

And all shall be Well
By
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“April is the cruellest month” are the opening words of T.S.Eliot’s poem, “The Wasteland” written in 1922. It deals with the issue of life and death and contains symbolism drawn from the Bible, Tristan and Isolde, Milton’s Paradise Lost, and Dante’s *Purgatorio*. It even draws from the Buddha’s Fire Sermon. The Easter season with the liturgical celebrations of Jesus’ Passion, Death and Resurrection puts this whole question of life and death in clear focus. It is as if Jesus is standing before us, as he did with Martha, at the death of Lazarus announcing that he is “The resurrection and the Life” and then asking “Do you believe this?” How will we answer this during the “Good Friday” moments in our life and in the lives of those around us?

In the fourteenth century Dame Julian of Norwich living as an anchorite became the first woman to write theology in English. Her manuscript begins with her description of how she prayed to God for “three graces by the gift of God.” The first was to have a deep personal experience of Christ’s Passion. The second was to receive a bodily sickness that would bring her to the point of death and the third was to have three wounds; the wound of utter contrition, the wound of compassion and the wound of longing with every fibre of her being for union with God. I am sure that this strikes you as quite an extraordinary prayer in today’s culture but as a result of this prayer she did descend into a serious sickness. Then as she lay on what seemed her death bed she was granted sixteen revelations or showings as they are usually called. They are all very profound teachings on the nature of Christ’s passion, sin and the great love that God has for the entire world. We are fortunate today to have the two versions of the revelations as she wrote them. There is a shorter text which she wrote down soon after her experience and the long text written many years later following a life of deep prayer, contemplation and reflection.

The words that have come down to us are full of joyful hope and make very encouraging reading. Her life and all of her experience is of being “enfolded in the love of God”, this is well illustrated where she writes:

You will not be overcome, were said very insistently and strongly,
for certainty and strength against every tribulation which may come.
He did not say: you will not be troubled, you will not be belaboured,
you will not be disquieted; but he said: You will not be overcome.
God wants us to pay attention to these words, and always to be strong
in faithful trust, in well-being and in woe, for he loves us and delights
in us, and so he wishes us to love him and delight in him and trust
greatly in him and all will be well.

These words can be used to move us to an interior prayer of consolation and hope where there “arises like a spring of living water within us” a peace that “passes all human understanding.” Over and over Julian emphasises for us that “all shall be well” and it is

this that enables her to say that the whole meaning of Christ is “love.” Do doubt we can take heart in these words from Julian:

And so our good Lord answered to all the questions and doubts which I could raise, saying most comfortingly: “I may make all things well, and I can make all things well, and I will make all things well; and you will see yourself that every kind of thing will be well... “and in these words God wishes us to be enclosed in rest and peace

In spite of T.S.Eliot’s assertion that “April is the cruellest month,” this is surely a good time to explore and taste the consolation and depth of God’s love. Dame Julian is no naïve optimist. The whole of life will ultimately be well simply because of the resurrection of Christ. She was shown by God in her revelations that we are able to experience clearly that pain is quelled by love and we are enabled to trust in the providence of a gracious God. Our Easter reflection can be a time when we can open our whole life up in prayer for a deeper trust in God’s care so that, like Julian, we will have the courage to face whatever befalls us in life. If we really keep Julian’s words in our heart they will become as orientation of all our prayer and indeed of our very life itself.

We began with a quotation from T.S.Eliot and we could no better than to end with the last stanza of his poem “Little Gidding” which includes the affirming words of Dame Julian that “all shall be well”

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
.....
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)
And all shall be well and
All manner of thing shall be well
When the tongues of flame are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

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