

Some great words of encouragement from a Medieval Mystic – for times like this...

It's a bit grey and rainy out there today! I don't know about you, but I imagine I wouldn't be the only one who can feel their mood changing, depending on the weather? As soon as the sun comes out, I feel my heart lift - especially if there's any chance of getting out into the sunshine! Mercifully, for us as Christians, we can be assured that God's feelings towards us don't fluctuate like that.. He continues to love us just the same, come rain or shine, indeed whatever's going on outside - climatically or politically.

On Monday evening, those of us who showed up at the 'Meeting Up' zoom session found ourselves talking about an amazingly spiritual woman who lived in Norwich in the 14th Century. We don't even know her name, just that she spent most of her life as a kind of hermit (an ' anchoress') in a small room attached to the side of St Julian's Church, in the commercial area of the city. It was a time of huge turmoil, England bogged down in a 25-year long war with France, and the Black Death ravaging the nation twice during this woman's youth, causing half the population of Norwich to die in the second of those fatal waves, when she was just nineteen. People were afraid to handle the bodies of those who died, so they were simply left in the streets. It must have been unbelievably dreadful. Thank God for modern medicines and for the NHS!

Julian of Norwich, as she is now known, had prayed to have a deep encounter with Jesus in which she would see him as he suffered for her on the Cross. She had also prayed to experience a life-threatening illness at the age of thirty, which would take her to the point of death, but from which she would recover; so she could spend the rest of her life being grateful to God. Amazingly, in May 1373, that all happened; and over the course of 48 hours, as she hovered between life and death, she had a series of sixteen visions, in which she encountered Jesus, in a dramatic and life-transforming way. She then spent the next fifteen years reflecting on the meaning of these vivid 'showings' (or insights), and finally, having taught herself to read and write, she wrote what is now recognised as a masterpiece of theology, under the title, 'Revelations of Divine Love'*. Unusually, it was written in English - rather than Latin - and, finally rediscovered in the early 20th Century, it presents God's love for humanity in an amazingly compassionate and affirming way. You might also enjoy this little documentary on the history of one of the manuscripts:

<https://youtu.be/7sbfVBB4AuY>

In one of the passages I was reading this morning, I was struck by what Julian was saying about the dangers of looking in the wrong places for happiness and fulfilment. At one point she is given an image of a tiny sphere the size of a hazelnut, resting on her palm. She asks God what this is, and senses him saying, "***It is all that is made***". She's amazed by its tinyness and apparent fragility, yet senses in her heart that, "***It lasts and always will last because God loves it***". *'And so everything receives its being from the love of God', she concludes; going on, 'In this little thing I see three truths: the first is that God made it; the second is that God loves it; and the third is that God keeps it. But what did I really see? In truth I saw the Creator, the Lover, and the Keeper. For until I am substantially united to him, I can never have perfect rest and true happiness. I mean to say, that I must be so united to him that no created thing can come between my God and me. This little thing it seemed to me, could have fallen into nothingness because of its littleness. **We need to be aware of the littleness of created things in order to avoid being attached to them, and so come to love and possess God who is uncreated.***'

And then she makes a *really* important point about how dissatisfying things are, ultimately, when they distract us from our relationship with God: '*For this is the reason why we are not fully at ease in heart and soul. We seek rest in insignificant things, which can offer us no rest, and we do not know our God, who is all-powerful, totally wise and good. He alone is true rest. God wishes to be known by us, and he delights when we rest in him*', adding wisely, '***For all that is less than him is not enough for us.***'

How tempting it is during the present time to distract ourselves with online shopping and box sets from Netflix, when we could choose to be attentive to what's going on around us in nature, and also within ourselves. God has so much more for us than we could ever dream or imagine! He longs for us to experience the depths of his love, and to allow ourselves to open up to him just a little bit more. I'm really struck by that last line: '***For all that is less than him is not enough for us.***' God *really* wants the best for us; and the *best* he can give us is actually *himself*! Jesus himself says the same in Luke Ch 11 v 13.

At times of deep uncertainty like the present, it's good to be reminded, as Mother Julian puts it, that, '.. he himself is the Eternal, and he made us for himself alone, and restored us by his most blessed passion, and *is always keeping us safe in his blessed love*. All this is the work of his Goodness' (from *Revelation 5* - my emphases; my highlighting, above)

Andrew Cromarty, Colburn Vicarage, 13.5.2020

Quotations: taken from '***Medieval Women Mystics***' - Elizabeth Ruth Obbard (New York: New City Press, 2002)

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Medieval-Women-Mystics-Gertrude-Spirituality/dp/1565481577/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=medieval+women+mystics%2C+elizabeth+ruth+obbard&qid=1589388092&sr=8-1

***Revelations of Divine Love** (https://www.amazon.co.uk/Revelations-Divine-Love-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140446737/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=revelations+of+divine+love&qid=1589387645&sr=8-1 - £6.99 paperback or 99p on Kindle).