

Reading
with
Leader's
Guide

VINTAGE
Saints & Sinners

Julian of Norwich (1342-1416)

These revelations were shown to a simple unlettered creature
the year of our Lord 1373, the 13th day of May.

2. In this revelation God showed a little thing,

the size of a hazel nut in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball.
I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: 'What can this be?'
And it generally answered thus, 'It is all that is made.'
I marveled how it could continue, because it seemed to me
it could suddenly have sunk into nothingness because of its littleness.
And I was answered in my understanding:
'It continues and always shall, because God loves it;
And in this way *everything* has its being by love of God.'
In this little thing I saw three characteristics:
The first is that God made it.
The second is that God loves it.
The third, that God keeps it. (Reading 8)



**Close your eyes as I read this revelation one more time. Put yourself in Julian's place. Imagine opening your palm to hold a small brown bumpy hazel nut. Imagine yourself asking Jesus what this could be and hear him answer: This hazel nut is all of creation, all of the universe right there in your hand. Listen for words that tell you more about this creation—and of God's relationship. Are you ready? {Leader: read this section again!}*

**What emotions did you feel as I read this passage to you?*

**What is Julian telling you about the created universe?*

What is Julian telling you about God?

**If you were holding this hazel nut yourself, what questions would you ask God?*

**What other thoughts does this bring up for you right now?*

1. Our good Lord showed to me a spiritual vision of God's simple loving.

I saw that God is to us everything that is good and comfortable for us.
God is our clothing which for love enwraps us, holds us,
and all encloses us because of His tender love, so that He may never leave us.
And so in this showing I saw that God is to us everything that is good, as I understood it...
For God does not despise what He has created and He does not disdain to serve us even at the simplest duty that is proper to our body in nature, because of the love of our soul which God has made in His own likeness.
For as the body is clad in clothes, and the flesh in skin, and the bones in flesh, and the heart in the breast,
So are we, soul and body, clad in the goodness of God and enclosed—yea,
and even more intimately, because all these others may waste and wear away,
but the goodness of God is even whole, and nearer to us without any comparisons.
For truly our Lover desires that our soul cleave to Him with all its might and that we evermore cleave to His goodness,
For all things that the heart can think, this pleases God most and soonest succeeds. (Reading 8 & 12)

**what words or phrases are vivid for you here? Read them out loud now for the group.*

- *What images came to you as I read this passage?*
- *How many times do you see the word good or goodness in this passage? {yes, count them!}*
- *By Julian's telling, where is goodness found? What does goodness feel like--physically?*
- *Julian says that God has made us in his own likeness. In what ways are you like God?*
- *What does God desire of us, according to Julian?*
- *How do we please God? Do you think that is all that God requires of us?*
- *Is there anything about Julian's ideas about God that are different from yours?*
- *What else are you thinking of right now?*

3. After that the Lord brought to my mind the yearning that I had for Him in the past,

and I saw that nothing stood in my way except sin (and thus I observed universally in us all).
 And it seemed to me that if sin had not been, we would all have been pure and like to our Lord as He made us.
 And thus, in my folly, before this time I often wondered why, by the great foreseeing wisdom of God,
 the beginning of sin was not prevented, for then, it seemed to me, all would have been well.
 I ought much to have given up this disturbing wondering,
 but nevertheless, I made mourning and sorrow about it without reason or discretion.

- *Take a look back through this passage. Which emotions does Julian name here?*
- *Julian speaks of a yearning for God that in the past. How would you describe your own feelings about God during different times in your life?*
- *Why does sin stand in the way of our yearning for God? How does that work?*
- *Julian struggles with a question in this passage. What is that question?*
- *What has been your toughest spiritual or theological question?*
- *Do you think that asking these questions is "folly" (to use her word)? What is your own attitude toward doubt?*

But Jesus answered by this word and said:

'Sin is inevitable, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.'

In this unadorned word 'sin' our Lord brought to my mind generally all that is not good, and the shameful despising,
 And the uttermost tribulation He bore for us in this life, and His dying,...
 And with the beholding of this, with all pains that ever were or ever shall be,
 I understood that the Passion of Christ to represent the greatest pain and ever more than that.
 And all this pain was shown in one stroke and quickly passed over into comfort. [Chapter 27]

Sin is the sharpest scourge that can strike anyone's spirit.

This scourge wears down both man and woman, making them loathsome in their own sight.

It is not long until they consider themselves suited only to hell,

until the Holy Spirit's touch moves them to contrition and turns bitterness into hope in God's mercy.

Then the Spirit begins to heal the wounds, revive the spirit, and return the person to life.

Dearly does our Lord protect us in his loving care when we seem to be almost forsaken and cast away
 on account of our sin. And indeed we deserve as much.

Yet because of the humility we acquire in this fashion, we are raised high in God's sight through his grace.

Contrition makes us clean, compassion renders us ready, and desire for God makes us worthy.

So all shame is transformed into joy and glory.

For our courteous Lord does not wish his creatures to lose hope even if they fall frequently and grievously.

Our failure does not prevent him from loving us. Peace and love are always present within us, living and laboring,
 but we unfortunately do not always abide in peace and love.

- *What new ideas does Julian introduce in this section?*
- *How can it be that Jesus says, "Sin is inevitable but all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well?" How is this possible?*
- *[2nd paragraph] How does sin influence how we see ourselves? How does God see us?*

**What does Julian teach us about the work of the Holy Spirit?*

**Listen again to these words: "We are raised high in God's sight through his grace.*

Contrition makes us clean, compassion renders us ready, and desire for God makes us worthy.

So all shame is transformed into joy and glory."

**How do you understand what she might be saying?*

**Does any of this describe your own experience in any way?*

3. God is being and wants us to sit, dwell and ground ourselves in the knowledge of God while at the same time realizing that we are noble, excellent, assessed as precious and valuable and have been given creation for our enjoyment because we are loved.

**Take a moment to hear these words as I read them to you a few times. {repeat as desired!}*

**What is the truth at the heart of this sentence?*

**If you truly believed this—how would your life be different?*

4. It is necessary for us to have awareness of the littleness of created things

And to disregard everything that is created, in order to love and have God who is uncreated.

For this is the reason why we are not fully at ease in heart and soul:

Because here we seek rest in these things that are so little, in which there is no rest,

And we do not recognize our God who is all powerful, all wise, all good, for He is true rest.

God wishes to be known, and He delights that we remain in Him, because all that is less than He is not enough for us.

And this is the reason why no soul is at rest until it is emptied of everything that is created.

When the soul is willingly emptied for love in order to have Him who is all, then it is able to receive spiritual rest.

Also our Lord God showed that it is full great pleasure to Him

that a pitiable soul come to Him nakedly and plainly and simply [saying,] 'God, of Thy goodness, give me Thyself;

for Thou art enough for me, and I ask nothing that is less than can be full honor to Thee.

And if I ask anything that is less, ever shall I be in want, for only in Thee have I all.'

These words are full lovely to the soul and most nearly touch the will of God and His goodness. [Reading 9]

"The constant seeking of the soul pleases God very much."

**What is Julian's diagnosis of our discontent, our restless spirits? If she were giving you personal, heart-felt advice right now, what do you think she'd say?*

**To repeat a question we explored earlier: what does God want of us? How can we respond to God—in everyday, practical ways?*

**When you are feeling ill at ease in the midst of a busy day, how do you access rest for your spirit?*

5. Our Lord desires that our spirit be truly turned to gaze upon him and upon all his glorious creation,

For it is exceedingly good and his judgements are sweet and comforting, and bring our spirit to rest....

For God has made all things, so all that's done is in some way God's doing....

No one acts but God. God never changes his mind in anything and never will.

Nothing in creation was unknown by him from the beginning. All was set in order before anything was made.

Nothing will fail in its design for all is abundantly good. So the Trinity is entirely pleased with all its works.

Behold, I am God.

Behold, I am in all things.

Behold, I accomplish all things.

Behold, I never withdraw my arms from my work.

Behold, I never fail to guide all things toward the purpose for which I created them, before time began,

With the strength, wisdom and love, with which I created all. So how can anything go wrong?

**Julian says that God, the Trinity is entirely please with God's works. Does that ring true for you? Why or why not?*

**Julian holds on to two paradoxical truths: (1) Sin is inevitable. (2) God's love means that nothing will fail to be abundantly good—that all will be well. How does this help you see the world in in a new way? Your own life?*

**What will you most remember about these readings from Julian of Norwich?*

**In what ways do you think you are like Julian? In what ways do you think you are different?*

SOURCES: Revelations of Divine Love, trans. By Fr. John-Julian, OJN (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011)

All Will Be Well: Julian of Norwich, John Kirvan, ed. (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2008).

A Revelation, chapter 42, Brendan Doyle's translation

THEOLOGICAL HORIZONS
