



Julian JOTTINGS

Thoughts on Things Spiritual

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Lord, Open Our Eyes

Sr. Cornelia, OJN

“O Eternal Savior, make us conscious of our need for your strength, that we who venerate the renowned merits of Blessed Gilbert, may by your grace and assisted by his prayers, be delivered from all diseases of our souls.”

Just think. On Monday we celebrated the commemoration of Saint Birgitta of Sweden, who founded a Religious Order including both men and women around 1350; today we celebrate the commemoration of Saint Gilbert of Sempringham in England, who founded a Religious Order including both men and women around 1150; and on Monday we celebrate the commemoration of Saint Teresa of Avila, who in 1562 began her reform of the already existing Carmelite Orders for Sisters and Friars into the Discalced Carmelites. These founders, each approximately two hundred years apart from the other, were concerned to respond to the inner life and its needs: how does one respond to God’s love; and what are the diseases of the soul which would increase or diminish that response?

The diseases of the soul are naturally much in our minds here. We are a newly founded Religious Order including both women and men. We have undertaken by our vows, and especially our vow of prayer, to give careful attention to our souls’ needs. What exactly are those needs nowadays? How do we weigh priorities? Are we going about it properly? This is radical work we’ve taken on board.

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Psalm 1 (to choose only one of the prime monastic readings for this Feast) contrasts the images of rootedness and life, and rootlessness and death. To do soul work, we have to take an enormous risk of seeing ourselves as rooted in God—first of all by giving up all those good and not-so-good things and relationships which the world would call being properly rooted—in order to live in our small, new Community the worth of which we have to take on trust. Our Savior suggested such a strategy to his disciples as the way to follow him, the early church confirmed its worth, and the early years of monasticism fine-tuned the method. We, St. Teresa, St. Birgitta, St. Gilbert, are heirs to all that—we have a goodly heritage.



Rootedness in Community is not easily come by. Keeping the standards of the secular world while trying to live by Community standards creates an awful inner turmoil which is far, far worse than the considerable pain of letting go of our past ways—but for most people, it's a case of having to try a dose of the divided heart before the truth of that monastic assertion can be accepted. But this does give Community rootedness a distinctively astringent flavor: community members are at various stages of their spiritual growth, so that their dismay, distress, even anger, have to be accepted as inevitable accompaniments to the growth of Love. Gradually it dawns on us that this strange acceptance is the gradually deepening perception that God loves all of us, despite our inevitable accompaniments, with an incredibly unfolding loving-kindness whose strange lessons are drawing all of us nearer and nearer to Himself.

Michael Casey expresses our peculiar vocation very neatly in his book, *Strangers to the City* [Paraclete Press, 2005, pp. 4-5]:

Monastic life is not really about self-realization, in the immediate sense of these words: It is more about self-transcendence. These are noble words, but the reality they describe is a lifetime of feeling out of one's depth: confused, bewildered, and not a little affronted by the mysterious ways of God. This is why those who persevere and are buried in the monastic cemetery can rarely be described as perfectly integrated human beings. Far from it. We live and mostly die with our imperfections intact. Accepting this means letting go of efforts to manage one's self-definition and to control events in accordance with it. It means living in the insecurity of God's mercy and that of the community.

Self-transcendence is a relentlessly grinding process. It makes each one of us the anti-hero in the drama of our own life: unknowing, incompetent, stumbling. To persevere in such an unpoetic existence requires unusual skills, if they may be so called, and strong motivation. . . .

This is why one of the early tasks confronting newcomers to monastic life is to understand by what dynamism Providence has led them to take this step. Once this has been done, they can sit back and



wait for their newly crafted vision to fall apart. Then they can start again, re-assembling the pieces, with God’s help, into an approach that will serve them for another few years. And so the process of re-definition continues.

Our last Chapter Talk used the description of our vocation as “spreading the Gospel by the manner of our presence”. And last night’s Vigil reading declared that “those who bear witness to Jesus have the spirit of prophecy.” Embracing the role of prophet is to climb onto Christ’s Cross so that it will hold us upright. If we are single-hearted, we are not scared to prophesy in this way—by the manner of our presence imperfect though it still may be: we are convinced that this way has worked and will work again and so we don’t mind speaking out with our own person or (equally difficult) by letting our very hiddenness, our very disappearance, speak for us.

But have we disappeared? I am at the stage when I don’t think so. Remember the vast expanse of the mystical life but don’t cower before either its grander or its smaller aspects. If we are true to our vocation of contemplative life and prayer,

I know that we can proclaim our message through our presence to whatever people may surround us, small crowd or large—for our contemplative prayers are massed like chariots of fire on the hills. . . . Though I at least still feel compelled to whisper “Lord, open their eyes and let them see—please”.



O clemens, O pia, O dulcis, ...
The Rev. William Bulson, friend of OJN

There is that
time, when voices
are met with open
hands, when the very sounds
echo settle reverberate
in palm creases,
take in their shape,
and shape of bones.

One calls to
the other, from their sources
words come out up
in skin, and meanings
move in curved
tempo, the silence of breathing.

Accepting the Present Moment

This article is from a meditation by Fr Gregory, OJN, on the Order of Julian's motto – Await, Allow, Accept, Attend – and will be part of an audio recording to be made this fall with the a cappella music of Heather Ponting, ObJN, and Jacynth Hamill.

Accepting the present moment is easy when the present moment brings what we want, when it is pleasurable, meaningful, enjoyable. Thus the spiritual practice of consciously choosing to accept the moment only comes in to play when our will has been frustrated or our intentions destroyed.

Another name for acceptance is thus surrender. Or abandonment to the will of God. Or self-offering: releasing ourselves to flow out in sacrifice in the present moment. To practice deep acceptance means to bow down before what we cannot understand and to give up all resistance to reality as it presents itself. Acceptance is precisely this surrender of any right of refusing what is.

Such acceptance of the present moment does not make us doormats for other people to abuse and walkover. To think this would be a great misunderstanding. Rather, acceptance, this surrender of resistance, gives us honesty and empowers us with a great presence of self. From this surrendered presence of self we are able to initiate change, refuse to be abused, and resist tyranny. For instance, the abused woman first has to accept the fact that she is abused before she can be empowered to act in love for herself and others in changing or leaving the abusive relationship. This is the paradox of resistance-less resistance, non-violent protest, and the creativity that initiates change free of personal egoism.

When we accept the present moment we are no longer living under the metaphor of conflict or struggle with what is. We are no longer living from a self based resistance, negativity, and violence. Rather, we stand empowered and whole in the present moment, making choices from a center of love and willing to take responsibility for the consequences of our action. Our actions are no longer re-actions, no longer angry or violent or manipulative responses to a reality we refuse to accept. Our actions flow instead in the simplicity of personal choice and with open clarity of mind. Our actions are a surrendered participation in God.

To accept the present moment means that we accept that there is in fact so much that we cannot understand about reality. We accept the fact of what is, and stop fighting it. We are then free to chart a course according to our deepest values and spiritual principles. We become creative initiators of change and new life precisely because we living from love and not anger, from peace and not war.

The artist Paul Cezanne wrote, *'Artistic perception had to overcome itself to the point of realizing that even something horrible, something that seems no more than disgusting, is, and shares the truth of its being with everything else that exists. Just as the creative artist is not allowed to choose, neither is he permitted to turn his back on anything; a single refusal and he is cast out of the state of grace and becomes sinful all the way through.'*

