

INCARNATION MONASTERY

A Quarterly Newsletter

Bread of Life

Issue 13 December 2013



"Full Moon Over Big Sur" by Fr. Arthur Poulin

"All shall be well
And all shall be well
And all manner of thing shall be well"

Julian of Norwich

Letter from the Prior Created to be Co-Creators

Dear Oblates and Friends,

"For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life" (Ephesians 2:10)

How do we feel in response to this text? Are we fearful of the challenge or excited by it? Does it seem like a burden or exciting adventure? Does it suggest obedience, or freedom, or perhaps both? How do I know what precise good works God wants me to do? How can I hear God's will for me? Is it through silence and meditation in retreat, or listening with the ear of the heart? Or listening to events in one's life, in the world? Or through dialogue with a spiritual director and others who know us well? Or through lectio divina? Or through the prayers of the Psalms and the Eucharist?

All of these ways might be helpful. What is important is the deepest attitude of listening. With this attitude, how can I discern what is the will of God, what is my own will? Since God created us, our deepest yearnings, our most authentic will, does express God's will for us. But we need to get below our more superficial ego or personal interest. And our deepest will wants us to be beneficial to others, to humanity, to God's good creation.

But essential to it all is listening. And that means obeying. Because the basic meaning of "to obey" (obedire in the original Latin) comes from "to listen" (obaoudire). It is often difficult, in fact, for us humans to listen fully. We have other things on our mind. We are thinking about what we will say next, not tuned in really to the other person. And if it's hard to listen to other humans, it is even more challenging to listen to our deepest self, let alone God. Certainly "to obey" God sounds heavy, seems like a difficult thing for us today. But if its root meaning is simply to listen, and in our case to listen to our all compassionate, all loving God, who totally wills our good, then listening to God, obeying God frees us up to be co-creators with God. If we sincerely attempt to hear our God, and then to do God's will, even if we don't get it exactly right, God can work with any

decision we make, as Sr. Lenora Black, Benedictine has noted. So God is always with us, always co-creating with us, for humanity and for all of creation.

As always, in communion. ♦

Fr. Andrew Colnaghi, OSB Cam.



The Guest House and Spiritual Center - Update

If you have been to the Guest House at Incarnation recently, you may have started to taste the transformation of that space from the monks' living quarters to a quiet retreat center. The difference for me is palpable, and I am amazed and grateful at the community's dedication to the renovation both in terms of time and financial assistance. Beginning this past summer the monks began to move into their new cloister and we began a journey of considering the vision of the guest house. That vision is starting to manifest itself in our midst in the form of: newly painted walls, renovated guest rooms, furniture movement and a deep cleansing of the interior. We still have much to accomplish, but we are well on our way to seeing it through. I want to express my deep gratitude for all who have participated in this work and will continue to participate in the future. Our Pray and Work days were very gratifying and many individuals (about 15 on our first and 8 on the second) came and shared their love of the monastery in a special way.

*Before*

I thought this would be an ideal time to provide an update on the refurbishment and the vision of the guest house. As of Sunday November 10, all the guest house rooms and public spaces have been painted as well as the planned re-carpeting of the majority of guest rooms. The upstairs and downstairs kitchens have been completely cleaned and re-arranged to meet the needs of a retreat center and the living room has been rearranged to make for an inviting

*During*

guest space and video viewing area. We have also inventoried and disposed, where needed, of guest furniture and are in the process of obtaining new furniture to standardize the rooms to a single look and feel. Each of our rooms will now have a comfortable reading chair, desk and chair, single twin bed with pull out storage space and a night stand. We plan to replace the mini-blinds with

curtains to add color and warmth to each room with matching bedspreads. Additionally, we will be converting Andrew's old room into a mini-conference and prayer room as we have had inquiries from small groups who wish to use our space for meetings. This will make an ideal space and will open us for additional income. So the

*After*

next time you are at the monastery, I encourage you to peek into an empty guest room and see the results.

You may also wish to consider a weekend stay during the coming holidays or to prolong our upcoming days of quiet and silent prayer to prepare yourself for a deeper experience of the Christmas season. Your presence in the space will add to the contemplative atmosphere so please prayerfully consider some extended time in the silence. In the coming New Year we will have additional Pray and Work days so come lay your hands on the guest house as there are several unfinished projects. Look for announcements in January.

Finally, if you have other ideas on the guest house, please let Arthur, Karen, Leonard, Thomas, Theresa, or myself know as we are your Guest House representatives on the Incarnation Advisory Board and are always happy to hear what the spirit is communicating to us!

I look forward to our coming holiday time together and our continuing to co-create and transform the guest house into a sacred and holy space. ♦

Marty Badgett, Oblate OSB Cam.

Why I wrote Julian's Gospel: Illuminating the Life & Revelations of Julian of Norwich

When I was in high school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart in New York City, my theology teacher used to quote the words of Julian of Norwich to me whenever I was in crisis: "All shall be well..." But I never really knew who Julian was. When I finally read Julian's Revelations of Divine Love in the late 1970's, I was overwhelmed by her originality of thinking, her passionate questioning, and her courage to write about her mystical experiences under threat of persecution. Her book never left my reading table for decades. My daughter still remembers seeing it there from her earliest childhood. Julian became my best friend and wise teacher.

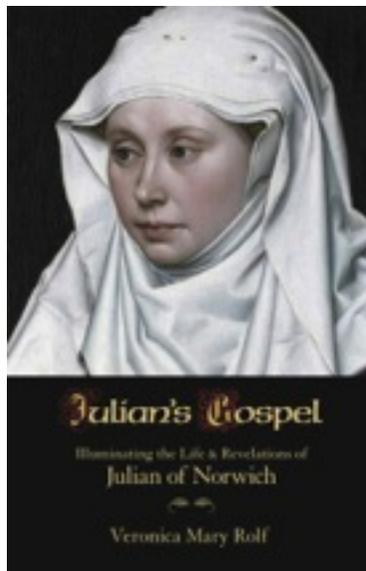
When my husband and I moved to Berkeley from London in 2005, I began leading weekly meditation groups at Newman Hall and lecturing on Julian's extraordinary text as part of a three-year Forum that explored the history of Christian mysticism, entitled *Ascent to the Divine*. Fr. Thomas Matus attended many of these three-hour sessions and engaged in lively discourse with the Forum members. I also started giving *Retreats with Julian* to men and women of all ages and different religious affiliations, and developed a series of reflections and meditations called *Mornings with Julian of Norwich* for church groups. Fr. Andrew Colnaghi invited me to present two of these *Mornings with Julian* at Incarnation Monastery. The depth of response from the worshipping community at Incarnation was overwhelming. People were immensely attracted to Julian's daring vision, radiant hope, and impassioned love of God. They wanted to know more about her - and to have clear guidance in understanding her sometimes challenging text in terms that related directly to their own spiritual paths. This "live" audience - mainly at Incarnation Monastery - became my motivation for writing *Julian's Gospel*.

So, after a lifetime spent in the theatre as a professional actress, playwright, Artistic Director of a theatre company in New York, and Master Teacher of Dramatic Arts, I

decided to quit my job coaching actors at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, put all my other retreat activities "on hold," and begin my labor of love. I became a veritable hermit in our home in the Berkeley hills, working eight to ten hours a day, six days a week (and on the seventh day, I played with our grandsons). Little did I anticipate it would take five years from research, to writing, to publication!

Julian of Norwich lived in fourteenth century England at a time of devastating wars, plagues, poverty, peasant revolts, and religious persecution. She was no stranger to great personal suffering, spiritual conflict, and doubt. She became deathly ill at the age of thirty, and was given extraordinary visions of Christ on the cross. She recovered fully to write her very personal account of Christ's *Revelations of Divine Love*. It was the first book ever written by a woman in the English language. Yet her words were virtually unknown for six hundred years, until the twentieth century. Thomas Merton called Julian "one of the most wonderful of all Christian voices" and "the greatest English theologian."

I soon discovered that even with the abundance of volumes written about Julian by scholars, theologians, feminists, psychologists, and textual exegetes, *the woman herself* remained an elusive figure. Personally, I had always had a strong intuition that Julian was a middle class married woman with children (rather than the prevalent assumption that she was of aristocratic birth, well-schooled in Latin, and a Benedictine nun before she became enclosed as an anchoress in later life); but I had to substantiate that hunch through an exhaustive study of both text and historical context. I needed to go in-depth to uncover the political, cultural, social, and religious milieu that formed Julian's development as a woman and a mystic. I had to investigate the probable sources of her inner conflicts and burning questions. Most importantly, I had to explore the various influences that enabled Julian to learn to read and write with such maturity (in an age when girls were denied schooling after puberty), and to examine how she might



have learned to do theology without a thorough Latin education.

I immersed myself in the fourteenth century by reading over 300 scholarly books on medieval history, politics, wars, peasant uprisings, plagues, theology, and heresies. Early on, I also decided to make an entirely new translation of Julian's Long Text from the Middle English and then wrote chapter-by-chapter explanations of her teachings so that modern readers could experience Julian's Revelations on a spiritual level.

Describing her mystical experiences, Julian speaks to us as the women of Galilee might have spoken, had they been able to write their own eye-witness accounts of Christ's passion on the cross. Hers is not a far-off judgmental God (so often preached in the Middle Ages), but a God intimately involved with every aspect of our daily lives. The whole creation appears to Julian as tiny as a hazelnut, so small and fragile that it might disappear, but for God's love that continually creates, protects, and loves it.

In her long vision of Christ's sufferings – arguably the most graphic and detailed description of the passion in all mystical writing – she never sees

Christ angry. She intuits that *there is no wrath in God*, only pity and compassion for human blindness and the tragedy of sin. During one of her mystical Revelations, Julian was invited to enter Christ's Sacred Heart. There she found "a fair, delectable place" that was "large enough" not only for herself, but "for all mankind that shall be saved to rest in peace and in love." Indeed, Julian's gospel is her testimony to unconditional Divine Love that overcomes all sin, suffering, and woe. It is the astounding Revelation of *Christ as Mother* who tends to our needs and desires (as well as our sometimes necessary disciplining) with more compassionate care than even the most loving earthly mother. And it is a gospel of hope, precisely because Julian was promised by Christ that "all shall be well."

After four years of research, writing, and editing, I sent the complete manuscript to Robert Ellsberg, Publisher at Orbis Books, leaders in religious publishing since 1970. Mr.

Ellsberg read the manuscript in less than a week and decided to publish it. I was in shock. In this climate of extreme difficulty in getting a book published, I knew it was a miracle . . . and all Julian's doing. Julian's Gospel is featured on the cover of the 2013 Orbis Fall/Winter Catalog.

I could not have survived these arduous years without the total support and editing skills of my devoted husband of forty-two years and my two enthusiastic children, as well as the encouragement of Fr. Andrew, Fr. Arthur (who has been my spiritual guide along the way), Fr. Thomas, Br. Ivan, and my dear friend, Sr. Mary McGann, RSCJ. The heart of *Julian's Gospel* began beating when I saw the faces of people in the monastery chapel at the Julian Retreat five years ago, many with tears in their eyes, trying to comprehend that God could love us that much and that unconditionally. I remember one woman who expressed it for all: "Why weren't we told these things when growing up?"

"Certainly one of the best books on Julian of Norwich I've ever read. With a vast amount of research and a great deal of passion, Veronica Mary Rolf successfully recreates the world of the great mystic...and, overall, paints a convincing portrait of one of the most remarkable women ever to have lived – and believed."

James Martin, SJ, Editor-at-Large of America Magazine

I have tried to bear witness to Julian's warm and sensitive humanity, her love-longing for God, her clarity of mind and complexity of heart, her strong determination to search for answers, as well as her extraordinary gift of contemplative prayer. With great courage, she recorded her mystical experiences

from a deeply personal point of view, at a time when it was forbidden for a woman to write theology in the vernacular language, or presume to teach anyone but her own children. She lived under the constant threat of censure, excommunication, punishment - or worse. Yet she dared to defend her right to speak what the Lord had revealed to her. Now, 640 years later, Julian's Revelations about the goodness of God are becoming more and more relevant to the lives of men and women in the twenty-first century. I hope that through *Julian's Gospel*, her heartfelt words – and the words she heard Christ speak to her – will be better known and more completely embraced by her fellow Christians. Hers is a gospel that we in the post-modern church urgently need to hear. ♦

Veronica Mary Rolf, www.JuliansVoice.com

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Making Peace with Dante

The dark cry of suffering can seem indelible, leaving us feeling bewildered and afraid in its wake. Still, the fragility of this human experience can also be taken up with gentle hands, crafting hope through creative expression. This response, be it in word, image, song or gesture, has been a signal of grace for me in our peripatetic world. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is a prime example of this transfiguring work. Ever since encountering the poem after my own dark cry, I have



Dante Alighieri

felt called to share its vision of wisdom, hope and peace. Like many of Dante's readers, I began with him shivering in the dark wood as he tried and failed to face his demons alone. I hiked with him and Virgil through the muck of *Inferno*. I stayed with them for the steep climb of *Purgatorio*, witnessed his reckoning with Beatrice, and then flew with them among *Paradiso*'s sublime planets. We met thousands of souls, all the while learning about human tendencies and relationships and faith. We developed an ear for identifying the good of one's words. And finally, we came to imagine liberating ourselves from fear's undertow, free to see the gift of being alive in a universe animated by a great love.

My heart was aflame! How fantastic would it be bring the myriad lessons of Dante's afterlife back to Earth? I had a lot of passion, but I needed to be a knowing guide. The poem became a private touchstone for years until a friend told me about the Graduate Theological Union. Under the advisement of biblical scholar Dr. Barbara Green, OP, and Dr. Steven Botterill, an expert

in Dante Studies at UC Berkeley, I built a master's degree around the poem. My work explored the text as a vehicle for peace in the personal, relational and civic realms. After graduation, I pursued a certificate to teach adults. By last fall, I had my toehold to start a class.

Soon after, a friend introduced me to the Resolve to Stop the Violence Project (RSVP) that operates in the San Francisco City Jail. It helps male violent offenders break their cycles of destruction. I attended an RSVP circle, where men spoke openly about owning their behaviors and listened to each other with tender attention. Their good work heartened my hunch that teaching the poem as a vehicle for peace could find fertile ground. The pilot class began in the spring. We met every Saturday afternoon for four months reading *Inferno* and the beginning of *Purgatorio*.

Even in the unpredictable environment of the jail, a small group of committed students slowly emerged. I brought them journals to reflect on essential questions such as: "What is your dark wood?" — "Who is your Virgil to guide you through it?" — "Who is your Beatrice who sees a singular promise in you?" We began class reading these entries using *lectio divina*, sharing harrowing events and recognizing people who helped carry them through. They heard from their classmates about which words truly moved them. The students found their voices within this supportive regime and developed a trusting sense of community. Together we could then tackle a challenging canto, unpack its meaning and look at slides of artistic renderings before closing the class with another essential question for homework.

The leadership of RSVP was pleased with the class and asked if we could put together a final presentation. I stitched together a script from their journals, the poem itself, and the essential questions. Though some students were reticent, after holding the script in their hands and reading it through, they agreed. We rehearsed for three weeks. I showed them how to breathe through stage fright and to project their voices. We enunciated. We articulated. We warmed up physically in a circle, sharing our best moves to Earth, Wind & Fire. I could actually hear their joyful laughter rising, unabashedly through the air.

On the day of the performance, six of us sat before the community of fifty men. Father Andrew and Father Arthur made the trek to the jail in San Bruno, along with dear friends and family. Their witnessing held me in love. One by one, each student stood and performed their reflections with eloquence and intelligence. At the show's close, everyone stood in a long ovation. Many interested questions followed. My hope about the poem revealed itself in that peace-filled moment, as those students bravely transformed their dark cries into words of wisdom, spurring us on with their hard work and creativity. ♦

Nicole Pagano M.A.



What's New at the Hermitage?

On All Saints' Day Brother Ignatius Tully made his simple profession of vows.

"...So God became human so that we might become divine, so that we might become human. We discover God is in us and then discover that we are in God. We are ordinary people doing extraordinary things, so that we might become extraordinary people doing very ordinary things with joy, with attention, with love. So, Ignatius, I pray that that is what this life will do for you: help you be human so that you can become divine—a saint!—so that you can become human; realize God within you so that you and me and all of us realize that we are swimming in the ocean that is God, and so to build the city of God, so that God's kingdom come, God's will be done on earth, in you, as it is in heaven." ♦

Fr. Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam., Prior
www.contemplation.com

Daily Schedule

Monday and Friday

Lauds, 7 a.m.
 Short Vespers with sitting meditation, 5 p.m.

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday

Lauds, 7 a.m.
 Vespers and Eucharist, 5 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday

Lauds and Eucharist, 8 a.m.
 Vespers, 5 p.m.

Christmas Eve

First Mass of Christmas, 8 p.m.

Christmas Day

Mass of the Incarnation, 11 a.m.
Second Vespers of Christmas, 5 p.m.

New Year's Day

Mass of the Maternity of Mary, 11 a.m.

Sacred Reflections

Saturday, December 7

Quiet Day, 9 a.m. to 12 noon
 "The Isaian Servant (Isaiah 53) and Nonviolence,"
 with Barbara Green, OP

Contemplative Prayer

Retreats

Saturday, December 14

Silent Day, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, January 11

Silent Day, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

For more information about Sacred Reflections
 and Contemplative Prayer Retreats
 please visit our website
www.incarnationmonastery.org

JOURNEY OF THE MAGI

A cold coming we had of it,
 Just the worst time of the year
 For a journey, and such a long journey:
 The ways deep and the weather sharp,
 The very dead of winter.
 And the camels galled, sore-footed, refractory,
 Lying down in the melting snow.
 There were times we regretted
 The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
 And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
 Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
 And running away, and wanting their liquor and women,
 And the night-fires going out, and the lack of shelters,
 And the cities hostile and the towns unfriendly
 And the villages dirty and charging high prices:
 A hard time we had of it.
 At the end we preferred to travel all night,
 Sleeping in snatches,
 With the voices singing in our ears, saying
 That this was all folly.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate valley,
 Wet, below the snow line, smelling of vegetation:
 With a running stream and a water-mill beating
 the darkness
 And three trees on the low sky,
 And an old white horse galloped away in the meadow,
 Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves over the lintel,
 Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces of silver,
 And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
 But there was no information, and so we continued
 And arrived at evening, not a moment too soon
 Finding the place; it was (you may say) satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
 And I would do it again, but set down
 This set down
 This: were we led all that way for
 Birth or Death: There was a Birth, certainly,
 We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen birth and death,
 But had thought they were different; this Birth was
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,
 With an alien people clutching their gods.
 I should be glad of another death.

T.S. Eliot