

## Julian of Norwich (1343-1416)



It was a warm(ish) Summer day that my mother and I drove from our house in Hertfordshire to Norfolk in 2018. We had decided to have a day out and settled on Norwich primarily to see the place where Julian of Norwich spent her life. I had read and heard about her, but never really connected with her.

As is our custom, we ended up walking in the wrong direction. A helpful local stopped when she saw us looking rather helplessly at a map. “I’ve lived here my whole life,” she said, “Can I point you in the right direction?” Soon after we found ourselves walking down the (correct) side road, and before we knew it, we had arrived at the humble little church of St Julian’s. Small though it was, it stopped us both in our tracks. We stood there, already transfixed by the overwhelming sense of awe that this woman continues to offer, even some 600 years after her life.

Julian of Norwich (also known as Mother Julian or Dame Julian) – her actual name is unknown – was an anchoress – someone who “enters into an enclosed solitary life in a fixed place, in order to achieve greater spiritual perfection”. Having been close to death aged thirty, on the 8<sup>th</sup> May 1373, she was being given the Last Rites by a Catholic priest, and as he held the crucifix over her bed, she saw Jesus begin to bleed. Further visions continued that night and the next, and soon after she completely recovered her physical health. Her written record of these events is called “Revelations of Divine Love” - the *Shorter Text* records the visions and a brief interpretation of each, and the *Longer Text*, composed over the following twenty years, records a much more detailed understanding of her visions, which she came to appreciate over time.

Julian’s text is not only the earliest example of a book which was written in English by a woman, but an incredibly moving work. She gives intimate insight into her understanding of God, and His infinite love for us. For example, she writes

“For I saw no wrath except on man’s side, and He forgives that in us, for wrath is nothing else but a perversity and an opposition to peace and love” (Ch 14)

Her most famous quotation is not actually something she composed herself, but words she recounts Jesus saying to her after she expresses her concern about the amount of problems in the world. She writes:

“I had often wondered, in His great foreseeing wisdom, why God had not prevented the beginning of sin; for then, I thought, all would have been well. But Jesus answered ‘Sin is befitting, but all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well’” (Ch 27)

I continue to be comforted and inspired by this text every time I read it.

Julian’s room, which is located inside the little church in Norwich is only a few square feet in size. There are two windows in her room, one which looks into the church, and one which looks outside. Through the window to the outside she offered advice to many people who came to her for her spiritual direction. She became profoundly influential to many people during her life.



It occurred to me, as I was pondering Julian, that her life has much to offer us during this time of self isolation. How much did this lady accomplish in her little room? What would we be able to achieve if we allowed our minds to be focused on God’s calling for us while we are shut in our homes? Julian seemed to connect and influence the outside world with just one window. While modern technology is wonderful, Julian teaches us that there is much to learn without it too. We might not receive the visions that she did, but I am sure that God has so much love for all of us that we might not totally appreciate it until we are still, quiet and alone.