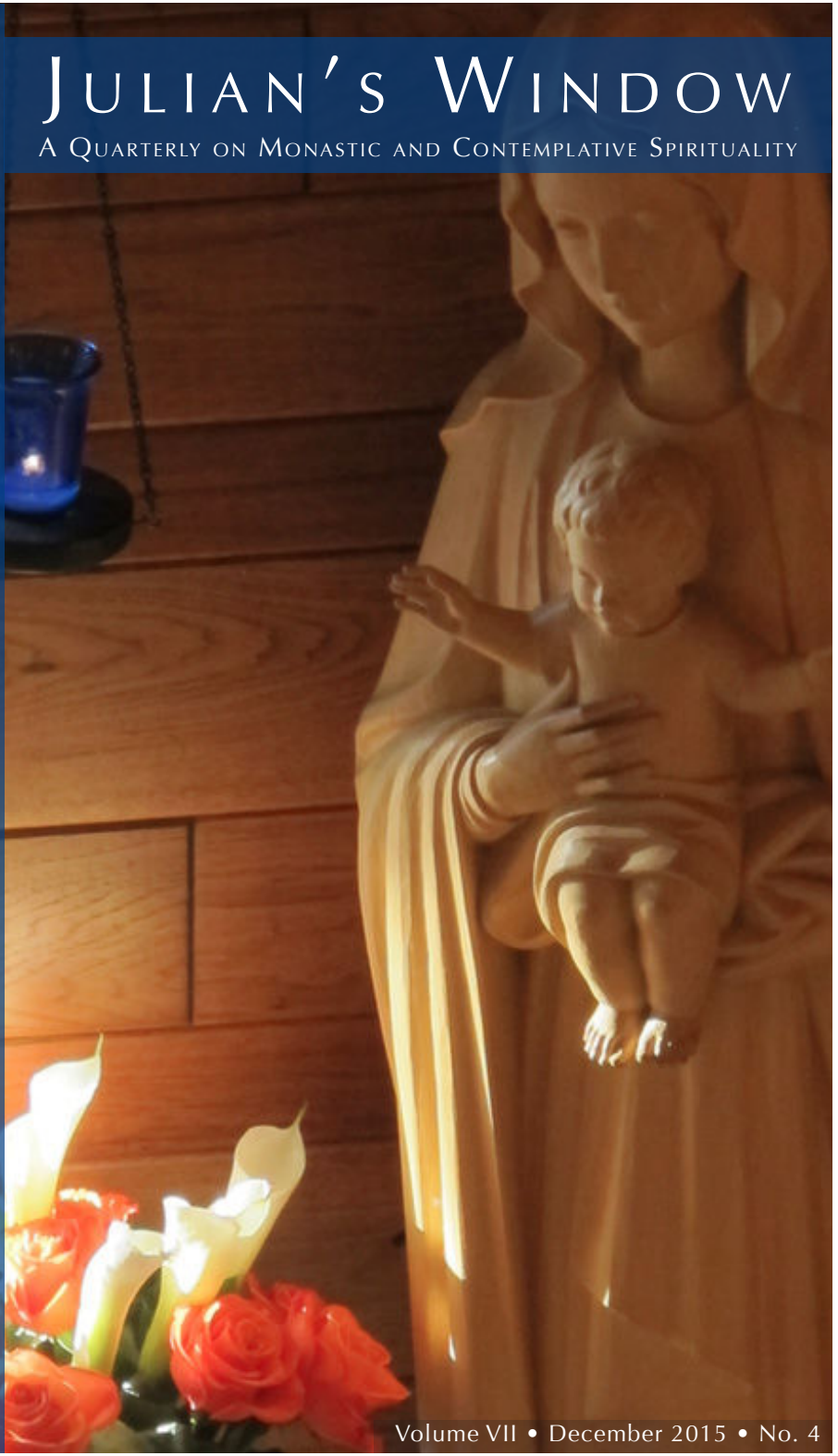
The Order of Julian of Norwich

Julian's Window

A Quarterly on Monastic and Contemplative Spirituality



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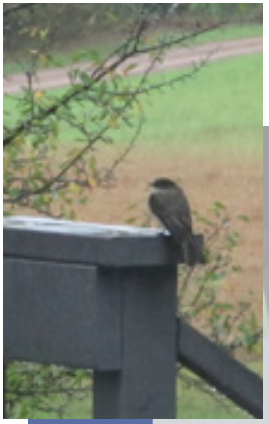

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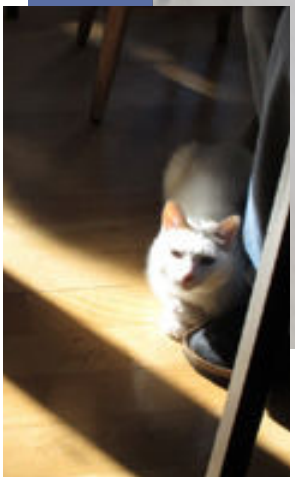
On the cover: The statue of Our Lady in the chapel



The Order of Julian of Norwich

is a contemplative Order of monks and nuns in the Episcopal Church. Our aim is to renew the spiritual life of the Church in three ways: first by a renewal of the contemplative monastic tradition, second by supporting a vibrant community of affiliates who are a bridge between the monastery and parishes, and third 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,** through which we publish articles on the spiritual life .

Julian's Window, also found on our website, is published quarterly. For permission to re-publish, please write to the Order:

The Order of Julian of Norwich
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Thirty Years

Advent Greetings to you from Our Lady of the Northwoods Monastery!

When the founder of our Order was a newly-ordained priest in the Diocese of Fond du Lac, he became the founding vicar of a tiny mission church in Eagle River that at first bore the name Our Lady of the Snows. Its name subsequently changed to St Mary of the Snows and the mission continues to the present time under the patronage of St Francis. In naming our new monastery we wanted in some way to complete the circle and hark back to that early history as we begin the next stage of the Order's life here in Nicolet National Forest, in the Diocese of Fond du Lac.

Whereas our monastery in Waukesha was called Julian House, Julian's name will grace the guesthouse we hope to build adjacent and attached to our present monastery. The house we have moved into here is not as large as Julian House was, and as a consequence, we are unable to accommodate guests who wish to make overnight retreats. St Julian's Guesthouse is now in the design stages, but to make it a reality we need both your prayers, and your financial help especially for this project. To that end we have included with this issue of Julian's Window a special flyer for your prayerful consideration. As ever, all monetary donations to the Order are tax deductible.

By the grace of God, the faithfulness of those who are now or have at one time been Oblates, Associates, monks and nuns of the Order, and by the prayers and support of many, this year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Order of Julian of Norwich. We keep as our founding day the 30th of December when in 1985 our founder, Fr John-Julian Swanson, OJN made his solemn life vows as a monk in the presence of Bishop Bradford Hastings of Connecticut, the Order's first Visitor.

As with any human being on the way to thirty, the Order has grown and undergone all sorts of development — small steps and large leaps forward, reversals, and learning of all kinds from joyful to sorrowfully difficult and back again. We have been gifted with

the usual healthy share of adolescence (and the pictures to prove it) as well as the sober awakenings, strength and singleness of vision that adulthood brings. All through it, however, has run the contemplative thread of the inspired motto our founder gave us, *Await, Allow, Accept, Attend*.

Trusting in Jesus, our future and our hope, giving thanks for Julian our patron, and for you, our "even-Christians", Oblates and Associates, friends and benefactors, we step out into the next years with joy and hope, and wish you a peaceful and fruitful season of Advent, and Christmas to come.

Mother Hilary, OJN

Guardian of the Order

Being Known before God

Mthr Hilary OJN

In the just-previous edition of Julian's Window, I wrote of how the contemplative monastic life has been understood to be prophetic. That is, something about the life bears witness to the world about what it is to be a human being in company with the rest of the created order. At its best the monastic life is sharply flavorful, preservative of something good, and an illuminating, inviting light in an increasingly darkling place.

The current issue comes to you as Advent begins, when we wait for the revealing of the One closest to the Father's heart who will make the fullness of God known to us, and the fullness of what it is to be a human being. So this time I want to hold the monastic saltshaker over a certain conception of self-identity, and what it is to allow oneself to be known.

More and more, Advent is the liturgical year's most countercultural season. At once expectant, introspective and expansive, it is also the liturgical season that has been most closely identified with the contemplative monastic life. The Church, so to speak, puts off its habit of primarily active agency and, offering itself simply to be with another, sets itself down with Saint Mary to await the birth of her child, bearing with her all that the gestation process inevitably brings.

With quiet insistence, Advent questions us. What do we suppose we are waiting for? What is it we think we most need and how do we get it? The deepest need of the human heart is to be known and to know another. Calling to us yet again with grace upon grace, God is sending the Word of the prophets in our own idiom and form to say, unmistakably, that we are not alone and unregarded in the universe. But Jesus the revelation of God also conspires in the revelation of one of our deepest secrets. Yes we do wish to be known, but not as the impoverished, unrighteous beings a pervasive and powerful intuition continually whispers that we are. When it comes to the point, it is difficult to believe, as Julian says, that we are looked upon by God "with pity and not with blame".

The difference between our desire and our fear can be illustrated by the stories of two people revisited each Advent and Christmas season. While King Herod exults and worries over his hold on the temporalities of power, prestige, and wealth, ever grasping, ever plotting and never resting, Mary the mother of Jesus waits and wonders over the portents announced with the new life that will subvert all these. What is it about Mary that allows her to make this trusting response? What might this posture of receptivity have to say about the matter of human identity?

Once upon a long time ago a person's identity was considered literally to be a given. If not immutable, identity was at least

strongly determined by one's birth into a particular family and by that family's relative place in the larger society. Identity was more a creature of inheritance than self-expression, more of social consensus than personal protestation.

This understanding of identity has undergone significant change over time, almost to the point of inversion. Personal identity is increasingly seen as exactly that, a creature of personal construction, self-expression and willed invention, influenced and formed by nothing else. The question has even arisen in some circles as to whether any outside entity (even in the case of small children, their own parents) may legitimately have input into who or what a person may conceive themselves to be.

One thing that has fertilized this conception of identity has been the widespread use of connective digital technology. It is amazingly useful, but like any other tool can easily be pressed into the service of fear. From behind the protective carapace of the illuminated screen, I am whoever I choose to present myself as to the world, and in read-only format; my self-identity cannot legitimately be put to question by others.

Even as digital connective technology has provided a venue for sharing one's self with potentially thousands of others at once, it does not seem widely to have led to greater meaningful connection or to the fullness of human communal life. Could it be that living from behind an impenetrable, constructed self has become a means of dealing with the fear that one's real self might crumble under the pressure of actual human interaction?

I want to hold up next to all this the older technological culture of the contemplative monastic life, a crucible designed to produce

as joyfully human a being as possible this side of heaven, and a culture that tends toward the understanding of identity in a very different way. There, personal identity is neither a creature of communal imposition nor unassailable self-invention, nor is it mediated by words that many others will hear or see.

In the contemplative monastic life one's identity is a thing at one and the same time self-revealed, discovered, and offered to the self by others. The identity of a person, the beauty and truth of a person, is drawn out from inside by the slow workings of community life itself, the kinetic conversation of day to day human interaction that no manner of protective equipment can long withstand. At the same time, identity is also offered to that self from outside as gift, in what comes to light in the mirror of the lives of one's brothers and sisters, a reflection of the already-existent real self whose truth one may choose to accept or not. To be able to live like this — speaking, discovering and receiving one's identity requires a certain amount of courageously humble trust, and a community worthy of it. And a community becomes this to the degree that it also has the courage to be awake to the intuition of truth in whatever way it may be revealed.

In this kind of community, love is not a prize for those who have been examined and found acceptable. Love and acceptance are, rather, the conditions necessary to allow these forms of revelation and mutual exchange to take place at all. Absent this, the hope of truthfully knowing and being known is a house built on sand, and what sort of relationship could be nurtured inside of that?

In this long "Advent" of self-gestation, coming to have a personal identity that is rooted in reality and directed toward hope, there is in evidence more and more of the strength of St Mary and less of the grasping weakness of King Herod. Because in voluntarily giving herself to the purposes of God, Mary also discovers and receives herself; she is gifted with the fullness of her identity and its meaning by the light of the ongoing revelation of Jesus her Son, the way, the truth and the life.

In the end, we don't know what will be, or even what we will be — only that it will be something good. For as St John says, in the end we will see Jesus as he is, and know ourselves to be fully known by Jesus. In the meantime we pray to be and become creatures equal to the bracing goodness of it.

The Lesson of Advent

Fr John-Julian OJN

Pick up any Bible commentary that you wish and look up Chapter 7 of Paul's first letter to the Church in Corinth — this is where Paul says: "To the unmarried and to widows I say this: it is a good thing if like me they stay as they are…"— that is, they should not marry. And virtually every commentator, anxious to lift such a heavy and unpopular behest from the shoulders of modern Christians will hasten to point out that the reason Paul speaks against marriage is because he — and all Christians of his day — expected the Second Coming of Christ to occur during their lifetimes, and so Paul set up more stringent regulations than would otherwise be the case. And that point is supposed to mean that modern day Christians are exempt from Paul's mandate.

I have often wondered why that was. Ought not we modern Christians ALSO to expect the Second Coming momentarily? Simply because it has not happened in 2000 years does not mean that it could not happen tomorrow. So, unconsciously, the commentators are saying, "Don't worry about the Second Coming because we all agree that the Parousia is not imminent — so go ahead and get married if you wish."

Now I do not intend to preach about marriage today. but I have used that example to face into one of the absolutely core values in Christian spiritual life — and particularly for those of us who claim to be contemplatives — that is, the condition of WAITING.

Today we begin the season of Advent — a liturgical event which we can trace back at least to the 6th century. It is a venerable commemoration, and it is (and has always been) a season of penitence, fasting, and preparation for the feast of the First Coming of Christ at the Nativity — as well as preparation for the Last Day, the Second Coming of Christ. And the pre-eminent aspect of this season is the aspect of waiting — of holding off on the jubilation, of choosing not to satisfy our yearning for festivity, of restraining our desire to celebrate the feast that we are waiting for.

In our present day, with our emphases on immediate gratification, on fulfillment of one's every desire as soon as possible, without any restraint, the season of Advent has suffered terrible privation of its penitential aspect — the aspect of waiting. Waiting — holding off and waiting — is as unpopular as celibacy these days!

But it is the core of serious Christian spirituality, and is central to all serious growth. And the reason for waiting is simply that spiritual growth is not something you and I acomplish, not something we can earn or build up to or work our way towards. Like the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, true spiritual growth is something given by God, and it is called "grace".

And, as Mother Julian put it so well — all we can do is sin!

But to paraphrase that a little more hopefully: all we can do is wait! We can live as faithfully as possible, provide God as central a place in our lives as we can, keep our commitments as Christians unwaveringly, and WAIT.

And, as I have said many times before, we cannot even give a clear definition or explanation of what it is we are waiting for. We can call it union with God in Christ; we can call it perfect virtue; we can call it heaven; we can call it the kingdom of God or the Second Coming — but none of those things is a clear and accurate description of the goal itself, because the goal for which we wait is shrouded and wrapped in darkness and in mystery.

Consequently, even the simple job of waiting can be extremely difficult, and, ultimately, it is an expression of faith and hope, since it is only on faith and in hope that we can tolerate this seemingly endless waiting.

And our hope is based not only on our private aspirations, but finally and ultimately on the promise of God the Father and Jesus Christ his Son. He promised to be with us until the end of the ages. He promised to come again in clouds and great glory. He promised the completion of his kingdom.

And that is what we wait for — we wait for the signs of it in the Nativity — and we wait for it on the Day of the Lord at the end of the world.

And it is the waiting which serves as a kind of spiritual development in itself, because at the core of the waiting is the suppression and the denial (the "naughting" as Julian calls it) of the ego. Waiting, with its lack of stimulus, its discipline, its faithfulness without apparent reward — that very waiting helps us ever so gradually to slide the self aside and to make room for the Maker and the Divine Actor. With enough waiting, we begin to give up on our own ability to resolve it, and gradually the expectation begins to slide our egos, our selves into the background — and all our attention begins to be focused on the One Who Is To Come!

And that, in turn, is good practice for the day-to-day reality — of wanting, but being unable

to obtain — of longing for, but being unable to bring about — and, finally, of leaving it all in the hands of God — who then, finally, is able to do his work!

Our motto — Await, Allow, Accept, Attend — takes on double power and double value in these purple days of Advent.

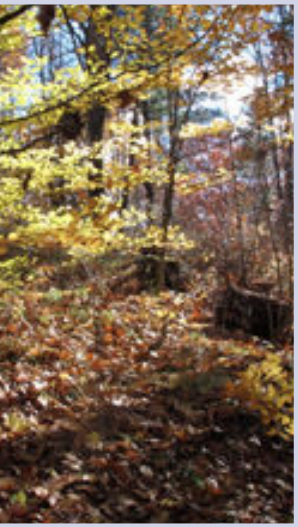
Let us each see how well we can develop the skill of WAITING during this holy time which the Church in her wisdom has set aside specifically for that.

Three Advent Feasts

Sr Therese OJN

St Andrew the Apostle

"They were fishermen" but "Jesus said, 'Come with me'" and "at once they left their nets and followed him."



Or put another way, Andrew and Peter unhesitatingly gave up their security and livelihood and measure of self-worth, virtually their entire identities, because this man Jesus says to them "Come with me". He has come to mean more to them than anything they have in themselves, and they are not afraid to leave behind even who they are to be with him.

This is one of Andrew's greatest gifts to the Church: the faith to go fearlessly when Jesus calls, and the vision to see in Jesus the treasure of great price, beside whom all else is nothing.

St John of the Cross

John shaped his approach to the few years that comprised his life by the awareness of God's offer of union, and by how he chose to respond to that. He knew himself offered the infinite and inapprehensible, but also that the realization of it would be worked out in his own here-and-now and all that this held, without exception.

Thus the immense trials he faced when helping bring to birth the Discalced Carmelites, his service as superior, and his own hidden spiritual trials, did not lead him to say "Father, save me from this hour". He lived out his understanding that nothing other than himself — his lack of trust most of all — could prevent in any way the attainment of his sole desire, and so he could pass through all things securely and in peace, as if to say "It was to pass through these things that I came to this hour."

For him it was not simply a matter of making use of the present, but of relying on the goodness of God, to trust and to go forth in that trust, no matter what happened. And as those who desire nothing else than God do not walk in darkness because they run by faith, in turmoil as in joy the response of his life will be only: "Father, glorify your name."

St Thomas the Apostle

Thomas was one of eleven apostles who refused to believe the news of the resurrection until he had encountered the risen Jesus himself. With just cause to be skeptical about the matter, he is simply reflecting to his colleagues their own initial doubt, and is even honest enough — or hopeful — to insist on more concrete evidence.

If the scene of his confronting his fellow apostles is their first missionary endeavour — and to one of their own no less — they don't come off very well. You have seen the Lord? that's all very well for you, but what about me? In their excitement the apostles presume that nothing more is needed than the authority of their word — they who had not believed the first witness who anyway was a woman. Now they are rudely brought home the fact that their words mean next to nothing if they cannot back them up with living witness, which in this case, Jesus humbly provides for them.

For those who will follow, the followers themselves are called to be the living witness, must live Jesus and permit him to live in them so fully and so unquestionably, that their very lives will say 'we have seen the Lord', and no one will be able to doubt it, or need to ask for other evidence.

Community Notes

We have been warmly embraced by the Diocese of Fond du Lac, and are also delighted to be here. However, before we get into the changes of life here, we owe a postscript on our Waukesha property. This was purchased by St Coletta's of Wisconsin, headquartered in nearby Jefferson, southern Wisconsin. They have been serving people with developmental disabilities for over a hundred years and are going to turn our former monastery into two residences — complete with chapel — which they plan to call St Julian's and St Clare's. We could not have asked for better buyers for the property and ask that you keep St Coletta's and those they serve in your prayer as we do.

We have now been here in White Lake almost three months. Though it has been extremely busy, the quality of silence and solitude here is nurturing, and we hope to share it with guests in time. We spent several weeks unpacking, painting, cleaning up. Several friends came out to visit, as well as to help move library parts into the house. The books finally moved into the house (from the garage) in late October and November, and we are currently unpacking that last great project. We don't yet have a date for the dedication and blessing, but we will post it on our website when we do.

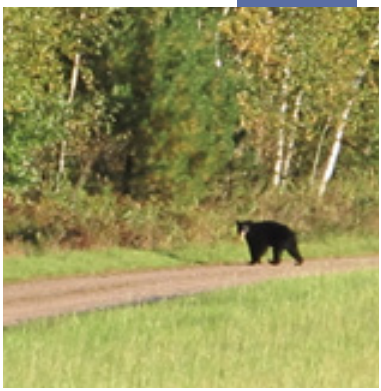
Many of you will have noticed that our website was slow to update in late summer, but during the fall more time opened up for secretarial

tasks and we are putting up new pictures and information. One big work that happens every fall is putting together the Ordo (our liturgical calendar) for the next year; the help of friends this time has made it much easier.

Another fall work was picking nearly a bushel of wonderful apples — there is a thriving miniature orchard around the house. We are preparing for our first winter here, and in addition to continuing to settle in, plan to build up our stock of Soapus Dei soaps, and to start selling locally.

Some of you have asked about wildlife. We are on their territory of course, so we see lots — especially deer, foxes, bald eagles. We have only seen one bear so far (pictured below), who didn't stick around to chat.

For now, Br Barnabas is remaining at the senior residence in Milwaukee where he is receiving care for Parkinson's Disease, but we are in the process of finding an appropiate residence for him closer to White Lake. Fr John-Julian is staying in Hartland, and continues to work on translation and research projects in the Milwaukee area.



And for the sharp-eyed among you, yes, we have indeed changed our habits. This has actually been a much longer process than moving, since we first began discussing it some years ago, and finally began work on it a year and a half ago. We wished to simplify the design of the tunic and make it easier to wear, as well as to simplify it overall by making it one color. We chose dark grey — and since we still print our newsletter in black and white, the pictures don't show much difference!

Clockwise from the top: Sr Therese and our neighbor George Alft on a tour of the boundary of our land • Friends from Grace Church Sheboygan, whom we put to work • The bear who ran away • Mthr Hilary and Sr Cornelia on a trip to local Cathedral Pines National Monument, an area of old growth never logged.

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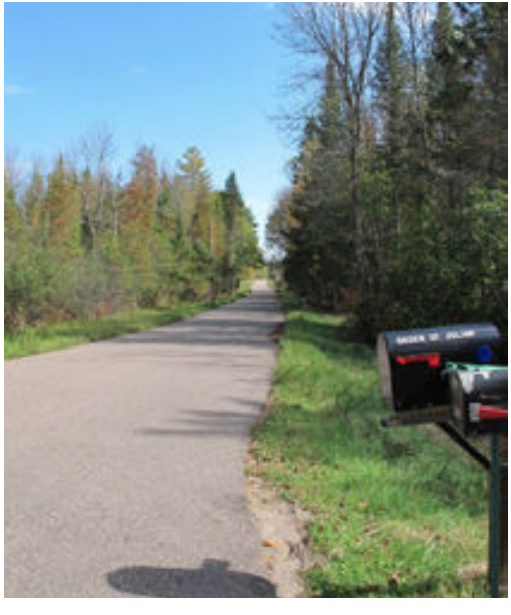

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