

The Cloud of Witnesses

“God is love.” – 1 John 4:16b

Julian of Norwich



- Julian lived in the mid- to late-14th century in Norwich, England. She was an anchoress attached to the church of St. Julian, where she lived a life of prayer in her cell.

- At the time, Europe was being ravaged by the Black Plague. At least 50% of the people in the area of Norwich died as a result. It was also a time ravaged by a series of peasant revolts and bitter wars with France. Many people interpreted these difficulties as punishments from God.

- She claimed to receive a series of visions from God, which she wrote about in her classic book, *Revelations of Divine Love* (or *The Showings*).

- In answer to the question of why such evils and sorrows were abounding in her time, Julian stressed the love of God and the full, future revelation of that love at the end of time.

- She often refers to Jesus as “our Lord of blissful cheer.”

He showed me a little thing, about the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it and thought, “What can this be?” And the answer was generally thus: “It is all that is made.” I marveled at how it could possibly survive, for I thought it might suddenly fall to naught on account of its smallness. And I was answered in my understanding: “It lasts, and ever shall last, because God loves it.” And so everything has its being only in the love of God.

Here I saw that if He showed to us now His joy, there is no pain in earth or in any other place that would aggrieve us; but all things would be to us joy and bliss....And this is why He allows such things to happen: He has ordained, in his goodness, to make us higher with Him in his joy; and for this pain that we suffer here, we shall have a high endless knowing in God which we could never have without that pain. The harder our pains have been with Him in His cross, the more shall our worship be with Him in His Kingdom.

Then said Jesus, our kind Lord: “It is a joy, a bliss, an endless satisfaction to me that I ever suffered pain for thee; and if I could suffer more, I would suffer more.”... For every man’s sin that shall be saved He suffered; and every man’s sorrow and desolation He saw, and sorrowed in His kindness and love....When He was on earth He suffered and sorrowed *for* us, and now that He is risen and in heaven, still He suffers *with* us.

It is God’s will that we have true enjoyment with Him in our salvation....For we are His bliss, and in us He finds joy without end, and so shall we in Him.

We needed to fall, and we needed to see it. For if we had never fallen, we would not know how feeble and how wretched we are, and we would also not know the marvelous love of our Maker. For we shall see truly in heaven, without end, that we have sinned grievously in this life; but notwithstanding this, we will see that we were never diminished in His love, we never lost any of our precious value in His sight. And so, by virtue of this falling, we shall have a high, marvelous knowing of the love of God, without end. For strong and marvelous is that love which may not, and will not, be broken for trespass.

He said: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”...And in these words I saw a marvelous mystery hid in God, which He shall openly make known to us in heaven; and when we know, we shall see why He allowed sin and pain to come. And in this seeing we shall endlessly rejoice in our Lord God....All manner of things shall be well: for He wants us to know that the least things will not be forgotten.

Catherine of Siena



- Catherine lived in the mid- to late-14th century in Siena, Italy. Siena was also hit hard by the Black Plague, and lost 60% of its population. Catherine dedicated herself to a life of celibacy and prayer as a girl, and eventually became a member of the Dominican tertiaries.

- She devoted herself to serving the sick and the poor, and to a ministry of teaching. She developed a wide reputation for holiness. She helped arbitrate peace in the Papal-Florentine wars and was instrumental in bringing the papacy back to Rome from its exile in Avignon, France.

- She is most known today for collections of her letters and her book, *The Dialogue*.

- Catherine passed away at 33 years old, but her impact was extraordinary. She is honored as a patron saint of Italy.

I am inviting you, in this blazing charity, to plunge into a peaceful sea, a deep sea. I have just rediscovered the sea—not that the sea is new, but it is new to me in the way my soul experiences it—in the words “God is love.” And just as a mirror reflects a person’s face and as the sun shines its light on the earth, so these words echo within me that everything that is done is simply love, because everything is made entirely of love.

So I beg you, I command you: always be conscientious about consuming all the dampness of selfish love, of indifference, of foolishness. Let the fire of boundless holy desire grow, till you are drunk with the blood of God’s Son. Let’s run like people famished for his honor and the salvation of his creatures.

I don’t want you ever to stop throwing wood on the fire of holy desire—I mean the wood of self-knowledge. This is the wood that feeds the fire of divine charity, the charity that is gained by knowing God’s boundless charity. Then we become one with our neighbors as well, and the more fuel we put on the fire, the more intense grows the heat of our love for Christ and for our neighbors.

If you are who you should be, you will set the world on fire.

You are rewarded not according to your work or your time but according to the measure of your love.