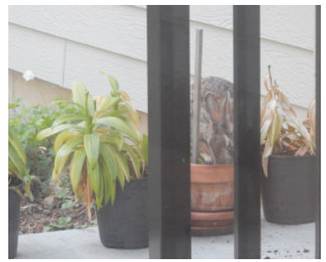
A Note from the Guardian

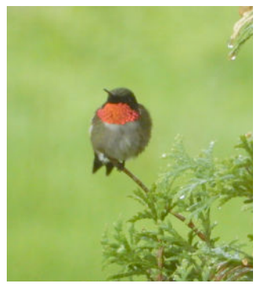
"How long, O Lord?" Julian of Norwich would have recognized the currents of anxiety, weariness, and uncertainty now flowing like tradewinds around the globe, given her 14th-century English society's revolving infestations of plague, war, flood, famine, and political instability. I wonder if, not being conditioned to modern convenience, Julian and her fellows had better-developed interior resources of patience for bearing with long-term societal disturbance.



For some it has already been an unbroken day to day reality, but now others of usually more affluent means are also encountering a wilderness not of their own choosing, with unfamiliar privations of mobility, a dearth of social resources and suddenly constrained finances. Yet for all that, even as physical distancing measures return or continue, what of value can be gleaned from the unfamiliar territory we are all now traveling through?

What about our situation is urging us toward a greater collective maturity? For unlike the unrighteous steward of the gospel parable, we must be both strong enough to dig and not ashamed to beg. There is work for us to do together in these days that we may not have been accustomed to, of collectively digging for wisdom, of patient, mutual humility, and the free exchange of everyday yet substantive mercies. Because these are hard and uncertain days for many, we have decided to skip our annual appeal and narrative-budget to our readers this year, and make it, for now, semi-annual. In the meantime, if you can share out of what you do have to assist us with our daily needs, we will always receive it with thanksgiving. Know that we are with you in determination and prayer as we continue this pilgrimage of discovery, in Jesus who keeps us 'full safely'.

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.orderofjjulian.org

Julian's Window

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the newsletter of the Order of Julian of Norwich

Electronic Address Service Requested

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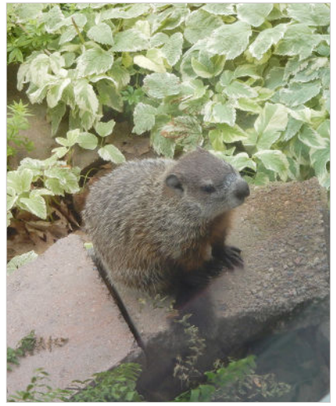
Community Notes

First, a big THANK YOU to all our friends and supporters for the continued donations, prayers, and for remembering us in the midst of so much need in the world. It is our privilege to pray for you all.

As with Julianfest, so with other scheduled outings: all were cancelled this year. It has been hard to keep our guesthouse closed, though we have tentatively begun to have Thursday evening Eucharists outside, so that our neighbors can join us once again.

This summer, we decided to sell at the farmers' market only once a month, which helped greatly with other work. Mthr Hilary's white, wheat, and gluten-free bread remains very popular locally, with a few standing orders.

In June Mthr Hilary and Fr Sergii established the "Hop Yard" at the top of the pasture, mowing several yards and setting up a sturdy frame immediately nicknamed "the swingset." Ten plants were given by a neighbor. Contrary to the purported tastes of wildlife something snicked many of the vines but they are determinedly growing back.

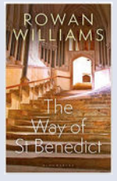


Three years have passed since the field out front became fallow and the landscaping was put in around the guesthouse; the plants have filled out, and the animals have moved in. We have been struck this summer by the great profusion of wildlife living so close, and are very aware that we are but neighbors amongst neighbors. There are swifts in the chimney, phoebes in the eaves, frogs on the windows, mice in the basement (despite constant removals); outside, there are woodchucks, toads, chipmunks, ground squirrels, porcupines, deer, and badger. The rabbits and their kittens have been eating the eggplant, calla lily, doormat, straw broom, and garage (sic). Although we have a perfectly serviceable barn, barn swallows (see back cover) have tried to set up lodging in the garage. In the field we enjoy seeing the cranes, coyotes, fox, and the occasional harrier. Some mornings, a 7 o'clock loon flies over.

Much of the summer has been hot and very wet. A local farmer has cut and baled the field out front and we hope to work out a long-term arrangment with them. The bales sat in the fields for a few weeks and so we enjoyed our version of Monet's haystacks as the shadows moved around the bales throughout the day.

This year Mthr Hilary will give the sermon at the Fond du Lac Eucharistic Festival—which will be zoomed in late August during our annual rest time.

From bottom left: the hay baler at work • a Marmota monax *neighbor outside our front door • Mthr Hilary at work on the hop frame • With the traditional tree planted for Our Lady in August*



The Way of St Benedict

Rowan Williams • Bloomsbury • PP:147 • ISBN: 978-1-4729-7307-8

"Patron saints" writes Rowan Williams, are not "benign mascots." They are "identifiable friends in the company of heaven who will give a particular direction and sharpness to the challenges of the gospel." This small book takes Benedict as expressed in the Rule of St Benedict and the Benedictine life in its monastic core, and draws out some of that sharpness and challenge for the church and others today.

Williams may be one of the few non-monastic authors who so thoroughly "gets" monastic life as to be able to write about it to a non-monastic audience with lucidity and prophetic insistence, and in a way even few monastic authors have been able to do. As with many of his books, this is a combination of lectures addressed to different audiences, discussing Benedictine ethos and writers in the context of Christian life, church reform, mission. Apart from a more academic discussion on mysticism, one of the most essential and linking points to the other six essays is the sheer practicality of monastic life as articulated by the Rule: "unless you have got yourself accustomed to the 'toolbox' of daily attention to the awkward reality of human others, the search for deeper intimacy with God will lead to destructive illusion."

This key thought is expanded with characteristic nuance and breadth, in discussions that bring in politics, the crisis of modern Europe, church reform and mission, and daily Christian life. The Rule is not proffered as a solution to the problems discussed, but "as an invitation to look at various current questions through [its] lens ...and to reflect on aspects of Benedictine history that might have something to say to us." In a world where "we have comprehendingly and disastrously lost a persuasive language for imagining shared goods and mutual dependence," the Rule can offer "the undramatic but transformative wisdom...to live with gratitude and, in the very fullest meaning of the words, common sense"—especially the sense of what is common to all. In that, the breadth offered by the Rule gives an image of "the monastic ideal [as] ... something that stands in opposition to anything that looks like a 'tribal' Church." And part of the sharpness of Benedict lies in his many interpretations.

On our Transfiguration

Mthr Hilary OJN

For many people this year has seemed like an uphill climb, and it is only a little more than half over. A lot of the spiritual life seems to have to do with the work of ascent as well — of toiling up something, real or metaphorical mountains, ladders, hills and so on. Events of great moment, of revelation and spiritual 'arrival' take place at the tops of these places; things happen that are well worth the work of getting there. When the climb of the spiritual life is engaged with intent, it is a work of the will in the service of love against the gravitational pull of sin, entropy, and despair.

In Dante's *Divine Comedy*, there is a passage right at the beginning of part two in which Dante and his guide Virgil have just come up from their journey through Hell and have landed on the shore of the great Mountain of Purgatory. (Dorothy L Sayers translates medieval cosmology for us and puts the mountain's height at "something a little over three thousand miles.") So Dante's initial relief at having come through Hell in once piece is beginning to ebb as he looks toward the top of the mountain and says to Virgil something like "Oh God. It's so high. I'm so tired." But then Virgil tells him, "Your beloved Beatrice is waiting for you at the top." Dante says "Oh sir! I'm just fine now! Let's get on with it!"

Today Jesus has chosen three of his disciples to accompany him up a high mountain to pray. Peter, John, and James have been with Jesus before in portentous circumstances, and will again. Of all of the disciples these three are the most liable to shoot first (mostly their foot) and ask questions later. This is going to have consequences. So when Moses and Elijah are revealed with Jesus on the mountain, not only does Jesus himself receive the encouragement to persevere in what has been set him, but the three disciples are given a true picture of the nature of the enterprise. This is their future too. And they learn there is not only glory awaiting the companions of Jesus the Messiah but also very hard work and holy fear; faith's native place is not the clear light of day, but the cloudy dark of unknowing. In the immediate term, once they return to the bottom of the mountain, it will seem as though the disciples have forgotten all this vision. But according to Jesus's promise, the event has been so etched on their minds and hearts that they will remember it later at the times of their greatest need.

There is more. Each of us as we climb through life are slowly being suffused with, little by little taken over by, the light of God. But to save us from the extremes of self-exaltation or despair, none of us really gets to see this happening. As Moses did not know when he came down the mountain that his face was shining, the degree of our own transfiguration is, mercifully, not apparent to us. But those around us do get to see it, and rejoice in it.

And there is another aspect of this communal dimension of the Transfiguration as well. When an older, more grounded Peter speaks to the Church of his experience on the mountain, he makes what seems like a non-sequitur, an odd point about the necessarily communal nature of the interpretation of Scripture: whatever point we have reached in the process of our own transfiguration in becoming a Living Scripture all suffused by Jesus, is not only ours to say—the ultimate food-value of our life is not only ours to interpret.

Toiling their way up the Mountain of Purgatory, Virgil tells Dante, "it gets much easier the closer you get to the top." To us who are monks and nuns, St Benedict says the same. Knowing what awaits them, those who persevere in the way will do so not with the fear and slow toil of the beginning of their monastic life, but with all speed and in the inexpressible delight of love.

A Time to ask Questions

Fr Sergii n/OJN

What a time to enter the novitiate. The pandemic and great national unrest in the US make inherently intense practical discernment and the trying on of monastic life that much more intense. The nuns here say that, though our daily life hasn't really changed, the "atmospheric pressure" we live under is palpably different. Not that my life before as an oblate wasn't intense. I actually find a great deal of continuity between living the oblate rule and my first few months as a novice. The means and modes of the intensity differ, though. I experienced being an oblate as a life with a prayerful center amidst a large variety and number of relationships, delights, demands, and graces, in the Church and in "the world." As a novice, I'm trying to live with a prayerful center with a much stripped-down provision of relationships, delights, demands, and graces. Things like enclosure and celibacy are some of the means that do the stripping down and give my present life its particular intensity.

But it's the questions that are the most intense part of my novitiate. The increased atmospheric pressure adds intensity to the questions, too. Am I called to live a life of prayer that is for God alone—not directly with, for, and on behalf of a family, congregation, or city, as I did for years as a father, parish priest, and oblate? Is the love the Spirit gave me in baptism to include the deep intimacy of marriage, or is it to be spread out now among more people, with greater space in between me and them for Christ to be present? (Monastic social distancing!)

The questions that press most for my attention and prayer have to do with death. Meditating on one's death is at the heart of monastic and Christian life, and there it is in the Rule of St Benedict: "Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die." So, I ask, Am I ready to die at any time, and am I committed to live a joyful, expectant penitence in order to be ready to die? Would my death here with these people be the right one for me to die? Would my death here continue, in a hidden way, the Church's witness to the world that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again?

You might expect that these questions—especially in times such as these—would be solely depressing for me. But they've got their own kind of liberation. They and my age begin to reframe things and suggest to me in surprising ways what might be important and what might be vanity, just like Ecclesiastes says—in myself and in the world's present struggles. St Bernard actually says taking on the view of that "pessimistic" holy writer is the first step on the path to the delight and love revealed in the Song of Songs. The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.... This is not at all a solution to the injustice and folly that press on us from right and left, behind and before—in me or in the world. But it is the intensive stillness of being a novice so far. And maybe that's what might make a difference some day.