

This time last year I was on a mystic's pilgrimage in Europe. Our first stop was Norwich England where we visited the church and home of the 14th century mystic and anchoress, Julian of Norwich.

This morning on this Good Friday as we walk with Jesus through the agony of the passion, I would like to share with you something of the visions of the passion of Christ that Julian experienced - and how she understood the nature of God through them.

Firstly, to say a little about Julian. She lived in England during the turbulent times of the 14th century. At age 30 Julian had a severe illness and when the priest who was called to administer the last rites, held a crucifix before her face, she found herself in the presence of the dying Jesus, watching his suffering and witnessing the great drops of blood falling down his agonised face.

Julian then received 16 visions, detailing the crucifixion of Jesus and all were grounded in the unshakeable love of God. She spent the next 20 years writing about her visions and these are recorded in her book "Revelations of Divine Love".

Julian noticed every detail about the crucifixion- even the weather on the day - and wrote that *there was a dry and frosty wind blowing* and the chill in the air fitted well with the wretchedness of how Jesus body hung on the cross there alone.

Her recollections are indeed harrowing, and I think many of us shiver at the thought of being privy to them- yet what Julian felt, above and beyond all things, was the depth of the love of God, willing to go to any lengths to be with us, especially in suffering.

Julian speaks of God's love as "motherly", in a way that is not just metaphorical, but as the reality of the character of Jesus. She describes how human mothers give birth to children who must die, but Jesus, our true mother.....bears us to joy and eternal life. ¹

Julian's reason for wanting to share Christ's suffering was not some feeling of morbidity but so that she could help him bear it. She understood her reasoning to be the same as that of the handful of loved ones, who stood with Jesus at the cross - his mother Mary, Mary Madeline John and Mary.

In her reflections, Julian does not even give a hint that there is any guilt or blame on herself. She suffered with Jesus for love, and was able to bear everything she witnessed in the power of this love because, in her own words - *love was its meaning*.

Julian is given resounding assurance of this when, having looked unflinchingly on the physical degradation of Jesus body on the cross, she writes; *just at the same moment, it seemed, that I thought that life could last no longer and the sight of his end must be shown, suddenly, as I looked on that same cross, his expression changed to joy.*

This change in his blessed mood changed mine, and I was as glad and merry as can be.

*Then our lord brought this gladly into my mind: where is any part of your pain and grief now? And I was overjoyed.*²

It was her absolute faith in the loving nature of God that enabled her to hear from God those wonderful reassuring words, that she is best known for: All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.

¹ Williams, Jane. *The Merciful Humility of God*. Bloomsbury, London: 2019. P55.

² Ibid p77

This morning with these words of assurance in our hearts we ponder the words of a more contemporary theologian Ronald Rolheiser, who shares with Julian the belief in the power of the loving nature of God. Rolheiser suggests that In the Garden of Gethsemane on the Eve of the crucifixion, Jesus suffered the emotional torture of being alone, misunderstood, isolated and without support. And it was this that made him sweat blood in the Garden.³

Yet through it all, he came to the knowing that he could go through what lay ahead, proclaiming - *not my will but your will be done*. In communion with his father, he had prepared himself to meet his death, by being willing to die without resentment, without wanting others to pay, without making anyone feel guilty about it, and with a heart that was warm rather than cold, forgiving rather than bitter, and large and understanding enough that it didn't have to demand its due. In the face of bitter duty, he took his life and his love and made them a free gift.⁴

Yes He bore all our sins and he gifted all he did in love.

When we reflect on Julian's visions of the cross of Jesus, and Rolheiser's insight, we glimpse that the way of our journey into Christ likeness is fuelled by love rather than guilt, and that love is the power that defeats sin in everything we do.

We glimpse too, the importance of presence in sharing the suffering of others - whether it be of our loved ones, friends or those who don't know and only hear about. Our personal presence and our prayerful presence is vitally important.

We see also how to offer our gifts freely, withholding nothing. For in the passion of Jesus we are shown how to love without strings attached. We see Good Friday as God's love outpoured, without denying the cost.

I'd like to close now with an adapted passage from Julian's writings.

*Good Friday can be a time when I can blame myself
for my sin that put you on the cross.*

*The thought of that terrible price
can blind me to your generosity.*

*It's hard to see you did this
not to burden me with debt,
but because I am loveable.*

*And even though I do not really understand
the divine joy and love that held you to the cross,
I cannot make feelings of unworthiness
more important than your love for me.*

*I listen as you say, kindly and gently:
"Please don't be overburdened with sorrow and misery.
I accepted crucifixion for love,
your wounds placed in my wounded hands,
absorbed into my redemption of the world."*

The Lord be with you.

³ Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Passion and the Cross*. Franciscan Media: Cincinnati, Ohio, 2015. P 5

⁴ Ibid p13