

Daily Meditation 04/30/2022

Leading Up to Mother's Day: Hildegard and Julian of Norwich

Good morning.

In today's meditation, I am laying out the possibility that we will be exploring Mother's Day, which occurs next Sunday, not this Sunday, preparing for it, like we prepare in Advent for Christmas. And in Lent for Easter. I think Mother's Day has more and more importance in our time as we wrestle with the matricide, the killing of Mother Earth, that is happening everywhere because of climate change, and the forces that carry that climate change on.

So I think our whole consciousness about the feminine and about Mother needs to become much more explicit and above the board at this time in history. That is why we chose Mother's Day three years ago to launch the Daily Meditations. And I certainly don't regret that.

One of the great mystics and proponents of healthy motherhood is Julian of Norwich, 14th century mystic, the first woman to write a book in English. And she was a feminist in her day: she spends a lot of time talking about the motherhood of God.

In this short poem, which are Julian's words, but I put them together as a poem because the sentences are found throughout her work, not back-to-back as they are here. This short poem is a good introduction to her teachings on nature, our relationship to nature, God's relationship to nature, and they flow wonderfully from Hildegard of Bingen's teachings, also mentioned in today's daily meditation about Mother Earth.

And notice that phrase, we usually hear it from indigenous peoples. But we need to understand that pre-modern peoples, like Hildegard and Francis of Assisi and Aquinas, and Eckhart and Julian of Norwich, all these creation-centered mystics. They spoke like indigenous people, they thought like indigenous people do, in so many respects.

So I'd just like to take a short walk with you through this poem from Julian, the words of Julian, maybe a commentary, too, along the way. And first of all -- remember this sentence from the Book of Wisdom?

"Wisdom is the mother of all good things."

That's in chapter one, verses 11 and 12. Wisdom is the mother of all good things. I think that is where Julian got her basic theology of motherhood. Wisdom is the mother of all good things.

And I ask, what if we banish wisdom? What if our entire educational project is patriarchal, and it's about knowledge and not wisdom? It's about gaining knowledge and with gaining knowledge, you gain power.

Whereas the agenda of wisdom and motherhood is very different from gaining power, isn't it? It's about relationship.

She then goes on: "The first good thing" -- what is the first good thing? For her it is the goodness of nature. That nature is so good to us. Such a blessing, such an original blessing, was all here before we arrived. We didn't do it. We didn't invent food. Neither did we invent the stomach to process the food, did we?

"God is the same thing as nature." Well, I guess the first good thing, then, is also God. Well, sure enough, here's the next sentence: "The goodness of nature is God."

Now, she's not talking about a punitive father. Not that kind of God, the God of fundamentalists, punitive Father, out to get us and judge us and create a place called hell, but the *goodness in nature is God*. So we have to give some time to nature, don't we, to receive, to taste.

Get to know that goodness of nature. Remember, when we talk about nature, we're also talking about human nature. We're not other than nature, apart from nature, we're absolutely part of the web of nature and creation.

Indeed, she says "God is the same thing as nature." Oh, then we're already part of God, then, aren't we? And God is part of us and that is panentheism isn't it? God in all things, and all things in God.

"The goodness in nature is God." One more reason to devote effort, devotion, as Mary Oliver calls it, to exploring the goodness in nature. To do so is to explore divinity.

"God feels great delight to be our Father. God feels great delight to be our mother." Notice the role of delight and joy in divinity. And there is a joy in being that aspect of divinity that is fatherly. There's a joy and be that aspect of divinity that is motherly.

"Meanwhile, we do experience a wondrous mix of both wellness and woe. The meaning of both well and distress in us is so astonishing that we can hardly tell which state we or our neighbor are in. That's how astonishing it is!"

So the *via positiva* is integral to our experience; the *via negativa* is integral to our experience. All of it is astonishing. Suffering is astonishing; grief is astonishing; loss is astonishing. So too is beauty, and joy, and wonder, and awe: in fact, awe is astonishment.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.