Julian Jottings

Thoughts on Things Spiritual

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The Peas Must be in by April 15th

Sr. Deborah n/OJN

"The peas must be in by April 15th". Little did I realize that this was the beginning of a new life cycle for me. *Peas* had to be in? *I* still had to finish my taxes and *they* had to be in. That was my only priority for April 15th. Well, the taxes did get done for the last time and the peas were planted hopefully for the first (for me) of many times to come. Working in the garden this spring and summer at Julian House has been the fulfilling of what I had hoped would be a large component of my life here as well as one of the most rewarding. What I didn't fully grasp was the depth of spiritual and monastic formation in my life that would happen there in the rows of healthy peas and spinach, leeks and Swiss chard, of cucumbers and lettuces and beans and squash and....

Who knew I would be a weeder? Coming from southwest Florida where the object is to move from air conditioned car into air conditioned house as soon as possible it would have never entered my mind. I am actually someone who loves to sit and weed a bed of vegetables, can sit there for hours and coax the little varmints away from tender roots and shoots, giving them space to grow. Can I weed out the varmints in my spiritual life, my life as a novice monastic giving it room to grow, expand, mature? As in the garden, I believe time will tell. It is an exercise in vigilance and repetition, in patience and mostly in faith of the Great Unknown. You think you've gotten the row done and can go on to something else only to find yourself right back there a few days later looking at a new crop of grass shoots or dandelions or some other creatively determined intruder. As in my slow and spotty acquisition of monastic discipline, the methods of uprooting can determine the success or failure of your endeavors — mostly. Often times, though, it is all truly a product of God's grace. But, I believe I now have a true grasp of the phrase "getting to the root" of a matter!

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I am told that this is a banner year for the Julian House garden. The broccoli is larger and better than ever before and keeps producing, the grape tomatoes could be put in a candy bowl, they are so sweet. The kohlrabi are big as fists. It's really hard not to puff up with some bit of pride upon hearing this, as though any part of it was my doing alone! Father Gregory and his cohort of prior garden assistants have been exhaustive in their nurturing of this garden space, in tilling and keeping the land, in amending the soil with home grown compost, in keeping chemicals out and yummy things in. I am merely the latest in this green thumbed cloud of witnesses to what goes on in this corner of God's creation and am reaping things I did not sow myself. God bless those who have come before and worked the ground for me.

I hope that, with time, I will learn to keep the toxic parts out of my own life, will see which things need to be nurtured, which need to be removed, which need to be thinned out. What new hybrid of creation can I add, what old heirloom seeds can be planted and tended with love? When, for crying out loud, do I get to reap a harvest and what should it look like? What color should it be? How big is it supposed to get? Wait — what did I plant in that patch and how am I supposed to look after it? Thank you to all who have written gardening manuals for the soul, for the master gardeners I am surrounded by who nourish, encourage and instruct me. And to my fellow gardeners, I believe it is time to again enter the fray and weed, weed, weed.

Saint Mary Magdalene

Sr. Cornelia OJN

"I shall totally shatter you because of your vain affections and your vicious pride; and after that I shall gather you together and make you humble and gentle, pure and holy, by one-ing you to myself."

I think that today we should have Mary Magdalene in our hearts along with Julian's famous account of the process of transformation.

Mary of Magdala, from whom seven demons had come out—Mary of Magdala made clean and holy by the work of this strange, compelling wandering prophet of the kingdom. The relief she gained through her deliverance from these demons would guarantee her devotion, faithful presence and her own funds to support Jesus in his travelling mission; guarantee her constancy through the terrors of his Passion and the sorrow of his burial; her bravery in going to the tomb in the dark of the early morning; and her recognition that after his extraordinary appearance from the dead he is now not only her Master, but indeed 'The Lord'—that indeed the kingdom of heaven is among them (just as he had so often proclaimed), that in effect: the Last Day IS the Present

Moment. This earth-shaking news, she knows without a doubt, has to have an enormous impact on how each person witnesses to it, on how lives are lived.

Jesus knows that she has absorbed all this and so it is she who is chosen to carry this great good news to the other apostles: THE LORD made good his purpose for her.

It will take the other apostles a little longer to catch on. And it is among them that we need to count ourselves, while keeping Mary of Magdala in our hearts as hope. The impact of our own Baptism into the death and resurrection of our Lord, of our own receiving of the Holy Spirit, of our receiving of our Lord as daily food and drink—all this seems to take a much longer time for us to come to terms with. We are greatly torn and tempted. For in the meantime our own cast-out demons have found other companions out in the whirling wastes—"why," they say, "should we stay out here when there is a clean, comfortable home waiting for us—come on, let's all go back to the old place—we know our way around there—and there's plenty of room for you all to join us!"

And so. . .we must begin. . .again. It is true that God's consolation never fails us. He comforts us in all our troubles, so that we in turn may be able to comfort others in theirs and to share with them the consolation we ourselves receive from God. But if we are really committed to following our Lord, we will have to be prepared to undergo the shattering, the sweeping out, the making clean, over and over again.

Our monastic tradition, its wisdom and its little practices, is the broom which helps our courteous Lord sweep our house clean. The painful reaction to this sweeping—to the shattering, to the rooting out, of our invasive secular identities and habits which choke out the light and life of the kingdom—this sweeping process distresses us each time. But when we are freed from one or some of our demons we do find a new and unexpected joy, a new and unexpected freedom, and a great longing to stay that way—and that finding is a cause for rejoicing, because it is in that joy, freedom and longing that God can make US apostles to carry the amazing news to others: that the kingdom of heaven really IS among us. N O W.

In the Spirit of Blessed Mother Julian

Mthr. Hilary OJN

At all times and in every circumstance, the Holy Spirit is working to form every person into the likeness of Jesus, that is, working to form each person into Love by Love. The best economist, the Holy Spirit uses every means available inside of any given life to accomplish this work. Anything is potential matter for food and growth and nothing gets wasted, not even the unhappy results of sin.

With increasing maturity a person discovers a life's work, a vocation—a condition of integrity where the borderlines between work, play, obligation and delight become significantly blurred. And this vocation turns out to be the finish-toolbox of choice for the Holy Spirit in the process of formation into Love. The discovery of a vocation reveals and invites a paradoxical set of circumstances in which a person's capacity to act in freedom becomes greater and greater inside of an apparently more and more circumscribed field of action. For a Christian, this whole process of loving formation by the Holy Spirit will be explicit, and cooperation with it from the moment of baptism a matter of conscious choice.

For those of us who have discovered that our formation into Love has something to do with the contemplative life and more particularly, with the person of Julian of Norwich, what might it mean to offer ourselves to the purposes of this Love and to be formed, as our Collect says, "in the spirit of our blessed Mother Julian"? What are some of the Julian fingerprints we might find on the process of our formation?

To begin, there are six large notions running through and always in the background of Julian's *Revelation of Divine Love* from which all the other little fingerprints are derived. These six are simplicity, trust, knowledge, sober joy, enlightened imagination, and the hope that, because we have been oned to God from without beginning, all shall be well—that our end is good and in God. A vocation "in the spirit of our Blessed Mother Julian" will participate in and show all these in some measure, and the more so as one goes along.

• A Julian formation involves the cooperative exercise of intellect and will. Julian is not only a passive receptor of divine revelation, but a choosing agent. When her curate was sent for to be at her death he instructed Julian "for her comfort" to fix her eyes on the crucifix held before her face. Julian reasoned that, though it seemed to her she was already all right with her eyes set upward to heaven, she consented to direct her gaze on the face of the crucifix. In this way, then, the revelations from the cross began. And a little later, Julian had, she says "a proposal in my reason (as if it were like a friend)" that suggested she look up from the crucifix to the Father in heaven. Deliberating momentarily between two evident goods, Julian answered with all the emphasis her soul could muster that no, she would choose Jesus on the crucifix for her heaven. "And

that had been a learning for me," Julian says, "that I should evermore do so, choosing only Jesus for my heaven in well and in woe." So we are called to the mature exercise of intellect, will, and to the virtue of discretion, the principle of proper choice in proper measure.

• The instruction to Julian from her curate also invites the understanding that Jesus can and does speak to us through the Church, and the Church *in its present and particular incarnation*, wounds and all. In the formula for our Julian promises and vows as well as in the various ordination rites of the Church we pledge to follow "the doctrine, discipline and worship of Christ as this Church has received the same". And when it happens, as it did for Julian that the teachings of Holy Church and the things learned in prayer seem to be at odds, like Julian we get to do the hard work of holding both in the trust that they will be reconciled and oned in heaven.

• Julian formation involves the understanding that God uses homely means for our growth. The first revelation came through a vision of an object so common that people used it in everyday speech to indicate the size of something—a hazelnut. Throughout her account Julian uses ordinary homely things as descriptors of the holy: herring scales, eaves of a house, garlands, rags shaken out in the wind, ordinary garden work, and so on. We can take this as a good sign that the holy will be mediated to us through quite ordinary means as well. The familial nature of community life in its various shapes is no accident either, but a primary means of teaching—the Incarnation itself tells us this. If there were any remaining doubt about the close-to-home-ness of the Spirit's working, Julian gives us a famous alimentary example: God who is highest comes down, by design, even to the lowest point of our bodily need.

• This kind of formation involves perseverance in enclosure in the simplicity of place, of text, of hope, and of patience. Julian writes from her cell, "Twenty years after the time of the showing (short three months) I received [this] inner teaching, as I shall say, "It is right for thee to take heed of all the qualities and conditions that were shown in the illustration even though thou thinkest that they are obscure and uninteresting to your sight." We have, and have had many teachers, but Julian is allowed to be, as it were, the headmistress of our school.

As for perseverance in hope, Julian says, "The Lord wills that we see our wretchedness and humbly let it be acknowledged. But

He does not wish us to remain thus, nor does he will that we busy ourselves greatly about accusing ourselves; nor does He will that we be full of misery about ourselves; for He wills that we quickly attend to Him". For Jesus "hastens to take us to Himself; for we are His joy and His delight, and He is our cure and our life." And because of this hope we persevere in the enclosure of patience both with ourselves and with others, as Jesus does with us. Speaking of the vision of Jesus' Passion Julian remembers, "Afterwards, before God showed any words, He permitted me to gaze on Him a suitable time—and on all that I had seen and all the comprehension that was in it (as much as the simplicity of the soul could receive it)." Jesus allowed Julian to look upon him while she labored to take in the vision, as in another place Julian puts it, "the bleeding [of Jesus' head] continued until many things were seen and understood."

• A Julian formation is Eucharistic, a participation with thanksgiving in the Passion by way of liturgy proper, and by way of community and personal life. And this participation is completed by blessing, for in its largest term, the fulfillment of our vocation as humans and as contemplatives is to respond to God's invitation and to bless, as Julian did constantly, "Benedicite Domine!"

• The growth process will of necessity include moments of clarity and moments of inscrutability. Julian relates a time during the showings when she was given a sense of great spiritual delight, of clarity and certainty, and during which she was free of fear. But after a brief time she says, "I was changed, and left to myself in such sadness and weariness of my life, and annoyance with myself that scarcely was I able to have patience to live. There was no comfort nor any ease for me except faith, hope, and love, and these I held in truth (but very little in feeling.) And immediately after this, our Blessed Lord gave me again the comfort and rest...and now the one, and now the other, various times—I suppose about twenty times." Julian would have us know that consolation and desolation are equally advantageous to understand that God "protects us equally surely in woe and in well" and that "both are one love". And, Julian points out, sin is not always the cause of this desolation; anyhow, one gets the sense that in Julian's universe neither clarity nor inscrutability are meant to bear a great deal of weight.

• The process of being formed into Love by Love involves submitting to, as Julian says, both "the sweet touching of the Holy Spirit" and also to the kind of rough and tumble polishing that comes with the proximity of life among fellow human beings. A necessary and integral part of the liturgy of our life is that, like Jesus in the Eucharist, we allow ourselves to be given in trust into the hands of others.

• Formation à la Julian involves knowledge: it is a process of coming to know ourselves at one and the same time as we come to know God. Julian discovers herself in the process of dialogue with God, and God waits for Julian and for us in that process of discovery.

• Julian formation involves freedom in not-having and freedom from clinging, trusting to God those whom we know and love. In the course of the revelations Julian desired to know about a certain creature, wondering "if it would continue in good living (which I hoped by the grace of God was begun)." But then Julian says, "in this particular desire, it seemed that I hindered myself, because I was not shown at this time. And then I was answered in my reason, as it were by a friendly go-between: "Take this generally, and see the graciousness of the Lord God as He reveals it to thee; for it is more honor to God for thee to see Him in all things than in any special thing." Julian is learning, and we with her, how to float upon the ocean of Divine Mercy with nothing in hand.

• Finally, and to come full circle in this very brief sketch, through Julian's vision of all created things lying fragile and small as a hazelnut in her hand and kept in being by the strength of love, we understand the several forms of this contemplative way to be, as the vows say, "not a flight from the world," but through love, "a consecration of that world."

Living the Kingdom

Sr. Therese OJN

It is for freedom that Christ sets free but it is not a freedom the world or often the disciples recognise; it has nothing of license about it, and might be mistaken for dire privation. For they are to be so free that nothing, not even themselves, is able to prevent them from loving, and for that a lot of so-called freedoms will have to be renounced.

The Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head, and those who follow Him are called to the same freedom—they will have no positions to defend, no rights to protect, nothing to justify. They are to have no identifying badges for themselves or others—whether such badges are buzzword labels or patches to be sewn on the clothes. Nothing in creation is to own them or divert them from fulfilling His command. They will have nothing for which to judge or to take offence, that they may announce the kingdom of God with their lives even more than with their words.

The sign of their establishment in the freedom of the children of God is the natural presence of what Paul calls the harvest of the Spirit, when the Spirit directs them entirely and without hindrance. Here they are beyond all law solely because love, the order of creation and of their re-creation, is the only law unto itself, and it is this freedom that Jesus means to restore them to.

Poetry and Contemplative Life

Fr. Gregory OJN

The attitude required for cultivating the contemplative life is similar to the attitude required of a good poet. The good poet does not sit down to force a poem out of herself on to the paper. Feeling the presence of the poem incohately in herself, the poet by displined awareness and patience offers the nascent poem an open space in which it can emerge and unfold and become itself. The good poet will also have honed the set of skills which allow her to receive the gift of the poem accurately and to give it the form that the poem itself desires. She neither forces her ideas from her head on to a piece of paper, nor does she simply yield herself to random chaos. Instead, she stands with a chastened and still, vigilant awareness that yields itself to the emerging and self-directing life inherent in the poem.

Likewise, the spirit required of us in the contemplative way is not that of an aggressive attempt to impose some new spirituality on our distracted selves from the top down, to make ourselves 'spiritual.' Nor is it just a chaotic reacting off life like a pinball, hoping that something spiritual will happen again. Like the writing of poetry, contemplative life requires a chastened and discplined awareness that is still and upright, offering itself as an open space for the Life of Christ.

In order to have this chastered awareness, we do indeed take up whole set of inner disciplines and spiritual practices. We take them up not because they are the contemplative life — they aren't— but because they merely clear the ground and open a path through which the contemplative life can come when and as God wills. Thus we read scripture, we pray, we cultivate virtues, we avoid excesses, we keep to the famous Middle Way. We sit in silence for an hour a day. We connect with a community of contemplative practice that guides our zeal and helps us to interpret our experience. We wait in the confidence that Love will come when Love wills.