



Turning Lockdown into a Retreat: Week 2

Finding meaning in troubled times: The witness of Julian of Norwich

Reflection: Being held in the palm of God's hand

Whatever is going on in the world, it is all in God's hands. Nothing is outside of God's loving care. Here is one of Julian's most famous visions:

And he showed me something small, no bigger than a hazelnut, lying in the palm of my hand, as it seemed to me, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with the eye of my understanding and thought: What can this be? I was amazed that it could last, for I thought that because of its littleness it would suddenly have fallen into nothing. And I was answered in my understanding: it lasts and always will because God loves it, and thus everything has being through the love of God. [Long Text 5]



Julian invites us to go into a quiet space, both physically and mentally, as best we can. Try becoming aware of the rhythm of your breathing, of the sounds around you and outside: the singing of birds, perhaps domestic noises carrying on around you or other sounds in the background.

Now focus in on your own body. This is a time of anxiety, and we carry our anxieties in our bodies. Become aware of any physical tensions within yourself, allowing them to relax.

In your imagination, try holding the world and all it contains in the palm of your hand, like a nut. Perhaps you have something small and round that you can hold. Imagine yourself as God, holding it because you love and cherish it.

Now imagine that you and all that you love and care for are being held lovingly. How does it feel to be held like this?

Reflection: When we fall, Jesus falls with us

Julian sees Jesus as radically identifying with us, inhabiting and feeling our pain, broken in our brokenness. Thinking about all humanity in the story of the fall of

Adam, she sees the second Person of the Trinity choosing to join in that fallenness in order to raise it up in love,

'When Adam fell, God's Son fell, because of the true union that was made in heaven, God's Son could not be separated from Adam, for by Adam I understand all mankind. Adam fell from life to death, into the valley of this wretched world, and after that into hell. God's Son fell with Adam, into the valley of the womb of the maiden...and that was to excuse Adam from blame in heaven and on earth, and powerfully he brought him out of hell.' [LT51]

Julian senses God's deep desire to share everything with us, even our pain. This is the heart of Jesus' total identification with our human condition.

Spend some time thinking about Jesus as a small, vulnerable child in the manger... fleeing for his life with his parents...lonely in the desert...hurt by the indifference or hostility of others... abandoned by his friends.

What do you want to say to him about this?

Are there any feelings of your own you want to share with him?

Reflection: Praying with our desires

Julian tells us that whenever we feel the desire or need to pray, it is evidence of God's grace, 'helping our desire'. Can you put a name to your desire now, before God?

In the Gospel a leper says to Jesus, 'If you want to, you can heal me'. Jesus' reply is, 'Of course I want to – be healed'. Can you trust that God will respond to your deepest desires?

The invitation here is to stay with God and ask for what we most desire, reflecting on what lies behind that desire. It may be that there is a 'desire beneath the desire'. A desire for financial or job or relationship security may reveal an anxiety that God is wanting to heal. A desire to be desirable may reveal an insecurity or lack of self-esteem that God is wanting to touch with the confidence of knowing ourselves loved unconditionally,

As you become aware of your desire name this before God and let your need or longing rest there.

'For this is the reason why our hearts and souls are not in perfect ease, because here we seek rest in this thing which is very little, in which there is no rest, and we do not know our God who is almighty, all wise and all good, for he is true rest.' [LT 5]



Some suggested readings for this week

Psalm 131; Psalm 139; Jeremiah 31:3; 10-13; Isaiah 43:1-7; Luke 5:12-13

Quotes are taken from Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, 1978, *Julian of Norwich: Showings*, translated and introduced by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh, New Jersey: Paulist Press