



Advent Daily Reflections

December 16, 2024

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Today's reading is from Julian of Norwich:

And when I was thirty and a half years old, God sent me a bodily sickness in which I lay for three days and three nights; and on the fourth night I received all the rites of Holy Church and did not believe that I would live until morning. And after this I lingered on for two days and two nights. And on the third night I often thought that I was dying, and so did those who were with me. But at this time I was very sorry and reluctant to die, not because there was anything on earth that I wanted to live for, nor because I feared anything, for I trusted in God, but because I wanted to live so as to love God better and for longer, so that through the grace of longer life I might know and love God better in the bliss of heaven. For it seemed to me that all the short time I could live here was as nothing compared with that heavenly bliss. SO I thought, 'My good Lord, may my ceasing to live be to your glory!' And I was answered in my reason, and by the pains I felt that I was dying. And I fully accepted the will of God with all the will of my heart.

So I endured till day, and by then my body was dead to all sensation from the waist down. Then I felt I wanted to be in a sitting position, leaning with my head back against the bedding, so that my heart could be more freely at God's disposition, and so that I could think of God while I was still alive; and those who were with me sent for the parson, my parish priest to be present at my death. He said, 'Daughter, I have brought you the image of our Savior, Look upon it and be comforted in reverence to him that died for you and me'.. I consented to fix my eyes on the face of Jesus until the moment of my death. After this my sight began to fail and the room was dim all around me, as dark as if it had been night, except that in the image of the cross an ordinary, household light remained—I could not understand how.

Today's Reflection is by Matt Garklavs:

Whenever I get sick or experience prolonged periods of pain I fall into a deep depression. I feel guilty for not being able to go about my daily business and disappointed in myself for letting people down. I realize this is a pitiful thing to say, but it's the truth. I can't stand being ill and I'm very hard on myself whenever it happens.

This mentality has only intensified since becoming a single parent. Getting sick or injured now could mean spending less time with my daughter. Obviously, this is not the worst thing in the world and solitude can be a gift in those situations. While I understand this to be true, on an emotional level it doesn't register. I tend to ruminate on all the things I'd like to be doing or should be doing, but can't do. And of course I love being with my child. Her presence in my life brings so much joy and it pains me whenever we're apart.

This recollection by Saint Julian reminded me of something I recently read in the book *You Could Make this Place Beautiful* by the poet Maggie Smith. In one chapter, Smith describes the Buddhist concepts of "torma" and "don". According to Smith:

"When you have a don, you are the possession. The anger possesses—owns—you. Torma means "offering cake." You offer the torma to your don. You feed the ghost that does you harm, "that which possesses you." Giving it a little something sweet is a way of saying, Thank you for the pain you caused me, because that pain woke me up. It hurt enough to make me change."

I see a lot of similarities in this passage with Julian's attitude about sickness and her relationship to God. Even as Julian was on her deathbed, she possessed so much gratitude for being put in that situation. I don't find her attitude relatable at all, but it's inspiring nonetheless. I like the idea of having a reservoir of faith to keep me afloat through the darkest of times.

I don't know if I could ever respond to a serious illness the way Julian does and I'm not sure it would bring me any closer to God. But I'm trying to be kinder to myself in these coming days, weeks, and months. And when my body fails me, as it surely will, I want to feel some gratitude for that pain and pay attention to what it can teach me. .



Matt Garklavs is a Librarian and Professor at Pratt Institute. He lives in Kensington and is the proud parent of a brave and beautiful daughter named Juniper Lee.