A Note from the Guardian

When I was a child I always looked forward to September and the start of the new school year. Even now something about the approach of autumn (here in the northern hemisphere) invites me to stand up straighter, listen more carefully, and look with attention for the changing angle of the sunlight.

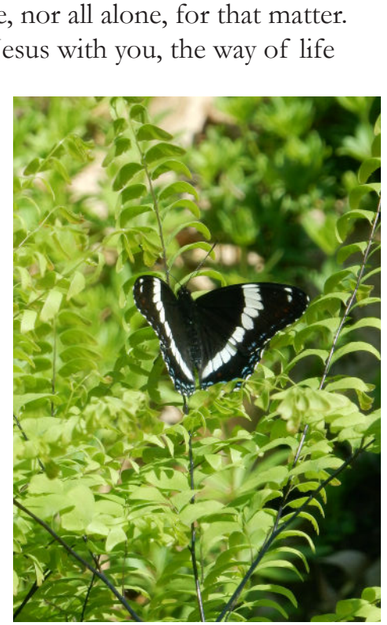
In monasteries guided by the Rule of St Benedict, the feast of the Holy Cross on September 14th marks such a change of season and of emphasis. The feast brings with it an invitation to sharpen our attention to the things of the spirit, to consider where we have been and where we are going, and be ready to be called more deeply into Love's purposes, come what may.

These recurring waypoints in time are invitations to begin anew, again and again, tokens that the future is not simply an undifferentiated expanse of the same ever receding, un-changing horizon. We don't have to bite off the day, the year, or our lives all at once, nor all alone, for that matter. We are glad and grateful to be traveling the way of the cross of Jesus with you, the way of life and peace.

Yours in Jesus and Julian,

M. Hilary, OJN

Guardian of the Order



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

Our widespread community of Oblates and Associates, women and men 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 XV • September 2023 • No. 3
the newsletter of the Order of Julian of Norwich

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Community Notes

We gathered again in Oconomowoc for Julianfest in early June. Joining us was our Bishop Visitor, the Rt Rev Wendell Gibbs, who also delivered one of the lectures.

This summer our weather has been comparatively mild and we give thanks that the drought here has not yet been disruptive. But it was new and different to not have much rain at all during the spring and early summer.

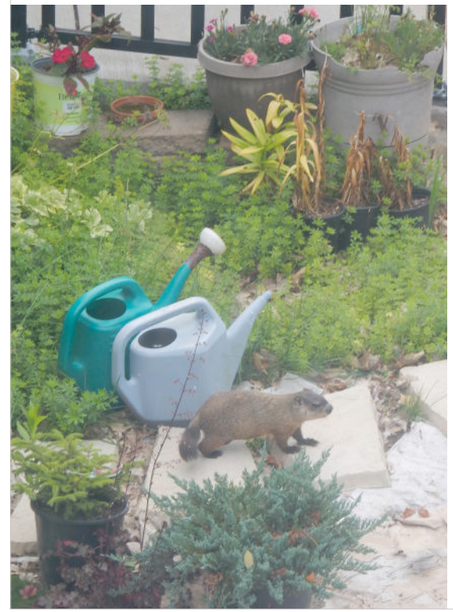
Many projects have been slated for this year, with most of them currently in holding pattern. However, we've had the pleasure of seeing some things get accomplished: after years of neglect, some of the overgrown trails in our woods have been restored with the help of a neighbor. We had a much-deferred barnyard work day in late August.

Much closer to home, and again with the help of neighbors, we have got half of the logs split. This summer the groundskeeper has been busy with stacking wood and keeping

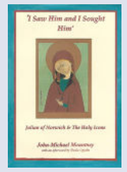
up with the grounds. She has periodically been aided by a new "helper," the woodchuck, who has decided to dig some burrows closer to the house and keep trim the weeds around the lawn. We also had a surprise visit from a duck; these don't usually stop here because there is no kind of pond. The duck offered no assistance.

Some of you have noticed that our online shop has been down most of the summer. This was due to prolonged maintenance while our webmaster moved it to a new platform. There are still more bugs to work out but it is functioning again. We will soon be adding new books on Julian, including the one reviewed at right which should be available this fall.

The guesthouse is slowly opening again as we are able, and currently open primarily to Associates and Oblates of the Order and clergy in and around Wisconsin.



Clockwise from lower left: Sr Therese at work in the wood pile • Bishop Gibbs and Mthr Hilary at Julianfest • A crowd of members of the Order, plus our Bishop Visitor, at Julianfest • Our neighbor the woodchuck



"I Saw Him and I Sought Him": Julian of Norwich & the Holy Icons • John-Michael Mountney • Friends of Julian of Norwich • pp 130 • ISBN: 978-1-3999-5302-3

Today we are awash with images of Julian; but the first icon of Julian apparently was written only in the late 1980s by Anna DiMascio. This icon, which had been commissioned by the author of *Julian of Norwich & the Holy Icons*, is featured on the cover. Mountney, also the author of the 1980s *Sin Shall Be A Glory*, returns with a book on Julian from an Orthodox perspective. As Elizabeth Obbard placed Julian by Thérèse of Lisieux, Mountey places Julian's texts alongside liturgical texts of Western and Orthodox Christianity and opposite full page color icons. However, Mountney's new book focuses "not on parallels between aspects of Julian's thinking and strands of the Orthodox theological tradition but… the way in which appreciation of Julian's witness can be enhanced through an appreciation of the spiritual effectiveness of the prayerful use of icons." As he notes, "Julian's Showings were things seen and gazed on, and the importance of this for our faith cannot be underestimated."

Mountney begins with a long introduction on the use and function of icons, followed by a reflection on Julian and the crucifixion and how the crucifixion is understood and portrayed in Orthodoxy. Each icon in the book is interpreted in a brief summary, before being shown in color with its liturgical material and a passage from Julian, chosen for its relevance to the icon. "These texts can form the basis of meditation" but may also help in contemplating the icon. This gazing and reading of the icon itself "is more than feasting the eyes, and it is a word that speaks also of rapt attention and being drawn in by love. This process can…begin now, and the holy icons which are 'windows into heaven' offer us the way, this drawing in, which is also the way of love." The foreword and afterword consist of "a brief history of orthodox time" by Sheila Upjohn, revealing "the urgent need for reconciliation and forgiveness"; *Julian of Norwich & the Holy Icons* explores some of "the gifts Orthodoxy brings to the universal Church."

Powerfully, Wisely, Lovingly

Mthr Hilary OJN

Julian said, "Thus powerfully, wisely, lovingly was the soul tested in this vision. Then I saw truly that I must give my assent with great reverence, rejoicing in God."

The adventure Julian is embarking on with Jesus, by Jesus's initiative, is to be made a being able to contain Jesus's presence, strong enough to be in conversation with Jesus as he is. Powerfully, wisely, lovingly then, Julian was being tested—tempered—throughout the visions to be strong enough to hold all that Jesus wished to give her, and to be able to transmit that to us. Jesus all power, all wisdom, all love, wishes to make us as like to himself in character as we are in nature, which is our full salvation. As St Paul says (1 Cor 15:49 ff) "just as we have borne the image of the man of dust we will also bear the image of the man of heaven."

But there are difficulties with this. As Eliot says, "human kind/ Cannot bear very much reality." We have to be strengthened in order to be strengthened. We see with Julian how Jesus did just this, how he set up the scaffolding for his work in her with the three visions that came concurrently with her vision of Jesus's head bleeding, as Julian says, "The bleeding continued until many things were seen and understood." Among these many things seen and understood were the vision of Mary his Mother at the Annunciation, encouraging in Julian the capacity of trust; the vision of himself as enwrapping and enfolding us with himself, that is, encouraging in Julian a first apprehension of security and assurance; and finally there was the vision of all that is made sitting in the palm of Julian's hand, kept and held in being for love by God who is all power, all wisdom, all love. There is nowhere Julian could ever be that would be out of the reach of God's keeping and love.

But back to those difficulties. More often than we would like to admit we human beings are a lot like a folded paper cup, not very sturdy, and in this work of giving ourselves to Jesus to be filled with him, we are up against several things.

There is the besetting gravity of the sins of impatience and despair which cause us to think, as Julian says, that while "God is almighty and may do everything...that he is all wisdom and knows how to do everything, but that he is all love and is willing to do everything—there we stop short." We can't always make that leap of seeing that God is not just a large version of our often capricious, even sometimes Jekyll and Hyde-y selves.

There is the difficulty of our fearfulness as creatures, and our continual pushing against competing visions of who God is, especially the ones see-sawing back and forth in the writings of the psalms and the prophets. Sometimes we are captive to the god of our imaginations, the god from whom Adam and Eve were hiding, and who, they imagined, acts and thinks as we do.

There is finally the simple difficulty of the heaviness of our bodies, a sense of creaturely overload: sometimes we are just too much for us to

carry around. And this often feeds back into our sense of impatience and despair, which creates the doom loops we know so well. We are working with the fact that we are indeed, creatures: contingent, made and ultimately sustained by Another's love and will.

One thing that goes with being creatures is that we don't know what we don't know, and in most cases this very human condition is actually a gift of mercy on our Lord's part. There is no shame in it. At one point, for instance, (in chapter 17) Julian is experiencing with Jesus the pains of his passion, watching as he is suffering and dying, and she admits that she regretted having asked for the experience in the first place: "like a wretch I regretted it, thinking, 'If I had known what it would be like, I would have been reluctant to pray for it.'" The most often used phrase in any world language has to be, "what was I thinking?"

So, we do not know what we do not know. How about this for a thought picture, for instance. Say you are standing in your yard considering the state of your house. You may be standing there thinking, 'Hmmm, needs a good scrape and a bit of paint, and then we're probably good to go.' But it could be that termites are eating away the foundation of your house, but you don't know it. Or if you are given to pessimism, maybe what you are thinking and what your house actually needs are the opposite. We're not always good at this kind of discernment. (So I can put in a plug here for the ministry of spiritual direction, spiritual companionship. It is good to have other ears in on our considerations at times.)

Jesus knows what we need, what we need to know, and how much of it we can handle at any given time. We do not know what we do not know. We do not know yet where our vision of God needs adjusting, or revisioning, or completely overturning, like the tables of the money-changers in the temple. What sort of education does our understanding of the economy of God need to undergo? We can only agree to try and be receptive to what, through our immediate circumstances and in the depths of our hearts, Jesus is longing to show us.

To take on new understandings often means letting old ones go. It is hard sometimes, and scary to let go of the side of the pool and trust that Love is going to hold you up, let you float, in the meantime. And it is good to be able to admit this. One morning, at a time of rather great difficulty in our community life, as I was preparing to celebrate Mass at the monastery I was standing in the sacristy praying fervently, "O God, please don't do anything new today." It's not always that we feel ready to live out our intention, "Lord, be it unto me according to your word."

At one moment in the time of the showings, (chapter 37 if you are looking these up) Julian was shown that she would sin, but she says, "because of the delight I had in contemplating [Jesus], I did not at once pay attention to that revelation." Then, she said, God waited for her and gave her grace to pay attention. Julian says that she experienced a quiet fear at the revelation that all of us would continue to keep sinning. (What? You mean we're just going to keep doing this no matter what?) Yet even at the same time as she was shown this, the consolation for it was granted also, Jesus reminding her, "I am keeping you very safe."

As you read Julian you can see Jesus, powerfully, wisely, lovingly, looping back to bring to her mind bits of what he said to her before, consolations and assurances he has given her and repeated as the revelations have continued, and you can see Julian riffing on these and expanding them as time and her thought go on, maturing and deepening. These are stepping-stones that Jesus gives Julian again and again, every time she finds she needs a foothold in all the new things she is wading in, Jesus gives her a secure place to stand.