



PARSON TO PERSON

(An occasional Fridays letter from the clergy of St. George's)

May 8, 2008

SAINTS AND MOTHERS

"It is a characteristic of God to overcome evil with good.

Jesus Christ therefore, who himself overcame evil with good, is our true Mother. We received our 'Being' from Him and this is where His Maternity starts And with it comes the gentle Protection and Guard of Love which will never cease to surround us. Just as God is our Father, so God is also our Mother." Julian of Norwich c.1413



On May 8, the day of this article, I celebrated the 37th anniversary of ordination to the priesthood by conducting a private baptism of a parishioner, in the church. The service was a gift to me, an opportunity to re-root myself in the foundation of Christian life given in Baptism. Clergy need that.

Julian, quoted above, is observed May 8. In the baptism we said the collect for her day. We seldom do private baptisms, so it was a different experience. The adult candidate, the spouse and me. The words, spoken without the support of liturgy on a bigger scale, stood out fragilely and so genuinely. They put both me and the candidate, as we discussed, in mind of the simple foundations of the gospel: We reach our hand out to God who has first reached out to us. We pledge relationship, trust and love. We are touched by the same oil upon the forehead that gives Jesus the name "Christ." We hold a candle, a flame of understanding, a guiding light. We celebrate. For both the candidate and for one long in harness, a new beginning, another year of grace, marked now for both of us by the life of Julian.

Julian (14th C.) was not supporting, one must conclude, the current feminization of God. But she saw clearly the connection between the feminine in the very being of God, and us. So it will be very natural this Sunday, which is

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

to combine that wonderful liturgy with

MOTHER'S DAY

which no priest would make it past 37 years if he or she neglected to observe.

"In speaking of Christ as "our mother" Julian was ... likening the work of Christ to that of a mother. He gives birth to those who are "born again." Like a mother, he suffers for them before, during and after "delivery." He must patiently nourish, safeguard and instruct those who are born of him. In none, of this, however, was Julian anticipating the contemporary argument that God is "she." (Fr. Victor Shepherd [a fine name for a priest: "Fr./Pastor Shepherd.]

But what is more demonstrative of the fact that God is both male and female than this perception of Julian? Does God only "understand" women -- better than other men? Or is the very Fatherhood of God a metaphor for one who actually created men and women, both, completely "in his image?" Baptism completely levels the playing fields between men and women. (By the way, I find that women (certainly my wife) better understand men generally than men understand themselves.) Questions like these will be on my mind during the sermon this Sunday.

The Daughters of the King will be having a Quiet Day and a Lecture on another famous and outspoken saint, a woman of exceptional godliness, in June (stay tuned for details) -- Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard, an Abbess in Germany in the same century as Julian, was a painter of exceptional works, a composer of music still sung in church, a scientist, a horticulturalist, and a battler of bishops who never lost a war. Both Julian and Hildegard had the fire of Pentecost within them, and the exemplary power of a Mother's Love.

Our greatest exemplar for Mothers' Day, however, is the Blessed Virgin Mary, who blesses all women with her patience, calm and strength. We will pray for our mothers, and all women, in the three Sunday services.

Peace and joy,

PS: Wear Red