

**New Life Episcopal Church  
Uniontown, Ohio**



**A Sermon for the 6th Sunday after Easter  
May 10, 2026**

**The Rev Barbara Bond**

## Julian of Norwich

Happy Mother's Day! A day to honor all mothers, including some priests who like the title (please don't call me Mother Barbara). In honor of all mothers, in fact and in metaphor, I present to you today Saint Julian of Norwich

This is not the first time I have mentioned Julian in connection with Mother's Day, because her feast day is always close to the second Sunday in May. Her day was actually on Friday, May 8. Close enough!

Julian was a 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic who often invoked female images for God in her writings. This was fairly common in the Middle Ages, but other more recent persuasions find this is little weird, preferring a masculine representation of God. (Father, Son and male Holy Spirit). Julian, and other saints, were persuaded otherwise. She found a mother's love as an apt description for our relationship with God.

A mother's love is close and intimate. Julian recognized this closeness in God's presence. She did not always see life in this way, but a terrible illness changed her outlook. She was born in 1342, five years before the Black Plague broke out in England and Europe, and so her growing-up years were marked by tragedy. She herself became very ill in her twenties, and during her lengthy convalescence, she experienced many divine visions, which she called "showings." She contemplated these showings for many years before writing them down, and thus we have a written record of her theology and spirituality, often centered in the motherliness of God.

Julian found the secular world too distracting, and so she withdrew to live in solitude, into a small room attached, or anchored, to her parish church in Norwich. She lived alone with God, and possibly with a cat, and interacted with the world on her own terms. Her room had two windows, one into the church so that she could see and hear the holy services therein, and the other window faced the outside, where many people came to see her for spiritual advice. One of her frequent visitors was Margery Kempe, a mystic in her own right. Margery wrote: This anchoress was expert in knowledge of our Lord and could give good counsel. I spent much time with her talking of the love of our Lord Jesus Christ." Julian is in our book of saints, Lesser Feasts and Fasts, which notes: "Julian understood that God was both Father and Mother to us, and understood Christ as exemplifying this maternal face of God." The collect for Julian reads: *Triune God, Father and Mother to us all, who showed your servant Julian revelations of your nurturing and sustaining love: Move our hearts, like hers, to seek you above all things, for in giving us yourself, you give us all.*

I have come to appreciate Julian's world view and what it might teach me in our own difficult times. I read a recent editorial in the New York Times by the Evangelical Christian writer David French recently, in which he describes two very different world

views. He writes that the pervasive operating view in our world today is transactional: I do this, and that is the result. A transaction, assuming I have all the power to make things happen. You may be able to think of some examples in today's news.

But David French notes that such a world view is not shared by everyone. For example, the government of Iran is theocratic, not transactional. Its views, and therefore its actions, are based on a faith system. Someone from the transactional world would not be able to comprehend this alternate view and thus might continue to pound their own interpretation of the world and, not surprisingly, get nowhere.

In this century, and in Julian's 14<sup>th</sup> century, and basically all through history, these two interpretations have been at odds. There is a theory that history underwent a huge shift around 900 BC, the beginning of a millennium called The Axial Age. The theologian Karen Armstrong describes this shift as pivotal to the spiritual and intellectual development of our human species. She writes, "At that time, in four distinct regions of the world, the great religious and philosophical traditions arose that have nourished humanity ever since: Confucianism and Daoism in China; Hinduism and Buddhism in India; monotheism in Israel; and rationalism in Greece. Each of these traditions pioneered a new kind of spirituality." These new systems of thought described a realization that the world did not work by transactional force. Alternate views emerged. We know of the conflict between the ruling Roman Empire and the teachings of Jesus, which were totally unreconcilable. The Romans couldn't understand what Jesus was teaching, finding it antithetical to their world view of force, and therefore it was threatening to their way of life, and we know how that ended. But we also know that the Roman view did not win in the end, and that the rise of Christianity presented a true alternative to the rule of force. We also know that the Christian view had its problems, tainted by the secular world view in many ways, such as the Crusades intent on forceful reclamation of the Holy Land.

Ultimately, we must have patience, that God's love will prevail. Very comforting to me is Julian's wise saying: "All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

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Lesser Feasts and Fasts 2024, p 224

David French, The New York Times, Opinion, May 7, 2026 "Our most transactional president is having trouble processing."

Karen Armstrong, Sacred Nature: Restoring Our Ancient Bond with the Natural World, Alfred A Knopf New York 2022, p 19