

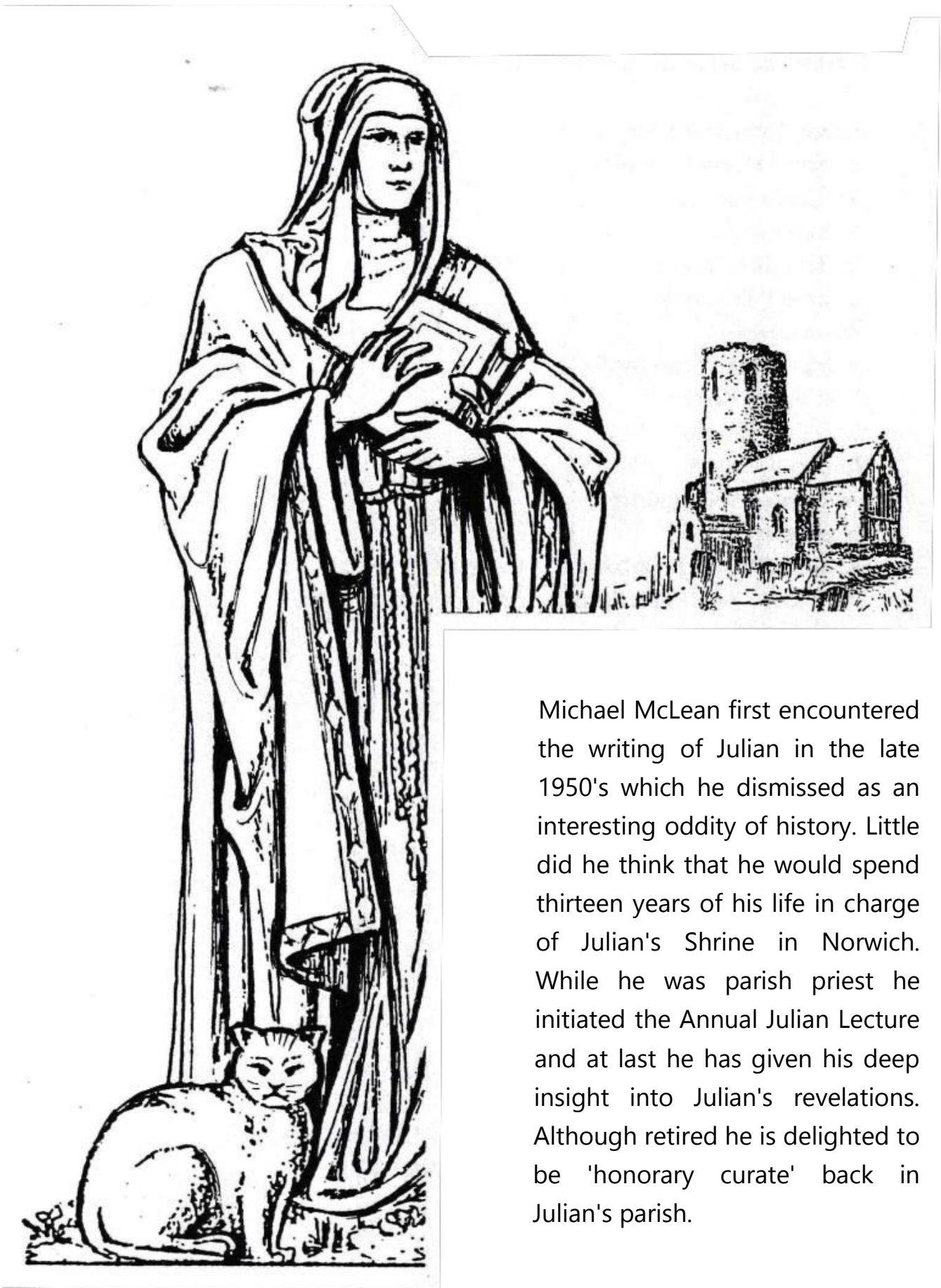
The Julian Lecture 2005

Jesus of the Scars



Canon Michael McLean





Michael McLean first encountered the writing of Julian in the late 1950's which he dismissed as an interesting oddity of history. Little did he think that he would spend thirteen years of his life in charge of Julian's Shrine in Norwich. While he was parish priest he initiated the Annual Julian Lecture and at last he has given his deep insight into Julian's revelations. Although retired he is delighted to be 'honorary curate' back in Julian's parish.

^[2]Twenty-five years ago, while I was Rector here, I invited my friend, the late Bishop John Robinson, to give what became the first Julian Lecture. I little thought then that I'd ever be standing here myself. Still less did I think I'd be standing here instead of one of the most eminent theologians of our day, Dr. Rowan Williams, whom we had hoped would be the lecturer this year. You can blame Father Robert for my being here; he'd read an earlier version of this paper and, when we were scratching about for a replacement for the Archbishop, insisted I gave it.

I am of course honoured. But I'm also a bit embarrassed to be included in a sequence which has contained some of the leading Julian scholars in the world. The most I can hope for is that a return to very basic stuff may help a few of you to feel more confident in approaching Julian. You may know that Thomas Merton called her "one of the most wonderful of Christian voices... with Newman the greatest English theologian"; and for many of us theology is a bit daunting. In my opinion Julian is not easy. So I make no apology for simplicity today. I do however apologise to any who heard me speak at the Cathedral a couple of years ago that this is very much a repeat performance.

I've called what I have to say 'Jesus of the Scars' because at the very heart of Julian's Revelation is the understanding that God in Christ is wounded for wounded humanity. The title comes from a poem written by Edward Shillito in the aftermath of the 14/18 World War when its pains and horrors were still fresh in people's minds. It goes like this:

If we have never sought we seek thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars.
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on thy brow;

We must have thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us, they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is thy balm?
Lord Jesus, by thy scars we claim thy grace.

^[3]If when the doors are shut thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of thine;
We know today what wounds are, have no fear.
Show us thy scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong, but thou wast weak;
They rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne.
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak.
And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.

The language of wounds, healing, the saviour physician, and the like, has a long history. Way back in the sixth century before Christ, Isaiah wrote of the servant who was wounded for our transgressions, the one who bore our sufferings and sorrows. St Peter tells us that through Christ's wounds we have been healed. Jesus himself, by implication, speaks of himself as physician and certainly acts as such. Later St Augustine of Hippo, for instance, in his Confessions speaks of himself as wounded in his will, his intellect, and his feelings. For him Christ is the great physician. And Julian, of course, stands in this great tradition.

It was as she gazed upon the crucifix which her parish priest (probably Father Whiting, vicar of this church) brought to her sick bed on that momentous May 8th 1373, seeing Christ's wounds which she so graphically describes in Chapter 12, that she began to

understand God's immeasurable love for man. In a sense it was to the cross that Julian was anchored - not just anchored in place, there, in that cell - but anchored in every point in the passion of her Lord. This is what she had prayed for when she was young:

This creature had desired three graces by the gift of God. The first was recollection of the Passion. The second was bodily sickness. The third was to have three wounds... I wished that I had been with Mary Magdalene and the others who were Christ's lovers, so that I might have seen with my own eyes the Passion which our Lord suffered for me, so that I might suffer with him.

She certainly got what she prayed for. And she paid its price. Her youthful prayer was wholly in accord with Jesus' command, 'if any man ^[4]would come after me let him take up his cross and follow me'. As St Paul prayed, 'may I share in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain to the resurrection of the dead'.

Christ's passion is, of course, the ultimate picture of human wickedness. But more profoundly it is the ultimate remedy for human wickedness. Here is ultimate healing. The wounds in our Lord's head and hands and side, and the lacerations of his body, are all sustained in solidarity unto death with humankind. And they become symbols of glory, they are the assurance that through the love of God all our wounds - the wounds of living, the wounds of suffering, and, yes, mysteriously, even the wounds of our sins - can be healed, can be transfigured into glory:

For every sinful soul must be healed...though he be healed, his

wounds are not seen by God as wounds but as honours

So 'all (yes all) shall be well'

From the cross Jesus said to Julian

See how I loved you. As if he said my darling behold and see your creator and your endless joy; see your brother, your saviour, my child behold and see what delight and bliss I have in your salvation.

I suggest we can unpack something of the depth of this love, a love which led Christ to his wounds, by considering the six phrases of the Julian Collect which I composed nearly thirty years ago and which is now in Common Worship (phrases which spring directly from her text):

Most Holy Lord, the ground of our beseeching, who through your servant Julian revealed the wonder of your love; grant that as we are created in your nature and restored by your grace, our wills may be so made one with yours that we may come to see you face to face and gaze on you forever. Amen.

1. First then 'the ground of our beseeching'

She is given this phrase in the 14th revelation when God instructed her about prayer.

[5] She writes:

Our Lord is the ground from which our prayer springs.

She understands our prayer to be rooted in God, like a plant or a tree whose roots spread deep into the earth and from it draws its nourishment. She speaks of the fruit of prayer (fruits like that of a plant):

which is to be united and like to our Lord in all things.

I suggest this is fairly close to the truth that we have in fact no prayer of our own; we enter into the prayer of Christ himself, and it is the Holy Spirit who speaks in us.

But although Julian uses this phrase about prayer, yet there is an ever-present awareness that God is the ground of our very being; the undergirding reality; the reason we exist; God's motive in creation. Just as St Paul wrote, 'In Him we live and move and have our being', so Julian wrote in the long meditation which follows the 14th revelation:

God is closer to us than our own soul, the foundation in which our soul stands' and 'God is our steadfast foundation... all our place, our life, our being, are in God.

2. Secondly 'who through your servant Julian revealed the wonder of your love'

It's worth emphasising that Julian believed that what she wrote, both in the *Short Text* immediately after the events of May 8th, and, after twenty years of contemplating those events, in the *Long Text*, to have been given - revelations and interpretations from God himself, not her own human cleverness or sanctity.

God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not nor ever was my intention; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak and frail.

And this is not just mock modesty or a feminist disclaimer to a masculine church.

[6] I know very well that what I am saying I have received from him who is the sovereign teacher.

For her there is an absolute imperative to transmit the message, for it is God's message:

It is truly love which moves me to tell it to you, for I want God to be known and my fellow Christians to prosper'...'I am not good because of the revelations, but only if I love God better...if I pay special attention to myself I am nothing at all; but I am, I hope, in the unity of love with all my fellow Christians.

It is this 'unity of love' - a unity which is first with God himself, and from that with her fellow men - which gives true life. Love is the

message: love, love all the way, all the time; the utterly unconditional love which God has for all he has created:

I desired many times to know our Lord's meaning in this. And after fifteen years I was answered 'Do you wish to know your Lord's meaning in this? Know it well; love was his meaning. Who reveals it to you? Love. What does he reveal to you? Love. Why does he reveal it to you? For love.

So she piles image upon image in her struggle to comprehend and articulate this absolute love. God is our Father, our Mother, our brother, our husband. And of course she receives the amazing and joyful insight that this love is so great that there is no anger in God, a theme so eloquently expounded by Fr. Robert Llewelyn:

I saw no anger in God neither briefly nor for long. For truly if God could be angry for any time we should have neither life nor place nor being.

What we express as his anger is actually the projection onto him of the anger which is within us. In a church such as that of Julian's day, which emphasised judgement and punishment for sin, and which had a doom painted over many a chancel arch, such an understanding was revolutionary. But it was also liberating. (I would add that it is perhaps a message which some parts of today's church need to take on board). Julian wrote:

[7] If there be any person who is continually protected from falling I do not know. But this was revealed, that in falling and in rising we are always preciously protected in one love. For we do not fall in the sight of God.

So we come to the third phrase of the Collect, and the very heart of Julian's understanding:

3. 'Created in your nature and restored by your grace'

These two activities of God, creation and redemption, are intertwined, because both are the action of love. But I shall consider them separately.

Created in your nature. At the very beginning of scripture is the astonishing and profound statement attributed to God, 'Let us make man in our own image' or 'God created man in the image of himself. male and female created he them.' We so often fail to recognise what an outrageous statement this is: it asserts that humanity is godlike. This is either the hubris of a megalomaniac or a given truth inspired by God himself. Julian, of course, believed the latter (and so I hope do we).

She has a very profound understanding of the doctrine of creation. Her second revelation as she gazes at the cross is of 'a small thing, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of her hand'. Like the poet William Blake, who saw a world in a grain of sand and held eternity in the palm of his hand, Julian has a nuclear vision. She thought 'what can this be?' and was given the answer 'It is everything that is made. It lasts and always will because God loves it. Everything has being through the love of God'.

I note the present tense - 'has being'. Not 'was made' but 'has being'. This is not the god who set things in motion long ago and now watches from a distance as they run essentially on their own,

following what we call the laws of nature. For Julian's God is (to use the ancient formula) 'ever active, ever still'; the dynamic God through whom and in whom all things continue to exist, and show whatever^[8] predictability they may have, because of the constant love which God is not 'outside' his creation; he makes and sustains them, creation is 'in' him. The space/time dimensions in which we exist and act here and now, and the extra space/time in which we shall live hereafter are understood by Julian to be but a single point.

The Almighty truth of the Trinity is our Father, for he made us and keeps us in him. And the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, in whom we are enclosed. And the high goodness of the Trinity is our Lord, and in him we are enclosed and he in us. We are enclosed in the Father, and we are enclosed in the Son, and we are enclosed in the Holy Spirit. And the Father is enclosed in us; and the Son is enclosed in us; and the Holy Spirit is enclosed in us.

This understanding of the Trinity and of man's creation, is given her from the very beginning. As she gazes at the Cross (and it's astonishing if you think about it that it should be in the cross that she sees this) her first revelation is that

The Trinity is our maker, the Trinity is our protector, and the Trinity is our everlasting lover.

We were made like to this Trinity in what Julian calls our 'first making'. But she is a realist, and sees our sinfulness. We need to be re-made since God wishes us to be like Jesus our Saviour forever in heaven. We are she says,

double by God's creation, that is to say substantial and

sensual. Our substance is the higher part which we have in our Father God Almighty; and the second person of the Trinity is our Mother in taking our sensuality.

This is precisely what our Mother Jesus did in his incarnation. 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that we might have eternal life.' We are so inestimably loved that God in Christ comes to share totally in our life, even our sensuality. The great Julian scholar Grace Jantzen writes:

our substance is our created nature which flows out from God and is constituent of the essence of our humanity as rooted in God; whereas our sensuality is that which constitutes our God-given independence. Sensuality does not refer ^[9]exclusively to the physical senses, let alone to our sexuality, though that would be included. It includes rather all our psychology and physicality as individual human beings.

We share, in our substance, in some of the attributes of God. We have the ability to do things, for instance, so sharing his power; we have the ability to reason, so sharing his wisdom; we have the ability to love, so sharing his essential being. But we also have the most amazing - and dangerous - gift of all-the gift which mirrors most nearly God's own nature - the gift of free will. God imposes upon himself a self-restraint on his omnipotence, and allows what he has created in unity with himself to be distinct from himself. It is here that our sensuality lies. It is not a question of 'soul and body'; there is no dualism in Julian. Both substance and sensuality belong to the soul, though without embodiment (actual enfleshment) in time and space, there could be no sensuality. It's a matter of the higher self and the lower self. And it was to unite the two that God was enfleshed in Christ and suffered and died on the cross.

For the wonderful gift of free will opened the possibility of sin, and man took this opportunity. Julian writes frequently of the vileness and horrors and distortion of sin. And so we reach the second part of this phrase of the Collect 'and restored by your grace'.

Sin, according to Julian, is the marring and twisting of the true image of God in which we are created. In our substance we remain in union with him; but in our sensuality we are wounded. She writes:

sin is the sharpest scourge with which any soul can be struck; which scourge belabours man, and breaks a man, and makes man despicable in his own sight so much that at times he thinks himself not fit for anything but as it were to sink into hell.

Yet Julian is given the wonderful assurance that God looks on his servant 'with pity not with blame'. She learns this in the lovely parable of the Servant which follows the 14th revelation about prayer. The parable tells, as you'll remember, of a Servant and his Lord. The Lord sends his servant out on an errand. Joyful to serve, and swift to do so, the servant rushes off. But he falls into a pit and is gravely injured.

[10]'He groans and moans and tosses about and writhes, but he cannot help himself in any way' (surely an exact description of the effects of sin; for the pit is sin). 'The greatest hurt I saw in him was his lack of consolation, for he could not turn his face to look on his loving Lord who was very close to him' (how like the impotence the sinner feels):

He suffered seven great pains. The first was severe bruising. The second was the clumsiness of his body. The third was

weakness. The fourth that he was blinded in his reason. The fifth was that he could not rise. The sixth that he lay alone. The seventh that the place he lay in was narrow, comfortless, and distressful.

It sounds very like St Paul who cried out, "Oh wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body doomed to death?"

But Julian tells us the cause of the servant's falling 'was his good will and his great desire'. How wonderful! And even more significantly she tells us that she 'did not see sin'. She asserts that 'it has no substance at all, not even a particle of being'. In a way sin is like the hole into which the servant fell, an absence of being rather than an entity (I wonder if black holes in the universe have something to teach us here, but I don't begin to understand that). Sin can only be known by 'the pain which it causes'.

Yet the paradoxical thing is that, as she says, 'sin is behovely, it had to be'. Without the possibility of sin there is no free will, and without free will man cannot really love; without the possibility of disobedience there can be no obedience; without the possibility of denying our true humanity there can be no real humanity. And all this is because God so loves us that he wills our perfection. The captivity of sin is a necessary possibility if we are to come to the glorious liberty of the children of God.

But Julian has yet deeper understandings. The servant who stood before the Lord was revealed to be Adam:

that is to say one man was shown at that time, and his fall, so as to make it understood how God regards all men and their falling. ^[11]For in the sight of God all men are as one man, and

one man is all men.

What is more she saw that the servant is the Son, Jesus Christ. Christ's humanity is the true Adam:

God's son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind. Adam fell from life into death in the valley of this wretched world, and after that into hell. God's son fell with Adam into the womb of the maiden who was the fairest daughter of Adam, and that was to excuse Adam from all blame in heaven and on earth; and powerfully brought him out of hell.

Here indeed is restoration by grace:

Our good Lord has taken upon him all our blame; and therefore our father may not, does not, wish to assign more blame to us than to his own beloved son.

The collect continues:

4. 'Grant...that our wills may be so made one with yours'

The saving act of God in Christ - his incarnation, ministry, passion, death, resurrection and ascension - opens to all humankind, in all ages, the possibility that our sensuality might be raised to the glory of our substance.

Our good Lord... when it seems to us that we are almost forsaken and abandoned because of our sins, and because we

have deserved it... visits who he will with such great contrition, compassion and true longing for him, that they are suddenly delivered from sin and pain, and taken up into bliss and made equal with the saints.

Contrition, compassion and true longing for God were the three wounds Julian had prayed for as a young woman. Though it is certain that God's love is absolute, the grace of salvation is conditional upon these three wounds. Yet it is noteworthy that it is God who visits man with contrition, compassion and true longing (as Julian has just said). United with the true Adam, Jesus, each Adam must share in his actions. Julian writes:

[12] each sinful soul must be healed by these medicines...by the wound of contrition we are made clean; by the wound of compassion we are made ready for bliss; by the wound of true longing for God we are made worthy of him.

What does Julian mean by these words, contrition, compassion and true longing?

True contrition is not just a sense of guilt and remorse and feeling sorry for ourselves. Such thoughts and feelings can easily take us further away from God, for they can remain self-centred, being simply a desire for personal ease. But real contrition is the turning from self to God, centring upon Him. This will involve the pain (the wound) of abandoning self-gratification.

As far as compassion goes we need to remember that Christ on the cross was undergoing not simply a passion, but com-passion. It was suffering with and for mankind. The outward wounds were the scourging, the crown of thorns, the nails, the spear-thrust; but the

inward and greater sufferings were the wounds of human sin which he was bearing. He entered into the utter dereliction of man. He believed that he was forsaken by God, that all he was undergoing was pointless. It is to this com-passion that we are called in a world so distorted by sin, so without hope. Julian understands that we are to cooperate with God. She writes:

I saw the great union between Christ and ourselves. For when he was in pain, we also were in pain.

And there is a close link between contrition and compassion for both require this detachment from self; the former with a centring on God, the latter with a centring on our fellow men.

The third wound is the ever-deepening longing for God. It is not just a longing for God in the bliss of heaven at the end of our days; it is the ever-present reality or possibility here and now. Julian says:

I saw him and I sought him, I had him and I lacked him.

[13]She tells us of the times when life is difficult for her: 'this place is a prison' she cries out in frustration at one point, and in chapter 64 she confesses she had 'no pleasure in living and labouring'. She speaks of the 'absence' of God. But she writes:

It is God's will that we accept his consolations as generously as we are able; and he also wants us to accept our tarrying and our suffering as lightly as we are able.

But - and here we come to the final phrase of the Collect - Julian constantly looks beyond this life to life finally in God: so we pray that:

5. 'We might come to see you face to face and gaze on you for ever'

Now such words are rather unfashionable today. "Pie-in-the-sky", people say disparagingly. The emphasis of today's church is on the things of this world - social justice, compassion for the needy, liberation for the oppressed, and so on. And of course such things matter. 'Thy kingdom come' we are bidden to pray, 'on earth as it is in heaven.' The gospel will not allow us to escape into some pious other-worldly dream. But neither will the gospel allow us to forget the future of man. Death is the only certainty facing each one of us; and unless there is more to life than this world, this world is fairly unsatisfactory. St Paul writes in I Corinthians, 'If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of people'.

The lovely Prayer Book Collect for Trinity 6 (based on an 8th century original) begs that God, who has prepared for those who love him such good things as pass man's understanding, will pour into our hearts such love towards him that loving him above all things we might obtain his promises which exceed all that we can desire. This is the virtue of hope - hope, which is, I think, the most neglected of the three theological virtues - hope which the great twentieth century theologian Moltmann says is 'the key' (the musical key) 'in which the life of faith is set here and now'. Hope is the heart and centre of true humanity. Without it life is hell (not for nothing does Dante place over the gates of hell the words 'abandon hope all you who enter here').

[14] And Julian knew this. She wrote:

We are as certain in our hope to have the bliss of heaven here and now, as we are certain of it when we are there'. 'At the

end of our woe, suddenly our eyes will be opened, and in the clearness of our sight our light will be fullI saw that our faith is our light in the night, which light is God our endless day.

Suddenly you will be taken out of all your pain, all your sickness, all your unrest, and all your woe. And you will come up above, and you will have me for your reward, and you will be filled full of joy and bliss, and you will never again have any kind of sickness, any kind of pain, any kind of displeasure, no lack of will, but always joy and bliss without end' 'You shall come into our Lord, knowing yourself clearly, and wholly possessing God, truly seeing and wholly feeling, and hearing him spiritually, and delectably smelling him, and sweetly tasting him. And there we shall see God face to face, familiarly and wholly.



The poet Edward Shillito with whom I began, writing against the background of the terrible events of a war which shattered old securities, knew that Jesus of the Scars alone could bring men hope and healing. Only the wounded God can speak to humanity's wounds. Julian was a realist. She lived in a century marked by constant war, terrible plague, social unrest, a corrupt church, and many other ills. But she found in the Cross the infinite and utterly accepting love of God. Hers is not optimism. It is a blessed assurance:

He did not say you will not be tempested, but he did say you will not be overcome.

I have suggested elsewhere that the 20th century was not unlike Julian's 14th, marked by similar pains and ills. I think the 21st is proving the ^[15]same. We need her realism. But we need even more her assurance. She was taught

Love is our Lord's meaning. Before God made us he loved us, which love was never abated and never will be in our creation we had beginning, but the love in which he created us was in him from without beginning. In this love we have our beginning; and all this we shall see in God, without end.

Like any Collect the last word is:

6. Amen.....so be it, ainsi soit il.

As the 17th century scribe who made a copy of Julian's manuscript wrote:

Amen. May Jesus grant this. So ends the revelations of the love of the Blessed Trinity, shown by our Saviour Jesus Christ for our endless comfort and solace, and also that we may rejoice in him in our passing journey of life. Amen.

Michael McLean