

Will it be okay?

Kevin Flynn

THE ANCIENT ROMAN poet Catullus wrote movingly of the sense of fragility and fleetingness of even the best things that life can offer, the heartbreak at the very root of things. He felt that we must take all we can from life while we can, for it will all be snatched away from us when we die.

Suns set and are able to rise again;
But once our brief light has set
Night is forever and must be slept out.

"Nox est perpetua una dormienda"—perhaps the most shattering line that has ever been written.

Compare that with the experience of a woman who was no less acquainted with the changes and chances of this mortal life. In the year 1370 a woman living in southeast England received a series of visions or revelations. She lived in a small monastic cell as a solitary nun. This woman is known to us as Julian of Norwich. Julian's era was a time of great suffering. The Black Death was laying waste to people all over Europe. Wars raged over the continent without end. It was a time of high taxes, bad harvests, and a shortage of labour. Controversies divided and weakened the Church. Julian herself was gravely ill. As she reflected on her visions over subsequent years, she found them to be a source of extraordinary hopefulness despite the calamities around her. "Our life," she said, "is founded on faith with hope and love." She knew how precarious life was, but her deepest intuition and conviction was that "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well." In other words, it really will be okay.

While Julian's revelations were unique, her expression of hope despite the worst that life can bring is characteristically Christian. Through both consolation and desolation, God can be found. We do not minimize evil; it is an undeniable

fact. The Bible acknowledges its reality without explaining it. But evil is set within a context of Christ and prayer. Those who share Julian's hope find that the life of faith provides meaning even when all else is shipwreck.

Anglicans and Roman Catholics find the source of that faithful hope in what God has done in Jesus. The resurrection shows us that the one whom we made victim has become our saviour. In Christ, God is no stranger to the suffering of life. The resurrection declares that, far from abandoning this world, God has pledged an eternal commitment to it. Our common faith is that through baptism we are bound to Christ's sufferings and participate in his glory. It is our destiny to be a part of this consummation in Christ.

Does Julian's "all shall be well" simply amount to a kind of optimism that things will work out in the end? Christ may be risen, but the world doesn't seem appreciably better off. Things can and do continue to go wrong, terribly so at times. The life of prayer helps us to find the consolation of God's love even in our darkest moments, but our common belief points to something still greater.

Because Christ is risen, Christians believe that death does not have the last word. There is a power at loose that is able to break even that last enemy. All creation will be transformed and held in God's unshakable embrace. Anglicans and Roman Catholics assert together that "God's purpose is to bring all people into communion with himself within a transformed creation."

For Christians, all those partial, broken, and fleeting perfections which they glimpse in the world around, which wither in the grasp and are snatched away even while they wither, are found again, perfect, complete, and

lasting in the absolute beauty of God, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Christians believe that what has begun in Christ is an unbroken and unending communion, the sharing of life with others in the God whose very being is in community. "The source of the Church's hope for the world is God, who has never abandoned the created order and has never ceased to work within it. ...While the Church pursues its mission and pilgrimage in the world, it looks forward to 'the end, when Christ delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and every power.'"

Along with Julian of Norwich, Christians continue to believe, pray, and act on the basis of a hope that life is not

a bad joke with human beings as helpless victims, but is even now the pale and splintered reflection of a divine splendour and beauty in which alone we can find lasting peace and joy. As the theologian Augustine of Hippo described it: "All our activity will be Amen and Alleluia. ...There we shall rest, and we shall see; we shall see, and we shall love; we shall love, and we shall praise. Behold what shall be in the end, and shall not end."

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Questions for discussion

1. What allows you to hope when life is difficult, to believe that life is stronger than death?
2. Are you able to give reasons for the hope that is within you? Can you trust that deep down everything will be well?
3. What allows you to hope when things aren't okay in your life?