

2. A LESSON OF LOVE

Good morning, and welcome to the second of three reflections on the writings of Julian of Norwich.

Julian was called to a life of an anchorite, a solitary enclosed life of prayer and meditation, and a ministry of spiritual friendship to those who came to see her and learn from her wisdom.

Why did she make this decision?

Well, before she entered the anchorite cell, she had a vision. Several visions, in fact, but one vision was supreme, and the power of it stayed with her for the rest of her life. It was a vision of Christ on his cross.

In early May in the year 1373, when she was 30 years old, Julian was lying sick in her home. She was in severe pain and drifting in and out of consciousness. On the fourth night, 8th May, her family sent for the parish priest to administer the last rites of the church.

She wrote:

My priest was sent for to be at my end, and by the time he came, my eyes were set, and I could not speak. He held a cross before me and said, 'I have brought you the likeness of your Maker and Saviour. Look upon it and draw comfort from it.

After this my sight began to fail, and it was all dark around me in the room as if it were night- except for the cross. I saw it glow with light, and I did not know how.

Then I truly thought I was dying.

So for Julian, as for countless Christians before and since, her faith was brought alive by a real experience of the cross. She wrote in graphic detail about what she experienced. To our 21st century ears, it may seem too gory, but maybe we sanitise our faith too much.

She wrote:



The blessed body hung alone there a long time, and the nails wrenched it as the weight of the body pulled against them. And the body sagged with the weight of its long hanging. And I saw bleeding from the wheals and the scourging, which ran and flowed so abundantly, it could have covered the bed where I lay, and all around.

And there was a piercing and wrenching of the head, ...I did not see how the wounds were made, but I understood it was by sharp thorns, and the way the crown was crammed on, roughly and harshly, hard and without pity...

As for all the pains I saw, all that I can say is too little for cannot be talked of...

And I thought: is there any pain in Hell like this pain?

And in my reason I was answered.

Hell is a different pain, for in it is despair.

*And I understood that in our Lord's meaning,
we are on his cross with him
in our pains and suffering.....*

For he says

*I shall totally shatter you because of your vain affections
and your vicious pride
and after that I shall gather you together
and make you humble and gentle, pure
and holy, by one-ing you with myself'*

And our Lord most mercifully waited and gave me grace to listen

And in this I perceived a gentle anxiety, and to this our Lord answered

"I keep thee full safely"

*And this word was said with more love and steadfastness and spiritual protection
than I know or am able to tell"*