

Encouraging thoughts from Julian of Norwich

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever ". (1 Peter:24-25). This holds true for God's words in the bible and for those words given to His faithful people over time since then. Life's basic sorrows, joys and challenges do not change radically, however affluent we are. The



worldwide Covid pandemic has brought this home to us. People have always turned to God when looking for security, comfort and help in troubled times.

Reading the revelations given to Julian of Norwich (1342-1416), we are struck by the parallels between her time and our own. She lived during a time of huge social, religious and political upheaval, incessant wars and sweeping epidemics. England was in the middle of the 100 years' war with France and millions had died during the Black Death. This created a big decline in farming and trading, which along with instability within the leadership in London, led to the Peasant's revolt of 1381, calling for more equality and an end to serfdom -- unfree labour. Echoes with today! Even the church couldn't provide stability as it was the time of the Great Schism between the Catholic west and Orthodox east.

As Julian reflected on the words that the Lord had given her and started writing, many would have been making their way to the street window of her anchor hold for advice and prayer. This was a small room built on to the wall of St Julian's church in Norwich.

In my last reflection, I considered her words " All shall be well". Let us look at some more examples from her revelations. Julian was the first woman to have a book published in the English language and was revolutionary in her theology, all based on scripture, however:

1. She dared to suggest that God is our Mother as well as Father. "God Almighty is our loving Father and God All-wisdom our loving Mother,

with the love and goodness of the Holy Spirit..." Consider Jesus's words in Matthew 23 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings".

2. She wrote that it is not God's will for us to live with guilt for He has infinite compassion. "The Lord looks on His servants with pity not with blame. In God's sight we do not fall, in our sight we do not stand". Consider "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us"(Psalm103:12).
3. This is "because He is God, He is good, He is truth, He is love...". Julian ends her writings with the conclusion that "I learned that, in all things, LOVE is our Lord's meaning". Moreover, "with all things, God created them, He loves them, and so He will sustain them". Julian saw that, to God, everything and everyone has ultimate worth and is precious. God has no room for prejudice or superiority. Consider "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good"(Gen 1:31) and "God is love"(1 John 4:16). We can see how her revelations would have spoken to the conflicts of her time -- and still do to ours today!
4. Julian knew, however, that we actually live between doubt and hope and between sensing God's presence and absence. " I saw Him, and I sought Him, I had Him and then lacked Him, that is how life is". In the meantime, "A wise heart abides in Christ, in sorrow and in joy....for steadfast prayer will keep our hope alive....our Lord is most glad of our prayer...pray wholeheartedly, even when it has no savour for you and when you feel nothing". For He says, "I AM the endless fulfilling of all true desires"., only in God do we have everything we want or need. Consider "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm23:1).
5. God longs for us to seek Him, in humility, and to receive His love. "The blessed Trinity wills my heart to be lifted above the depths of

the earth and it's sorrows, so to delight in and rejoice in Him". Julian knew that life has many tribulations, but He had said to her "Comfort yourself with My words and trust them and you will not be overcome".

What a beacon of hope Julian is for us today, seeking peace in a troubled world. I hope I've whetted your appetite to explore more of her writings! She is surely one of the " great cloud of witnesses that surround us, and cheer us on, so we can run the race, with perseverance, our eyes fixed on Jesus...and not lose heart "(Hebrews 12:2) Alleluia!

Nona Harrison

