

# Fully Alive: An Easter Retreat

## PART 1: HOW TO BE FULLY ALIVE IN GOD'S GLORY



**"To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be glory for ever and ever." - Romans 16:27**

"Only that day dawns to which we are awake," wrote Henry David Thoreau, the great American writer. He is saying what all the great holy people have said for centuries: Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and all others who have lived fully before God and their fellow human beings.

What more can we ask of God--that God make us fully alive to all that is. As Robert

Ellsberg says in *The Saints' Guide to Happiness*: "To be fully alive--it was for this that we were created; it was toward this goal, as the saints remind us, that Christ pointed the way" (North Point Press, 4 ). St. Irenaeus' famous observation, "The glory of God is a person fully alive," dates from the second century.

Pray these words of the apostle Paul reflectively:

"And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

As mystics do, you can pray, read scripture, and reflect on your life. As mystics do, you can turn from wrong-doing. You can open yourself to the Holy Spirit. You can, like the mystics, rededicate your life.

How "fully alive" are you? In what ways do you give "glory to God"?

A person who is fully alive can be called a "mystic." A mystic is a person who lives fully and loves deeply. The life of such a person is guided by deep love through prayer to God and through human compassion. Mysticism is the raising of the mind to God through the desire of love. A person who is a mystic serves others lovingly.

Although the word mysticism is not found in the Bible, you can find in the Bible many examples of people who searched for truth centered in love.

In the letters of the apostle Paul the early Christians are called the holy ones of God or saints. Holiness is not limited to a few people but is available to everyone of good will. Holiness for the Christian means to carry out Jesus' command to love God above all things and one's neighbor as oneself.

Is it surprising to you that you are also called to be a holy one of God? Your interest in making this retreat is a sign that you are! Your holiness, your spirituality is who you really are in your truest and deepest self in relationship to God, to other people, and to all creation

How fully alive are you as a human being? Being fully human involves how you live each day physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

Spend a few moments reflecting on how you are living today:

- **Physically:** Have you eaten some nutritious food? Have you had enough rest? What about exercise?
- **Emotionally:** What feelings are you experiencing? Are you happy, sad, bored, feeling blah, or what? Why? Who or how have you loved?
- **Intellectually:** What thinking have you done today? What reading have you done? Have you shared your ideas with others?
- **Spiritually:** Have you been aware of God's presence in your life today? Have you prayed? Have you loved? What has inspired you?
- In other words, have you given glory to God by being alive, really alive?

During this retreat you will have the opportunity to reflect on six people who have given to glory to God by being fully alive.

Paul the Apostle is probably familiar to you. You perhaps hear or read his words daily or weekly in the liturgy. He challenges all followers in this way: "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Francis of Assisi, known for his simplicity and joyfulness, took delight in the beauty of creation and the goodness of God.

Hildegard of Bingen reminded the world that God's love compels us to be just. She brought alive an integrated view of human nature and the cosmos, believing that human nature and all creation are good.

Julian of Norwich writes of a God whose power is expressed in love. In joyful hope she brought to the suffering people of her time the realization that God loves and delights in all creatures.

Five hundred years later came Teilhard de Chardin, both scientist and mystic. Through his prodigious explorations into science he affirmed the Christian faith and described the cosmic Christ.

Dorothy Day, a contemporary mystic, spent her life caring for the poor and needy and working for peace and justice. The foundation of her spirituality was the biblical teaching: love of God and love of neighbor.

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## **PART 2: PAUL THE APOSTLE (1st Century A.D.)**



***Open yourself to God's light shining in your heart, and reflect for a moment on these words: "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of Jesus Christ." - 2 Corinthians 4:6***

It's hard to imagine anyone in the sacred Scriptures about whom one could say more truly, "The glory of God is a person fully alive," than St. Paul. So much is known about him from the Acts of the Apostles, written by St. Luke, and by the many epistles attributed to Paul. His writings describe in detail the activities of this extraordinary minister of God and disciple of Jesus Christ. In the beautiful and

inspiring language of his letters he guides his readers along the way to becoming a mystic and giving glory to God.

Paul knows that whatever he does he is giving glory to God. As he says in his First Letter to the Corinthians 10:31: "So whatever you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." Paul emphasizes growing in love, in knowledge, and in wisdom. He says that for Christians to become other Christs, they must live and move and have their being in Christ.

Paul's story begins with his conversion from being a persecutor of the first Christians to becoming an ardent evangelizer of the Good News of Jesus. In the Acts of the Apostles (chapter nine) the writer describes how a light from the sky suddenly flashed around Paul on his way to Damascus. As he fell to the ground, he heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Paul answers this disturbing question with an honest question of his own, "Who are you, sir?" and Jesus replies, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." Jesus then tells Saul to go to Damascus where he is baptized and instructed by Ananias who has also been told by Jesus in a vision: "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." (Acts 9:15-16)

Paul spends the rest of his life evangelizing the Jews and Greeks (Gentiles) of the Mediterranean world. He brings them news of the gospel of Jesus Christ which prepared them to become followers of Jesus. In most of his letters Paul calls the members of his communities "holy ones," "saints," or "beloved of God" He begins his letters to them by showing his gratitude to them. The many letters Paul wrote were intended to encourage his converts. They reveal how he accomplished his missionary work.

The first chapter of his Letter to the Philippians sets the theme of Paul's preaching and writing to the Christian communities forming around him. He tells the people of Philippi that he prays that their love may increase ever more and more so that they may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

These people of Philippi in Macedonia, the first place in Europe where Christianity was established, welcome Paul and show him hospitality. Despite the many trials and difficulties Paul experiences, he knows that he will always find welcome in Philippi.

Paul calls the Philippians "holy ones," "saints," and shows his gratitude to all of them: "I give thanks to my God at every remembrance of you, praying always with joy in my prayer for all of you, because of your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.... For God is my witness, and how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:3-6, 38).

Paul instructs the community on what it means to be a mystic, a person fully alive and giving glory to God. He commends them on their partnership in spreading the gospel since they have become Christians. He has every reason to hope that they will continue their good work. Paul regards anyone who is a Christian as a holy one of God--as a saint trying to become more fully alive in Jesus.

What if Paul were to write a letter to you beginning, "To a holy one in Christ Jesus, grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." How would you respond?

Paul gives thanks for the generosity of the community at Philippi and encourages members of the congregation to keep up their good work. He reveals his enthusiasm for Christ as the key to both life and death. Paul gives glory to God in everything.

As he says, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21) Like a true friend, Paul shares with the Philippians not only his joys, but also his anxieties. Giving glory to God does not mean having no problems! Paul recognizes the limitations of human nature. He even urges two women to settle their quarrel.

At the conclusion of this letter Paul thanks the Philippians for supplying his needs and gives them good advice which applies to everyone. He says, "I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things, I have learned the secret of being well fed and of growing hungry, of living in abundance, and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through Christ who empowers me." (Phil. 4:12-13)

What is remarkable about this tender and optimistic letter is that Paul wrote it long after visiting Philippi. He writes from his prison cell in Rome. For all his great suffering Paul remains hopeful, trusting always in Jesus Christ. He knows that whatever he does he is giving glory to God.

Most of the letters from St. Paul in the New Testament are filled with suggestions that you can use for prayerful reflection on what it means to live fully and to give glory to God. He loved all of his communities including the people of Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Colossae, and Philippi. Paul gives glory to God in everything.

Reflect on the following passage which can show a way to live life fully and thus to give glory to God:

"May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19)

Paul was in prison when he wrote his long letter to the Romans, a treatise on Christian life. In this well-known passage from his Letter to the Romans, he refers to "glory" (without using the word): "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments and how unsearchable his ways!" (Romans 11:33)

Paul's letters present the foundation of the Christian message. To the Romans he says, "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." (Romans 14:7-8)

Conclude this first part of the retreat by praying with Paul, the apostle, to live always as a full human being who gives glory to God.

"It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

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### **PART 3: HILDEGARD OF BINGEN** **(1098-1179)**

**"Give to the Lord, you children of God, give to the Lord glory and praise." - Psalm 29:1**

As you begin this retreat with Hildegard, try to become quiet within yourself by taking a few deep breaths. As she did, imagine yourself as a feather (or balloon or kite) lifted up by a gentle breeze. Remember a time in your life when you felt buoyed up by God's love for you. How were you aware of God at that time?

For over 800 years Hildegard was not widely known outside of Germany, but today she is one of the best-known women mystics. The music which she composed for her nuns to sing in chapel can be heard at concerts and on CDs. She was truly alive in her day and remains alive for us today!

Hildegard's contemporaries in the 12th century knew her as a Benedictine abbess, and also as theologian and preacher, poet and composer, healer and author. Her life and writings attract many people today because they speak to contemporary interests such as holistic living, care of the environment, and creation-centered spirituality. Hildegard's message promotes everything that is life-giving and models the words, "The glory of God is a person fully alive."

When she was 15, Hildegard decided to enter the monastery where she continued her education in prayer, sacred scripture, music, and good works.

When Hildegard was 38, she was elected by the sisters as abbess. Hildegard wanted her monastery to be an island of order, harmony, and intellectual life in the midst of a corrupt and chaotic world.

As her reputation for holiness grew, Hildegard attracted so many new members that the monastery became overcrowded. Although she met with opposition, she knew God wanted her to build a new



monastery near Bingen where the nuns lived the Benedictine way of prayer and work in a balanced humane way. They lived in harmony with God, others, themselves, and nature.

Hildegard promoted the advancement of women in society and in the Church, then and now. She spoke to a patriarchal culture and a male-dominated Church and proclaimed the will of God to popes, bishops, and heads of state. Some of them took her words of wisdom to heart! Hildegard challenged women to reflect on their experiences and to exercise their creativity through music, art, preaching, organizing.

Because of her deep mysticism and prophetic commitment to justice, Hildegard saw the potential for global religious ecumenism even in her day, eight centuries ago. In a sense she anticipates the ecological and ecumenical movements of today. She awakens people to the sacredness of the earth and their responsibility for preserving it. In pointing out the relationship among religion, art, and science, her ideas foreshadowed the new cosmology of the 21st century. One of her short poetic meditations speaks of this unity:

I am the one whose praise echoes on high.  
I adorn all the earth.  
I am the breeze  
that nurtures all things green...  
I am the rain  
coming from the dew  
that causes the grasses to laugh  
with the joy of life...

*(Cries of the Spirit: A Celebration of Women's Spirituality, edited by Marilyn Sewell, Beacon Press, 1991, p.252.)*

Read this poem slowly, letting your imagination conjure up, one by one, all these images from nature. Let yourself feel the breeze, smell the rain, laugh with the greenness, yearn for the good. Become more alive in God's presence!

From the age of three Hildegard had experienced visions of light but had not spoken of them to anyone or realized that they were unusual until she told her spiritual guide and mentor. After Hildegard became abbess, her visions became more frequent and urgent. Reluctantly, she spoke of them to her confessor who told her to write them down.

In her visions Hildegard saw that the source of life, like that of all creation, is an overflowing of God's light and love. Her spirituality puts her and all Christians in touch with the wonder of creation. (It is interesting that her spirituality of the early 12th century redates by centuries all the new studies in science and cosmology which recognize light as the source of all energy.)

Hildegard recorded a series of visions describing the relationship between God, humanity, and the cosmos. Her imagery is similar to that found in the Old Testament book of Wisdom. These visions reveal her views on the human person and the relationship between God and humans in creation. She had visions also about the incarnation and redemption, and the church. Central to her spirituality was her belief that human nature is good as is all of creation. She saw sin as a distortion of that goodness.

In her imagination Hildegard heard God say, "I, the fiery life of divine essence, am aflame beyond the beauty of the meadows. I gleam in the waters. I burn in the sun, moon, and the stars. With every breeze,

as with invisible light that contains everything, I awaken everything to life...I am the breeze that nurtures all things green. I encourage blossoms to flourish with ripening fruits. I am rain coming from the dew that causes the grasses to laugh with the joy of life" (Scivias, [p.xx]). Hildegard saw the whole of creation as fully alive.

Hildegard's teachings gave an original and balanced view of the universe. She showed that human nature--the rhythms of the mind and body--were an echo of the greater rhythms of the natural world such as the rhythm of the ocean waves beating against rocks of the shore. She loved the color green and used it to describe the good life. *Viriditas* (greening), she called it.

Hildegard saw greening power at work in so many ways, especially in the actions of the Holy Spirit moving over the earth, causing all things to flourish. What is dry and barren and lifeless can be restored by the return of greening power and moisture. Greenness brings freshness and life to what is stale and lifeless.

This greenness included herbs which she recognized for their healing powers. When her sisters became ill, she was able to treat many of their illnesses with medicinal herbs. Her knowledge of herbal remedies was so extensive that many people came to her to be healed. Her books on herbs are available and still of value today.

Centuries before the current interest in holistic living, Hildegard was fascinated by the healing of the body. She learned how each part of the body functions and tried to explain the workings of the body according to her understanding. She was known far and wide as a healer. She encouraged the nuns of her monastery to live not only lives of prayer and work, but also to live in as healthy a way as possible in order to be in harmony with God and themselves.

Hildegard often suffered from serious illness, perhaps severe migraine headaches, when she delayed doing what she knew God was asking of her. When she complied with God's will for her, she recovered. Some scientific researchers have speculated that her visions may have been associated with the vivid colors and shapes of migraine attacks. What is amazing is that she could use even her headaches in her prayer!

Like all mystics, Hildegard served others with compassion and authenticity. She welcomed anyone in need who came to her monastery for physical or spiritual healing. She models for all contemporary Christians how to make holistic use of intelligence, imagination, and creativity. For her, earth was a home and a source of delight. She believed that every human being should assume co-creative responsibility with God for the well-being of the earth.

How does your own prayer include concern for the earth and its well-being? How can gardening or care for plants be a prayer? How can a concern for global warming be part of your prayer?

Hildegard was a woman prodigiously alive--and prodigiously creative. This nun--prophet, visionary, poet, musician, healer, and leader--taught about many things just through what she said about her music, the music which her nuns in the monastery sang every day.

Here are her words: "Underneath all the texts, all the sacred psalms and canticles, these watery varieties of sounds and silences—terrifying, mysterious, whirling and sometimes gestating and gentle—must

somehow be felt in the pulse, ebb, and flow of the music that sings in me. My new song must float like a feather on the breath of God...."

After listening to Hildegard's words (or listening to her music if you have CDs of the Anonymous Four), you may recognize even more the need for greenness in your life or for the radiance of insights like Hildegard's. This will be the glory of God--in you fully alive!

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#### **PART 4: FRANCIS OF ASSISI (1182-1260)**



**"The mountains shall yield peace for the people, and the hills justice." - Psalm 72:3**

Pray these words with St. Francis:

Lord, make me a channel of your peace  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love  
Where there is darkness, light  
Where there is sadness, joy.

Francis of Assisi, one of the most popular saints of all time, began life as a rich, rather wild young man attracted to adventure and ease. From such an unpromising beginning, he later inspired thousands of followers during his lifetime. And for the centuries since then many others have been inspired to lead lives of true simplicity, generous service, and delight in creation.

Francis could say with St. Paul, "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:22). Both Paul and Francis experienced dramatic conversions which transformed their lives. Paul changed suddenly from being a persecutor of Christians to becoming a great missionary who preached the gospel to the ancient world.

The conversion of Francis took place more gradually. After enlisting in a local war expecting to become a hero, he was instead wounded and taken prisoner. Returning home, feeling sick, empty, and dejected, he wandered around Assisi, noticing for the first time the people who were poor and living in squalor. After recovering from illness, he decided to serve God in the poor. to the dismay of his wealthy father he used family money for the poor and also for the rebuilding of dilapidated churches in the countryside.

One time when Francis stopped to pray in the ruins of the Church of San Damiano, he heard a voice from the crucifix asking him to repair the church. Francis thought the voice was asking him to rebuild the

church physically but later realized that he was being asked to build the Church of God spiritually. This vocation was strengthened by his encounter with a leper who was begging. After giving the leper a few coins, Francis impulsively bent down to kiss the leper's deformed hand.

These two experiences, the voice in the church and his kissing of the leper, led Francis to serve God's people, especially the poor. His wealthy father, embarrassed by Francis' actions, publicly disowned his son in the presence of the bishop and the people in the town square. In a dramatic gesture Francis took off his elegant cloak, threw it at his father's feet, and put on the simple clothing of the poor.

From then on Francis showed his zest for living by totally dedicating himself to serving Jesus in the poor. He and his companions lived outdoors or in churches, took care of the poor and sick, and, above all, lived and preached the gospel. Francis said to his followers: "Preach the gospel. If necessary, use words."

Does Francis mean: "actions speak louder than words." Does how you live show what you believe?

Eventually Francis founded a religious community of followers who desired, like him, to imitate Jesus. For eight centuries the Franciscan order has attracted countless Christians to a life of service, simplicity, and an appreciation of all creation.

Francis was a man of peace. His greeting to everyone was, "May the Lord give you peace." True Christians were to befriend all and condemn no one. Francis was a peacemaker always.

The brutal Fifth Crusade in the early 13th century horrified Francis. In an attempt to bring peace and the Christian message he traveled to the court of the Muslim Sultan in Egypt. Al'Kamil, a wise and moderate man, was deeply impressed by Francis' courage and sincerity and invited him to stay for a peace-making mission.

Francis in turn was deeply touched by the religious devotion of the Muslims, especially by the call to prayer five times a day. Had Francis and Al'Kamil been able to dialogue longer, and then been able to convince the Crusaders and the Muslim leaders about the value of Peace, how different our world would be today!

Francis' beautiful Prayer for Peace has touched many believers, and nonbelievers, through the centuries. It begins by describing the path to peace and simplicity:

"Lord, make me a channel of your peace.  
Where here is hatred, let me sow love,  
Where there is injury, pardon  
Where there is doubt, faith.  
Where there is despair, hope.  
Where there is darkness, light.  
Where there is sadness, joy."

After you read these words prayerfully, ask yourself which of them touches you most personally. How can living out this prayer bring peace not only to you but also to the whole world which is so badly in need of peace.

For Francis all that God has made is holy. Often called God's troubadour, he saw all creatures as brothers and sisters to be respected. Francis named creation in terms of a loving family: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Mother Earth, Brother Wind. Francis' love for all creatures endears him today to environmentally conscious people who see all creation, including human beings, as an interdependent community, an interwoven circle of life.

The Canticle of the Sun was inspired by Psalm 138 which praises God as the Creator of the universe. The Canticle begins with the line, "All creatures of our God and King, lift up your voice and with us sing, alleluia." Francis uses descriptive phrases like "rushing winds," "flowing water," "bright burning sun with golden beams," "soft silver moon that gently gleams," "stars nightly shining," "dear mother earth," and "all flowers and fruits." Every line ends with the words, "O praise God! Alleluia!"

As he lay dying, Francis added verses which welcomed Sister Death: "All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.... Happy those she finds doing your will."

Spend some time thinking how nature makes you more aware of God. Write your own hymn praising God!

Francis, in his writings and in the stories told about him, showed a delight in God's creation and a joy in living. He saw as a burden whatever was an obstacle to his love of God and neighbor. He kept his heart empty of anything that interfered with this love.

Near the end of his life he experienced a painful form of blindness and also received the stigmata (the marks of the nails in his hands, feet, and side like those of Christ crucified). What Francis had known in meditation became ultimately the actual experience of pain. Like many of the saints throughout the ages, Francis endured great physical and psychological suffering.

Shortly before his death Francis dictated his Testament, showing his followers how to live the Franciscan way of life. He emphasized the importance of imitating the poor and crucified Jesus. Influenced by a desire to live an authentic life based on the gospel, Francis offered a new form of "apostolic" religious life.

Moved by the preaching and example of Francis, Clare of Assisi in 1212 became the first female member of the Franciscan order. She, quickly joined by other women, became the founder of a contemplative community known as the Poor Clares.

Francis defined a Franciscan way of life for women and men of following the gospel in a life of prayer penance, and poverty. What Francis offered all his followers then and now is a model of human life based on the gospel of Jesus Christ. In giving glory to God he was indeed fully alive and his spirit lives on today.

Since his death countless pilgrims have traveled to Assisi to honor Francis and to pray for world peace. At the beginning of his papacy in 1986, Pope John Paul II announced that he would consult with world religious leaders in Assisi. The special meeting was held for prayer and peace. These leaders represented Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus as well as Christians of many churches. They fasted, kept silence, walked together in procession. They had no common prayer but each prayed according to his own tradition. The Pope said at the conclusion that what happened through prayer and witnessing for peace there continues the spirit of peace St. Francis offers the world.

As you come to the end of your time with Francis, ask yourself how you can live out the final lines of his famous Prayer for Peace:

"O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much  
seek to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive.  
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

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## **PART 5: BLESSED JULIAN OF NORWICH** **(1342-c1416)**

**"The heavens proclaim God's justice, and all peoples see God's glory." - Psalm 97:6**

Begin by saying these words as Julian would say them:  
God delights in me! God delights in me! God delights in me!  
Julian shows that God loves all who are faithful when they are too busy as well as when they have "time" to be aware of God.

Julian was convinced that you can experience God in whatever you are doing. She knew that prayer is not a complicated process, separate from daily living. Like Hildegard, Julian was creation-centered and saw wholeness in human beings, nature, and God. And like Hildegard she was caught up in mystical prayer and represented the "glory of God fully alive." Julian had an overwhelming sense of the centrality of God, her maker and keeper, who was her everlasting love, joy, and bliss.

Very little is known about the externals of Julian's life. But she knows herself in the very intimate relationship of a beloved creature and a loving Creator. In her book, *Showings (Revelations of Divine Love)* she shared the experiences she had of God. This vibrant woman, Julian, is known only by her powerful words in this book. She was much loved in her day and has become even more beloved in recent decades. Our times are very much like her own.

Julian lived in one of the most calamitous periods in human history. Barbara Tuchman (historian who wrote *A Distant Mirror*, Knopf, 1978), subtitled her book "the Calamitous Fourteenth Century." She calls Julian's age "a violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering, and disintegrating age, a time, as many thought, of Satan triumphant."



One of the greatest calamities of Julian's time was the plague of Black Death which killed at least a third of the population of Europe as it swept from South to North in the mid-14th century, reaching Norwich in 1349 when Julian was a child. Two other waves in 1360, when Julian was in her 20's, killed as many as 50% of Norwich's people.

At the same time there were problems in the church. These must have affected a woman of faith like Julian with great pain. The papacy was in political, economic, and ecclesial chaos. During the Great Schism (1378-1317) there were multiple popes and three factions in the papacy. In England the Bishop of Norwich engaged in unholy dealings in connection with the Great Schism and the Peasants' Revolt. Arrogant and a harsh administrator, he was ruthless and merciless in quelling this revolt. He was Julian's bishop!

How could anyone living during her era be "fully alive" and give "glory to God?" Think about the times in which you live. How calamitous is the first part of the 21st century? In what ways do the problems of Julian's day remind you of the time you are living in right now?

Although Julian was very much aware of all these tensions, she was also a prophet, a loving critic of "Holy Church." She distinguished between "God's kingdom on earth" and the evils of the hierarchy. Julian's vision was never clouded.

Julian, surrounded by death and the many other problems of her day, was immersed in the mystery of suffering. She probably developed what might be called today "a survivor mentality" and prayed to share in the sickness all around her. Her sickbed experience of visions of Jesus in his passion she described in Showings.

Showings is Julian's reflection on the sixteen revelations or "showings" of God's love which came to her while she was on her sickbed. In the 86th and final chapter of Showings, Julian summarizes all that she has learned--"that love is our Lord's meaning." From learning how much God loved her, Julian realized that God "delighted" in her. She says this over and over again in various ways.

Look back at the "delight" prayer at the beginning of Part 5. Julian's experience of God's delight can help you to be aware of how much God loves you. Prayer is not a complicated process separate from daily living. Whatever you may be doing, you can experience God and yourself as you are.

Julian writes in Showings that she saw the figure of the suffering Christ on the crucifix become alive before her eyes. Fourteen other showings followed in rapid succession in a few hours with the sixteenth coming on the following night.

What was Julian's story before this night? Julian and her mother survived. But who had died? Julian writes so much about motherhood that possibly she was a mother herself. Most women married very early so Julian may have had a husband and children who died of the plague.

After her sick bed experience and the "showings," Julian became an anchoress and lived in an anchorhold attached to the Church of St. Julian in Norwich. Anchoresses (widows and other women) lived lives of solitude, prayer, and charity. From her cell attached to the church Julian spent the remainder of her life praying and counseling many people from all walks of life.

Julian's name is taken from this church. She lived (with her cat Isaiah) and prayed in her one or two rooms. One window opened into the church so she could participate in services. The other window opened onto the street, letting her listen to stories of those people who came for solace and spiritual counsel.

Julian wrote Showings in this anchorhold. An overwhelming sense of her lively presence come through. She expressed herself with tremendous vitality and tender intimacy.

If you read Showings, you can come to know Julian intimately as a person who tells an incredible story of God's revelation of love. Whether because of or in spite of the misery of her time, her theology of "all shall be well" is tremendously optimistic! In every page she is "fully alive."

Julian revealed through every line of Showings:

- that God delights in her;
- that God created all as infinitely good and loves even the smallest things
- that the Lord is the ground of her "beseeching" (praying) and therefore that prayer is the only true stance before a loving and merciful God;
- that God is our Mother;
- that love is the meaning of life in spite of, even because of, sin;
- that "all shall be well" because God loves everyone and all creation.

For a confident, optimistic spirit like Julian, sin was truly a puzzle. There was tension between her perception of a loving God and the fact of sin in the world and in herself. The most extensive discussion of sin can be found in the 13th Showing when Julian asks why, through the great wisdom of God, "the beginning of sin was not prevented" for then "all would have been well" (224).

Christ's answer is that "sin is necessary" BUT "all shall be well." He told her that he would "make all things well which are not well and you shall see it." Because Julian's was a life of prayer and compassion, her mantra became: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things will be well."

Julian, aware that her optimism might not set well with her contemporaries, tried to reconcile her understanding of the goodness of God with the medieval Church's traditional understanding of sin and punishment. She takes refuge in the mysteries of God which are beyond explanation.

In trying to understand the paradox between love and sin, Julian realized that becoming too sorrowful about sin means failure to "recognize God's exalted, wonderful wisdom, or the power and goodness of the Blessed Trinity" (232). Christ told her to accept this truth in faith and trust, and in the end she would "see, truly, in fullness of joy" (232).

Julian's message reflects Christian hope and optimism. If the troubled 14th century needed this message, the troubled 21st century needs it as well!

Julian's view of Creation accounts for her "all shall be well" theology. This surely shows Julian as a "person fully alive" giving "glory to God."

Julian emphasized the theme of Jesus as Mother in many chapters of Showings (52-64). The Motherhood of God, for Julian, was inclusive rather than exclusive of all other titles. She saw Jesus as a wise mother

who watched carefully over all people. Julian described Jesus with many maternal phrases: "our precious Mother Jesus," "our precious Mother Christ," "our courteous Mother," "our tender Mother Jesus," "our loving Mother," and, the most frequent, "our true Mother."

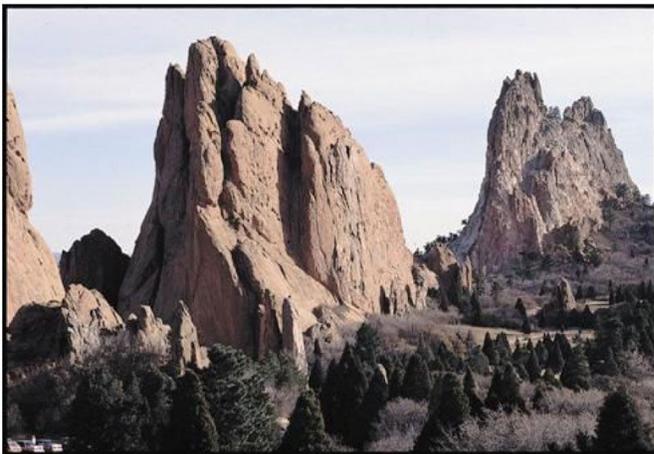
Julian came out of a tradition before her that recognized God as mother. Julian did not cite Biblical sources but scholars have found key quotations to support the image of God as mother, as, for instance, in Isaiah 49:15: "Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you." Or in the New Testament: "How often have I wanted to gather your children together as a mother bird collects her young under her wings..." (Luke 13:34).

Christians need Julian today as a reminder that, no matter what the sin or evil, all will eventually "be well." A mystic, a mother, and counselor to many people of her day, she gave great glory to God—and continues to do so!

In what ways can you live out Julian's message of loving God and knowing that God delights in you?

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## **PART 6: PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN (1881-1955)**



**"The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the firmament proclaims God's  
handiwork." - Psalm 19:2**

Read the following words as your prayer to Christ who extends into all the corners of your life and your world:

"You the Centre at which all things meet and which stretches out over all things so as to draw them back into itself: I love you for the extensions of your body and soul to the farthest corners of creation through grace, through life, and through matter.

Lord Jesus, you who are as gentle as the human heart, as fiery as the forces of nature, as intimate as life itself, you in whom I can melt away and with whom I must have mastery and freedom: I love you as the world, as this world which has captivated my heart" (Hymn of the Universe, 7).

How does this prayer speak to you as you begin this part of the retreat? Is Christ the center of your life? What can it mean to you to love the world as Teilhard did?

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in love with the world, was as fully alive as anyone could be. His life was one of passionate intellectual and spiritual adventure. His tremendous mind led him to continually ask profound questions about the meaning of cosmic and human life.

As traveler, explorer, scientist, priest, and mystic, he saw the world as a vast, living, tangible organism. As both theologian and scientist, he sought to reconcile the cosmic mysticism of St. Paul with the insights of evolution and contemporary cosmology.

His profound knowledge and his scientific imagination led him to see life and the universe in the widest possible perspective: the explosion of stars, the violent formation of great landmasses, and the tectonic shifts that resulted in mountains and canyons.

Born in the Auvergne region of Southern France, he traveled literally all over the world and spent his final years in the U.S. where he died suddenly in 1955. From childhood, he was fascinated with rocks and all earth forms. After a privileged childhood he entered the Jesuit order where he was encouraged to study early life forms or paleontology. As a paleontologist he found fascinating the origins of the human being.

Wherever he was, he collaborated with local scientists and paleontologists. He spent many years in China in exploration and research. He helped in the discovery of Peking man in 1931. His research led him to ask if Peking man was perhaps the earliest human being.

With the eyes of faith Teilhard discerned in the evolutionary process a guiding principle: that organisms evolved toward consciousness, love, and higher forms of spiritual energy. He sought to strengthen the bonds of the human community around the world through these powers of love and collaboration. He looked for new models of holiness and spirituality and looked for a mysticism of action.

Many people in his day thought Teilhard was too complex, too difficult a writer, too daring an innovator. Consequently, fifty years ago at the time of his death (1955) he was not given the attention he deserved. His contemporaries did not fully understand the power of his vision of God's universe or appreciate his life-affirming spirituality.

Look back at the opening prayer and read it again, asking yourself if or how you have changed after reading about Teilhard.

Throughout his life Teilhard lived as a deeply faithful member of the Catholic Church and the Jesuit order. However, the powers in the Vatican opposed him and criticized his scientific writing while he was alive and has not yet officially recognized the treasure of his spiritual and scientific legacy. He lived in exile from his beloved France for most of his life because of the Vatican's opposition to his theories, but that was a blessing in disguise because, as a result of his exile, he was able to do his research on several continents.

Today Teilhard de Chardin Societies have been established in many countries. His books are being continually read, studied, and republished. Many Christians and others revere him, and in the 50 years since his death people throughout the world have celebrated his life and ideas. He is indeed still fully alive today in his thoughts and insights.

That aliveness is first evident in one of his first books. The Divine Milieu had been in his mind ever since his experiences as a stretcher bearer in World War I. He finished the book in 1927, but it was never publicly recognized until its publication in French in 1957, two years after his death.

He chose the expression "the divine milieu" to describe the presence and influence of God throughout creation and all areas of human experience. He saw this presence of God as the power of love to be

shared. The one central focus of divine energy is God. Teilhard's language foreshadowed the scientific/philosophical study of the universe today.

Teilhard wrote *The Divine Milieu* "for those who love the world." It is his spiritual masterpiece showing a mystical vision of communion and union with God which gives every human being access to a "divine milieu." In his vision everything is transformed into fullness that culminates in Jesus Christ.

Early in his life Teilhard also wrote *Hymn of the Universe* (published in English in 1965). This can serve as an intimate companion to *The Divine Milieu*. In the first half of the book, "The Mass on the World," Teilhard shows how Communion with Christ through all things was his particular vocation. As a dedicated priest, also passionately devoted to the science of the earth, its life, and that of human beings, he wanted to offer up the whole creation to God.

He first began this particular kind of offering when he lived in the trenches during World War I and later when he was on expedition in China and had no place or time to offer his daily Mass. Calling his reflection, "The Mass on the world," he includes five parts: The Offering, Fire over the Earth, Fire in the Earth, Communion, and Prayer.

Take a few moments to look out your window (or go outside), and join your heart and prayer with nature immediately around you. Join prayerfully with Teilhard as you make your own offering of work and suffering:

"Since once again, Lord...I have neither bread, nor wine, nor altar, I will raise myself beyond these symbols, up to the pure majesty of the real itself; I, your priest, will make the whole earth my altar, and on it will offer you all the labours and sufferings of the world..."

I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labour. Into my chalice I shall pour all the sap which is to be pressed out this day from the earth's fruits.

My paten and my chalice are the depths of a soul laid widely open to all the forces which in a moment will rise up from every corner of the earth and converge upon the Spirit. Grant me the remembrance and mystic presence of all those whom the light is now awakening to the new day" (*Hymn to the Universe*, 19).

The more intensely Teilhard came to know and experience the world, the closer God was to him. He realized that those who seek God encounter God by turning toward the things of the earth in love and reverence. For him the natural delight he took in life and all that exists was the beginning, and goal, of mysticism. His many friends saw how "aliveness" radiated from him.

Teilhard wrote many books in his life, most which were published in French and then gradually made available to English-speaking readers. A new book, *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth* (Orbis, 2003), lists in its bibliography 20 books and nine volumes of letters now available.

After this retreat of praying with Teilhard, you might want to spend time (a lifetime) in study of his phenomenal works. He was ahead of today's cosmologists in saying that the Earth is unfolding or evolving to human consciousness and then to the consciousness of all creation, culminating in the Omega point--or the cosmic Christ.

Teilhard was an Easter Christian and died, appropriately enough, on Easter Sunday in 1955. Fifty years after his death he is celebrated throughout the world as a scientist, theologian, and mystic.

Conclude this part of your retreat by joining with Teilhard in a prayer he wrote early in his life:

"Lord Jesus, who are as gentle as the human heart, as fiery as the forces of nature, as intimate as life itself, you in whom I can melt away and with whom I must have mastery and freedom: I love you as a world, as this world which has captivated my heart..." (from *Cosmic Life*, 1916, an early war essay).

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## **PART 7: DOROTHY DAY (1897-1980)**

**"For a sun and a shield is the Lord God; grace and glory God bestows." - Psalm 84:12**

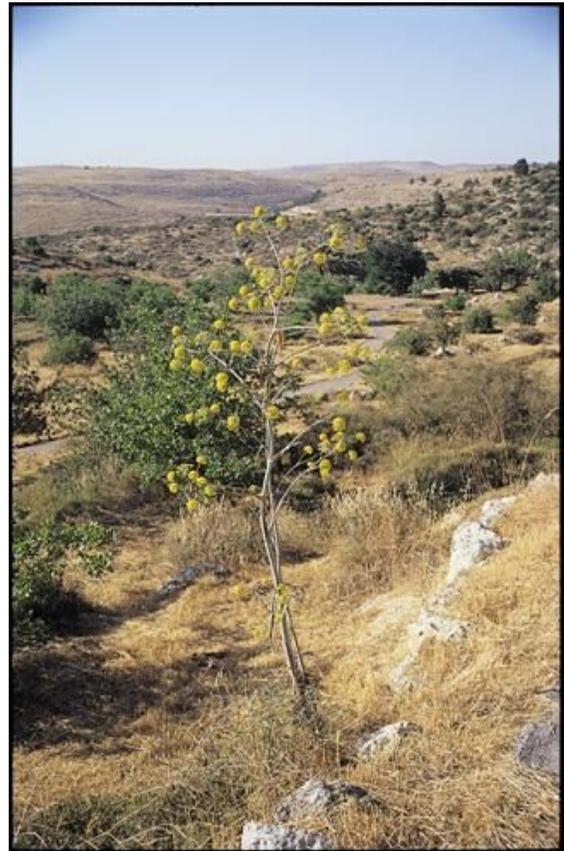
Pray with Dorothy: "We can be thankful for the trials of the past, the blessings of the present, and be heartily ready at the same time to embrace with joy any troubles the future may bring us" (*The Catholic Worker*, November, 1936).

Dorothy Day of New York, who began the Catholic Worker movement in the 1930s, provides an outstanding example of a Christian mystic, a woman fully alive. She gave great glory to God in her remarkable life. Since her death in 1980 people have come to realize that she was indeed a mystic, a woman who gained wisdom through love by accepting God's love for her. She returned that love in her life of prayer and in doing works of justice and mercy.

In her early years Dorothy Day led a wild, bohemian life. She dropped out of college after her second year, and as a young journalist wrote for a socialist newspaper, the *New York Call*. Her personal life in her twenties gave little indication of her future path.

Her first marriage failed. Later when she was dating someone else, she had an abortion and was devastated emotionally and physically. She left New York for California to recuperate. There she wrote movie scripts and a novel (largely autobiographical). This novel later caused her embarrassment and anguish. She wished it were possible to destroy every copy of it.

Returning to New York, she entered into a common law marriage with a man who was an anarchist and atheist. She loved him deeply and referred to her time with him as one of natural happiness. However, in the surprising way of God, she began to feel drawn to prayer and the life of faith.



Her happiness knew no bounds when their daughter, Tamar Teresa, was born. Dorothy had decided during her pregnancy to have her child baptized even though she knew her husband would leave her if she did. He did leave when she herself became a Catholic--to his dismay and that of her friends.

Dorothy's conversion required great personal sacrifice. A conversion experience often brings joy to those who choose to accept a life of faith or to follow a call to leave others behind. But it also can require great courage to leave the familiar for the unknown.

Reflect on changes you have made in the past because of your faith. Ask for courage to make any changes that may be asked of you now or in the future. Share with God your thoughts and feelings, fears and desires.

Dorothy's conversion came during the depths of the depression in the 1930s. Dorothy Day was searching for a way to live out her faith when she met Peter Maurin, a wandering French peasant, teacher, and philosopher. Together they began the Catholic Worker movement. Peter's vision of a Catholic social order resonated with her own. Peter, who had been living a life of voluntary poverty in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, taught Dorothy the history and meaning of Catholic social justice teachings.

Together they spread these teachings on social justice in The Catholic Worker newspaper which first appeared on May 1, 1933, and sold for a penny a copy. Until shortly before she died, Dorothy continued to write a column, "On Pilgrimage," in which she shared her rich insights on prayer, justice, and hospitality. The circulation of the paper rapidly grew as its message touched the hearts of many Christians eager to embrace the teachings of Jesus on love of God and of neighbor. The Catholic Worker still continues to be published and read today.

During her long life Dorothy lived out the spiritual and corporal works and wrote about the importance of putting into practice this teaching of Jesus in Matthew's gospel (25:31-46.) "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did for me." This passage served as a guide for Dorothy and the many people attracted to her work.

Review the gospel corporal and spiritual works of mercy listed below: corporal--to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to ransom the captive, to give shelter, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead; spiritual--to admonish the sinner, to instruct the ignorant, to counsel the doubtful, to comfort the sorrowful, to bear wrongs patiently, to forgive all injuries, and to pray for the living and the dead. Consider how you have personally performed these works of mercy. Give thanks to God for all the times you acted with mercy.

The love of Jesus guided Dorothy each day. She lived out the advice of St. Paul the Apostle to "pray always." She was nurtured by psalms that expressed longing for God. Two favorite verses were, "As the deer longs for running waters, so my soul longs for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1); and "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all my being, bless (God's) holy name" (Psalm 103:1.)

Over and over again she insisted that prayer is the foundation and motivating force of the Catholic Worker movement. Jim Forest, who worked with Dorothy at the New York Catholic Worker house and later became managing editor of the newspaper, wrote that she taught him that justice begins on the knees. He added that he never knew anyone who was more a praying person than Dorothy Day.

Dorothy's spirituality was rooted in the Word of God. She loved praying the psalms and reading the letters of St. Paul. Like St. Paul she saw Christ in others, especially those most in need. The gospel shaped her ministry day to day, asking her to take no thought for the morrow and to see Christ in all who came.

In her words, "the most radical thing we can do is to try to find the face of Christ in others, and not only those we find it easy to be with" (quoted from an article by Jim Forest in U.S. Parish, August, 1995).

Dorothy wrote that throughout all of her life she had somehow been haunted by God. Like St. Augustine in his dissolute young life she had experienced a restlessness for God. She desired fullness of life for herself as well as for everyone else. Her prayer always embraced neighbors close at hand and far away.

Dorothy Day worked principally as a journalist and as author of eight books in which she expressed her faith and spirituality. Her writings helped support herself, her child, and the Catholic Worker movement. She addressed many of the causes of injustice and violence affecting people who were poor or oppressed.

She gave witness by joining protests, picket lines, and boycotts in support of obtaining justice for workers. Occasionally she spent time in jail for her convictions, the last time at age 76 because she participated in a non-violent demonstration in support of the United Farm Workers.

All of her life she was a pacifist and often met with opposition to her anti-war stands. She was among those in the 1960s who formed Pax Christi, an international organization that continues to work for peace. Her personal journals show that in all of these causes and conflicts she never lost sight of her search for God.

People who knew Dorothy Day in person speak of her authenticity and integrity. Writer-editor Robert Ellsberg says that there was no distinction between what she believed, what she wrote, and how she lived. Others agree that what they saw was what she was. She had an extraordinarily well-developed sense of humility, of the truth of herself.

Her spirituality was strongly shaped by her reading, and she read a great deal. The novels of Dostoyevsky and others sustained her in her search for God. As she grew older, she loved reading the lives of the saints, and in a sense, walked in their company. That company included Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, and especially Therese of Lisieux.

She found herself drawn especially to the "little way," a phrase used by St. Therese to describe her approach to God. This "little way" of doing all things lovingly meant that the power of love can change the world. Dorothy Day understood that change occurs not in large dramatic events but in living attentively moment by moment.

Some people today would like to see Dorothy formally canonized as a saint of the Catholic Church. Other friends say that she "would die" if she were named a saint. Canonization for Dorothy would be ironic because many Catholics and others early on were so opposed to her teachings on pacifism and non-violence.

In the 125 houses of hospitality which have now been established all over the United States, many needy people are now--as then--fed, clothed, and sheltered. You may be familiar with a Dorothy Day Center near you.

If you have time and are able, visit a shelter or soup kitchen as a volunteer. Pray with and for the people who are lonely and seek to have their needs met there. In her autobiography *The Long Loneliness* Dorothy uses "loneliness" to mean a longing for God. This longing continued to deepen as she grew older.

Like Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, Dorothy did not stand on a pedestal to be admired, but lived a simple, humble, action-filled life. She had a passion for God and God's people and believed that all is possible with God. Throughout her life she was fully alive and gave glory to God in all that she did. She can be still alive today for anyone who follows her way.

As you conclude this retreat, reflect once more on the men and women you have met here: Paul, Hildegard, Francis, Julian, Teilhard, and Dorothy. How did each encounter the living God? How did each live life fully and joyfully?

***How will this retreat help you to live your life more fully and in so doing GIVE GLORY TO GOD?***