

Lent Meditations with Julian of Norwich – Week 3 (Tuesday 09 March)

One insight, for which Julian is well known, and which calls out to us over the centuries, is that God has both male and female qualities, that, as Julian says, “As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother”.

For Julian, the three persons of the Trinity have different emphasis:

‘I saw that the exalted Power of the Trinity is our Father, the deep Wisdom of the Trinity is our Mother, and the vast Love of the Trinity is our Master’.

They are all working together, but we, as human beings, have an especially intimate relationship with the second person, Christ.



‘In taking on our flesh, the Second Person became our Mother of Mercy. Our Mother keeps all our parts together and works on us in various ways. We profit and grow in Christ-the-Mother. Through her mercy, she restores and redeems us. Through his passion, his dying, and his resurrecting, he makes us one with his own essence. And so the Mother acts with mercy toward all her loving children.’ (*Chapter 58*)

Julian’s description of motherhood is so lovely, so tender, that it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that she might have been a mother herself at some stage. Either that, or her own mother set a wonderful example. Not everyone’s personal experience of their actual mother or of motherhood is so pure and joyful, but even then, it is good to be reminded that God’s love is over and above anything that our human nature can offer us.



‘This beautiful word “mother” is so sweet and kind in itself that it cannot be attributed to anyone but God. Only he who is our true Mother and source of all life may rightfully be called by this name. Nature, love, wisdom, and knowledge are all attributes of the Mother, which is God. Even though our earthly birth is low and humble—and so simple compared to our spiritual birth—he is the one responsible for the birth of all babies that are born to their physical mothers. The kind, loving mother, aware of the needs of her child, protects the child with great tenderness. This is the nature of motherhood. As the child grows in age and stature, she adapts her methods, but her love never changes. And when the child is even older, she allows him to be chastised to counter his vices and develop his virtues and graces. Whenever a human mother nurtures her child with all that is beautiful and good, it is God-the-Mother who is acting through her. And so, within our human nature, he mothers our lower part through grace, impelled by the love that originates in the higher part. He wants us to know this, so that all our love will flow toward him and cleave us to him. I saw that in truly loving God we pay off all the debts we have to his Fatherhood and Motherhood. This blessed love is a gift from Christ. It is what he was referring to when he said, “It is I whom you love.” (Chapter 60)

As we come together again, we will close our meditation by saying The Grace together:

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with us all
evermore.**

Amen.

Afterwards, those of us who would like to stay and exchange a little of what that was like, or what came to us in the silence, are very welcome to do so, but this is entirely up to each one to do what feels right for them.

Tim Bentley mentioned a good BBC program about Julian and her manuscript and how it was preserved and found. Here it is: <https://youtu.be/VptjqJN8wy0>

Very interesting – thank you, Tim for finding it again!

Further reading about Julian and some good translations (from the Middle English) of her *Revelations*:

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Penguin Classics, transl. Elizabeth Spearing, 1978)

Julian of Norwich, *The Showings – A Contemporary Translation* (Canterbury Press, transl. Mirabai Starr, 2014)

Upjohn, Sheila, *The Way of Julian of Norwich – a Prayer Journey through Lent* (SPCK, 2020)

Pennington, Emma, *At the Foot of the Cross with Julian of Norwich* (BRF, 2020)

Emma is Canon Missioner at Canterbury Cathedral. She has also produced a very interesting series of short talks, called "*Julian of Norwich: A medieval take on lockdown and how to survive it*". They are available via the Canterbury Cathedral website:

<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/julian-of-norwich-a-medieval-take-on-lockdown-and-how-to-survive-it/>

Well worth having a look at!