



Julian Jottings

Thoughts on Things Spiritual

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SURRENDERING TO GOD'S LIFE ALREADY IN US Prayer According to Julian of Norwich

The following is an extract from one of the eighteen Julian Classes given periodically in the monastery. The aim of these classes is to clarify Blessed Julian's thought and its implications for those seeking to live according to her spirit. This extract is from the tenth Julian Class, which covers Chapters 41-44 of the Revelations of Divine Love, where Julian discusses prayer.

For many people, prayer begins with an urgent desire to make some sense out of their lives, their experience. Life presents itself as a chaos of little meaning, and there is a felt need to connect with something deeper, a transcendent ground from which purpose and hope might flow. We long to escape from the alienated self, always pursued by the specter of its own meaninglessness. We seek meaning, and, what amounts to the same thing, we seek love. And then at supremely unexpected moments God touches us, and a whole new world is opened up for us in an instant. We see and feel ourselves grasped by a new possibility for life, something undreamed of — a life lived from Him, open and surrendered to His power and desire, and flowing with His Peace. This is the compelling vision of a life of prayer, a life lived in unceasing response to God, and Julian has a lot to teach us about how to understand and cooperate with the emergence of this new life in us. Whether our prayers are petition, or a choral Divine Office, or contemplative silence, or realized in the celebration of the Eucharist, in every case Julian would say that we are learning to surrender and trust in the God who is already the center of our being and the motive power of the whole of our lives.

Creative and Redemptive Love

Blessed Julian begins her reflections on prayer with a belief that prayer originates not in our effort or decision but in the life of God already moving us to pray. 'I am the ground of thy praying...' God says



to Julian. God is the ground from which all our praying emerges and grows. The very desire to pray, however awkwardly fulfilled, is thus not a sign of being cut off from God, but of already being indwelt by God and moved by Him. This is the Holy Spirit, a 'still small voice' pressing insistently on the soul until it yields itself in prayer.

For Julian, however, God is not merely the ground of our praying, but much more basically, God is the ground of our very existence.

God wills we have true knowledge that in Himself He is Existence itself; and in this knowledge He wills that our understanding be grounded with all our might and all our purpose and all our intention. And on this foundation He wills that we take our place and make our dwelling.
[Lesson of Love. 42]

As in Julian's earlier vision of the whole of creation as small and fragile as a hazelnut, almost falling into non-being, we recognize ourselves as contingent on God's love for the bare fact of our being. Julian's point is that we must understand our actual praying as only the last step in a long process of 1.) our being loved into being, then 2.) lovingly redeemed in Christ and 3.) lovingly kept safe by the hidden working of the Holy Spirit until such a time as we are able to enter into a conscious and loving relationship with God.

By the gracious light of Himself, He wills that we have understanding of three things that follow: The first is our noble and excellent creation; the second, our precious and dearworthy redemption; the third, everything that He has made beneath us to serve us and which, for love of us, He protects.

What He means is thus, as if He said: 'Behold and see that I have done all this *before* thy prayer, and now thou art and thou prayest to Me.' [Lesson. 42]

In this picture of prayer, our prayer is the surrendering of ourselves to the creative, redeeming, and sanctifying force of love that is the ground of all being and revealed in the work of Jesus Christ and offered in the Church.

The Reunion of Our Souls

From elsewhere in the *Revelations*, we are familiar with Julian's insight into an essence or core of the human soul where we are already, eternally one with God. She calls this our 'knitting' to God in love from the moment of our creation, and it is one of the chief insights flowing from her own mystical experience of Christ:

Furthermore [God] wishes us to be aware that mankind's dearworthy soul was preciously knit to Him in the creation—and this knot is delicate and so powerful that it is one-ed into God. In this one-ing it is made endlessly holy. [Lesson. 53]

Because of this knitting, we have in us what Julian calls a 'godly will' that, no matter what we do in our ordinary lives, remains fixed solely on loving God:

God showed frequently in all the revelations that man continually performs His will and His honor everlastingly, without any ceasing...continually the soul does what it was made for: it perceives God, it contemplates God, and it loves God. [Lesson. 44]

In other words, the life of divine union is always going on already in the deepest center of our souls. The problem is that who we are in everyday life is often split off from this unitive center, is wrathful and contrary to it. 'Peace and love,' as Julian says elsewhere, 'are always in us, existing and working, but we are not always in peace and in love.' [Lesson. 39] The promise of prayer, in whatever form it takes, is thus the re-harmonizing who we are in outward everyday life with who we already are in our own essential reality.

Prayer ones the soul to God; for though the soul is ever like God in nature and essence (restored by grace), it is often unlike God in its external state by sin on man's part. Then is prayer a witness that the soul wills as God wills, and it comforts the conscience and inclines man to grace. [Lesson. 43]

Praying is a true, gracious, lasting intention of the soul one-ed and made fast to the will of our Lord by the sweet, secret working of the Holy Spirit. [Lesson. 41]

When we come before God in prayer, we are choosing to do with our outward selves — to love and live from obedience to God — what is already our innermost reality. We are choosing peace and love. This in turn effects a gradual (think in terms of years!)





reconciliation of who we are in our outward character with the Holy Life flowing already within us.

Although we, (by the wrath and the contrariness that is in us) are now in tribulation, uneasiness, and woe...yet are we sure and safe by the merciful protection of God so that we perish not. But we are not blissfully safe in possessing our endless joy until we are wholly in peace and in love — that is to say, fully gratified with God and with all His works and with all His judgements... And thus, when we, by the action of mercy and grace, are made humble and gentle, we are completely safe. When it is truly at peace in itself, suddenly the soul is one-ed to God. [Lesson. 49]

Union with God is found when the Holy Spirit effects a peaceful re-harmonization of

our outward, historical lives with the inner gift of the divine presence to which we are knit in our essence. There are of course degrees of such union, from the most superficial and easily broken to the most profound, but the bare fact that we are praying at all is, however, a sign that we are at least beginning to be united with God, simply in acquiescing to God's desire that we pray. Coming home and coming to peace with that Holy Life already in us, we discover an increasing strength to live from that union in everyday life. Our desire then is to learn to be pliant, entirely obedient and free to move as God directs us.

Conclusion

Our Anglican tradition gives us the supreme gift of the Holy Eucharist as a sacrament of self-offering to God in which we receive the miracle of God's life given to us. This is the bedrock of a Christian life of prayer. Flowing from this, we may practice contemplative silence, or we may call upon God with our needs and fears and desires, or we may commit ourselves to a rule of meeting up with Divine Love every day in the structured pattern and play of the Divine Offices. Whatever form our prayer takes, it is always a response to the God inspiring it, a surrendering of ourselves to the movement of God within and around us, and it effects over a lifetime a reconciliation of our outward lives with the blissful inner essence in which God has knit us forever to Himself in love.



**TWO EXCERPTS FROM
LOVE'S TRINITY: A COMPANION TO JULIAN OF NORWICH**

Frederick S. Roden, AOJN (Liturgical Press, 2009)

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Commentary to Chapter 56

We cannot know our own soul without first knowing God. The God-in-us is so much more “God” than “us” that to know our deepest essence, our truest reality, is to know God. We desire to know our soul; we want to know our deeper self. Julian asserts that in and of that Incarnational essence we crave to know our God, but in our humanness we long to discover who we are. What drives us to explore our inner self leads us to know God. This is a statement of profound psychological health. Were we to look for God outside ourselves, we would miss the reality of God-in-us. We would fail to see our particular experience of Incarnation, the Wisdom and experience that is unique in each of us. That practice leads to bad theology and a distorted spiritual life. We forget who we are; we forget that we have bodies, and we forget that in our souls God already rests. Looking for God outside of us fails to respect the mystery of the Incarnation: we ignore the depth of our union with God, we denigrate our created selves. We must know both God and our souls; the desires to know ourselves and our God are both worthy. God is nearer to us than our own soul because our soul is built on God. He is our foundation, what holds soul and body together in the mystery of the Incarnation. Since we are enclosed in God, we find our souls when we look to God. Were we able to look directly into our souls, we would see God there. Through the working of mercy and grace, like Julian we receive insight in our bodies, minds, and understandings. This enables us to glimpse who we are, to see our souls, and to better know God.

The soul is that place where our essence, the Godself-in-us, and the fleshliness are one-ed. Our bodies are enclosed in the Incarnating flesh of Jesus, as the soul of Christ is in God. Our yearning is for the plain sight of our soul, where God leads us. Julian describes the trinity of our being as human nature worked upon by mercy and grace. This we know as the Incarnation: the action of the Spirit in the material world. The understanding of our soul, our understanding of God, comes through these three. Reason alone fails; we need the memory of who we truly are: that God is our essence residing in our soul — and love. That love is the action of mercy and grace; mercy and grace are that which saves us. These are the goods we receive.

How well do we know our own souls? Some of us get there with a conscious awareness of God’s guidance, many of us benefit from psychotherapy and spiritual direction. Few of us get to spirituality’s treasures without knowing our own baggage first, some of it marked by religion’s dark side. Psychotherapy and spiritual guidance shy away from too much identification with one

another — perhaps for good reason, because it would be unhelpful to apply one when a person needs the other. When we're more fully aware that any of these processes which lead to greater soul-depth inevitably lead us to God and that, in Julian's words, God is leading us into and through the entire process, we can imagine a stronger integration.

Commentary to Chapter 86 and Colophon

To say that "Love was His meaning" is a tremendous statement for the contemporary mind. "Meaning" has many different resonances. We speak of humanity's "search for meaning." We long for answers, something to give purpose and direction to our lives. We cope with, and struggle within, clinical anxieties and depressions, spiritual fears and doubts. The postmodern mind is intrigued with the notion of "meaning." Does meaning exist and can it be found? What is the relationship between the "signifier" and the "signified" — the word or symbol that represents the true "meaning" that lies behind it?

Julian affirms that yes, there is meaning: Love is God's meaning. Love is thus all meaning, all there is. There is meaning in our lives of strife, there is meaning behind the words, behind the showings. "Love was His meaning" takes the Word, the Logos, and parses it to say that in both the beginning (John's Gospel) and the end (Chapter 84), all is only Love. We are assured: meaning exists, and it is Love. In all those re-presentations that revert, like images that shrink to infinity in mirror tricks' endless progression, the only meaning to be found is Love. Our intellectual quest is humbled. In Julian's trinity, Love shows, Love is the showing, and it is shown for Love: God the essence, the Incarnation, and the Spirit at work in the world — all are one Love.

To say "Love was His meaning" is an important signification for Julian's age. Texts were always glossed with commentaries, the complementary reactions to the action of the Word. Julian's role as interpreter, the insertion of her self into the narrative as "hermeneut," analyst, affirms her commitment that God wills our knowledge. If Reason and Love are God, human understanding is His goal. "He showed it because He wished to have it known more than it is." Julian observes that "understanding" does not come overnight. It took over fifteen years for her to comprehend the meaning of her showings.

Interpretation of the "text" — the love of God present in the world — is Love's work. The Colophon assures orthodoxy. Julian speaks as a theologian and here she is justified and supported: "this revelation is high theology and high wisdom." She, as a medieval woman, has dared to enter the province of interpreters. To ask questions, to penetrate for answers — this is the work of every human and God's will. The search for meaning is the search for God; it is the search for Love. Through Julian's text, we are led there.



FAITH AND VISION

A Sermon for the Feast of the Transfiguration by Mthr. Hilary OJN

We are now almost exactly halfway through the season of Pentecost, and as if to give us hope and remind us where we are going, we are given a second time in the year this vision of Jesus, reassuring us that where Jesus is we will be, and that what Jesus is, we will become. By God's mercy we also will hear it said of us, "This is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased." The life of God who is unquenchable Love will transform us; God will be proved right and true in all God's ways.

To borrow T.S. Eliot's words, this our end "is where we start from... And any action is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start." First we get to see where we are going, and then Jesus shows us how it is we get there. The path to our own transfiguration leads through the cross. And this is the interesting part. Step by slow step, by our prayers in chapel, by our everyday choices and responses to life in the house, we are being completely suffused by the light of God. But to save us from the extremity of self-exaltation on the one hand or despair on the other, we ourselves don't really get 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 our community does get to see it, and rejoice in it.

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 an odd point about the communal nature of the interpretation of Scripture. The fact is that 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 not only ours to interpret.

You will remember that immediately after Jesus and the disciples come down the mountain, they are met with an epileptic boy the other disciples are unable to cure. "Why could we not drive this demon out" they say, and Jesus tells them, "this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting." Even when we are feeling the most alone and hung out to dry, it is not so. We are probably never going to know the extent to which the prayers and fasting of our brothers and sisters have made our degree of progress possible.

So, then, forgetting ourselves, beholding Jesus in his glory on the mountain, and Jesus in his glory in each other, let us press on in hope and faith knowing that this is a vision of our own future as well.



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WORDS FOR SILENCE: A YEAR OF CONTEMPLATIVE MEDITATIONS

by Fr. Gregory, OJN with preface by OJN oblate Abp. Desmond Tutu. *Paraclete Press*

Arranged according to the liturgical year from Advent through Pentecost, these meditations adapted from weekly Chapter Talks given by Fr. Gregory to the wider OJN community are made available to all who through ordinary life and mindful everyday practice are on the way to realizing as deeply as possible the union with God that Julian says is already ours 'from without beginning'.



INTO THE PRESENT MOMENT: CELTIC MUSIC AND MEDITATIONS

CAIM, a UK singing group comprised of OJN oblate Heather Ponting and Jacynth Hamill, collaborated with Fr. Gregory in 2007 to produce *Into the Present Moment: Celtic Music and Meditations*. The music on this CD is a selection of CAIM's most meditative a cappella singing, while the meditations are Fr. Gregory's personal reflections on the Order of Julian's motto: await, allow, accept, attend. The combination of spoken word and spirited music is centering and joyful.



LOVE'S TRINITY: A COMPANION TO JULIAN OF NORWICH

Long Text with a Commentary by Frederick S. Roden, PhD., AOJN with Showings of Julian of Norwich translated by Fr. John-Julian, OJN. *Liturgical Press*

Alongside Fr. John-Julian's translation of Julian's Showings (originally published in 1999 as *A Lesson of Love*), OJN Associate Fred Roden has written a beautiful commentary on the text, designed to "draw the reader more fully...[into] the truth Julian summarizes at the end of the Showings: 'Love was his meaning.'"



IMAGINATION AND THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

The Rev. Sandra M. Levy ObJN. *Eerdmans*

Levy explores how the imagination expresses itself — through ritual, music, poetry, art, story — and focuses on specific practices that can exercise and enrich our spiritual capacity, thus opening us up to divine encounter. *Imagination and the Journey of Faith* will speak to all readers, whether religious believers or not, who wish to strengthen and deepen the imaginative power of their spiritual lives.

Forthcoming: **THE COMPLETE JULIAN**

The Rev. John-Julian Swanson OJN. *Paraclete Press*