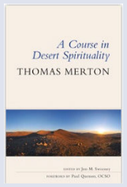
During our annual rest this July Mthr Hilary attended a short course on monastic history at St John's, Collegeville, MN. At home, friends installed the gate at the end of our driveway. Since shrubs and trees are dirt cheap at the end of summer, this is the best time to get them, but there were no trees left at the store by the time we wanted one. Instead, we picked up several fruiting shrubs for Our Lady and planted them in the octave of her feast in August.

This fall we are looking forward to welcoming the Priors of Oblates and Associates to the monastery for their annual meeting with the Guardian, and to welcoming a postulant to join us here at the monastery in late November. Please pray for these meetings, and especially for our postulant.

For our readers in the USA, and for all our Oblates and Associates, enfolded with this edition of Julian's Window is our annual appeal and budget summary. For our general readers outside of the USA who would like to read about and pray for this effort, the brochure can be accessed from our website and from our Facebook page.

Back issues of Julian's Window can also be found on our website, on the "Resources" page.

Clockwise from lower left: *A discussion group at Julianfest with our speaker, Derek Olsen • The beehives in late summer • Part of the "monarch meadow" at the top of the hill, with* Danaus plexippus *• One of the "guard" garter snakes that live out the back door • One of several modest sphinx moths (*Pachysphinx modesta*) that visited us in July during National Moth Week*



A Course in Desert Spirituality *Thomas Merton, Edited by Jon M. Sweeney*

Liturgical Press, pp 176 **ISBN:** 978-0-8146-8473-3

What is monasticism for, and what is it really about? The Desert Elders of the first Christian centuries remain the most significant source for both the purpose and the basic tools of Christian monasticism. *A Course in Desert Spirituality*, a concise overview of the Desert teachings from material originally presented by Thomas Merton to his novices, synthesizes and makes accessible some of the greatest riches of the desert, and is a commendable introduction to the names, dates, general trends, mistakes, and above all essence of the concentrated form of Christian life that evolved in the deserts of Egypt, Palestine, and Syria.

The original focus of all this material was not simply information but *formation*: "to immerse [the novices] in a tradition, to allow them to become acclimated to a way of life" which had long preceded them. The beauty of this "Course in Desert Spirituality" is how it offers something comparable for a modern non-monastic audience. Merton's digests of key points of this tradition—on which much later Christian practice stands—are pared down "to a more digestible size," in the process making clear that these teachings are far from "just for monks" and are not only appropriate for the practicing Christian, but valuable, readily adaptable, and transformative.

The sheer wisdom in these condensed teachings, many of which anticipated modern psychological "insights" by many centuries, won't be grasped all at once by the casual reader. *A Course,* however, lends itself to study either alone or in a group, and will fruitfully reward repeated reads, witnessing to "Merton's belief...that monastic wisdom and spirituality are applicable for everyone."

Conversatio morum & Obedience: being "turned inside out"

Fr Harry Allagree ObJN

We're one-ed in the love of the Father who speaks to us. Listening intently to God's Word of love with the heart, the deepest part of our ultimate freedom, is already living in obedience. Christ the Word who is Love from the Father graces us with truth, endurance, faithfulness of heart, steadfastness, stability through sharing in his suffering, dying and rising. Carried along by the self-giving love of the divine Spirit, we journey in a continual conversion of faith through our time on this human plane.

My late son, Andrew, was once invited to give a eulogy at a memorial service for a young friend of his and fellow dancer who had recently died. As he and I later talked about the demands of ministry Andrew commented: "*Sometimes it almost feels like God wants to turn me inside out.*" How fittingly that relates to St. Benedict's monastic commitment to *conversio* or *conversatio morum*. The Latin term, almost untranslatable, really encompasses the entirety of the contemplative/monastic life. In the *Rule* St. Benedict says : "... *When he* [the new monk] *is to be received, he comes before the whole community in the oratory and promises stability, conversatio morum, and obedience...*" (RB 58:17). What Benedict actually describes is one promise which is three-fold. *Conversatio* hints of an ongoing lifestyle, a turning around in a given place, the external behavior and practices of contemplatives—the things which contemplative folks ordinarily do.

The roots of the English words *conversation* and *conversion* fail to communicate the richness of the Latin. *Conversio* conveys the idea of circular movement, of turning around, of being transformed: reversed in order, relation or action. *Conversatio* relates to frequency, familiar association, ongoing connection, knowing, exchange. Simply put, *conversatio morum* might be understood as *fidelity in living how God wants us to live*. Andrew's image of being "*turned inside out*" isn't far off the mark of what the Holy Spirit of Love effects in us as we journey toward eternal life. There is a continuousness; sometimes a wrenching; change in the midst of the ordinary. The Spirit-filled contemplative is never static, but always actively on the road, moving on, pressing forward, a true pilgrim, but always in an unspectacular and simple way. It's akin to the biblical concept of *metanoia* = *radical change*, *repentance*, and entails an ongoing turning, a turning from self-will to a turning toward God's loving will. The Baptismal Covenant sums it up: "...*Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? I will, with God's help...*" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 304).

Benedict reminds us further: "...*Your way of acting should be different from the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else...*" (RB 4:20-21). The idea is that we're to be constantly "in the present," "on task," moving steadily toward perfect one-ing

with God. Obviously, that comes at a cost, the cost of suffering and death to self, "*(Costing not less than everything)*", as T. S. Eliot observed. (*Four Quartets*, "Little Gidding", The Centenary Edition, 1988, p.59). *Conversatio* is simply the commitment to acknowledge and accept the demands of ongoing change and growth, and to be faithful in living how God wants us to live. Our OJN rule is such a commitment, which we do whether we like it or not. We hold on, patiently enduring, plugging the leaks, respecting the boundaries which ultimately makes us free. This involves poverty of spirit, single-mindedness, a chastity of the heart. We learn to value be-ing over do-ing; to slow down the pace of our life; to let go; and to seek to be dispossessed of all that is not God.

Ultimately, *conversatio* leads us to compassion, to feel with, to suffer with all of God's creation. Sister Laura Swan, OSB describes it as "*...a womb covenant, a compassion that is generative, life giving, and enabling of restoration...*" (*The Forgotten Desert Mothers*, 2001, p.163).

Neighbors

Sr Therese OJN

Nobody who approaches Jesus and asks a question goes away empty-handed, and few go away the same. A lawyer decides to test Jesus, not knowing he will be the one tested. He asks about the way to eternal life, and when the answer seems good enough, tries to escape with what he thinks is a straightforward question:

"Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus is supposed to tell him the obvious: a neighbor is someone like himself, someone of his own people. But Jesus doesn't give him a direct answer. The lawyer gets a story that has some villains, a hero, and a victim. There is a quiz at the end.

The "man" in the story, the main character who becomes the victim, is someone like the lawyer—someone of his own people. The villains are left unidentified. And the hero of the story does not belong to his own group; instead, the hero is someone the lawyer wouldn't ever identify with. Those other characters in the story the lawyer might identify with, people he probably admires, don't come off very well.

But then comes the quiz. Jesus asks the question, "which of these was the neighbor to the person who was robbed?" This is not the question the lawyer asked, nor the one he wanted answered, and one that turns the tables on his lurking legalism. The lawyer wanted to know who was entitled to his love, who it was he was supposed to love as himself, but Jesus asks him what is the nature of a neighbor, and via a story that asks whether the lawyer himself is able to be one. *A neighbor is not someone in need he is supposed to help, least of all someone just like him.* Nor is a neighbor simply someone worthy of love. A neighbor is someone who loves freely and without strings—even across ostensibly intractable social divides. The man who was a neighbor was essentially free: not constrained by ethnicity, politics, his interior weather, or anything else that might prevent him from opening his heart to anyone at all. A neighbor not only loves freely but is free to love. In a sense, such a person already possesses eternal life.

Whether the lawyer sees this much, he has to admit he is cornered: the person who was a neighbor to the man robbed and beaten is "the one who showed him mercy."

Go and do this, Jesus tells him. This is the way to eternal life.