NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

'Live kindly'

Rich Heffern | Mar. 17, 2010 NCR Today

In mid-May of the year 1373 the woman who would later compose the first book ever written in the English language died at the tender age of 31 ... or so her bedside companions thought. In the throes of a severe respiratory infection, this middle-class English woman, Juliana by name, experienced wht we call today a "near death experience." In visions like those of the star traveler in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, she navigated star systems up and down the wide corridors of our galaxy, crying out *Benedicite!* in bewildered fear and dread. Through the vast, wounded heart of our world, she journeyed to a beautiful and shining city, which it turned out was located within her own soul. There, in hushed awe and breathless wonder, she saw the divine mystery personified, the Holy One -- whom she described as, curiously enough, a bit homely, but also most courteous and personable. The Divine Sustainer held the whole universe (it looked like a little wrinkled hazelnut) in warm, caring hands -- loving it, suffering along with it, bathing it in kindness and love.

Shortly after experiencing this life-changing vision, Juliana moved into a small cell attached to the church at Norwich and spent the rest of her life in prayer and giving spiritual direction. A contemporary of Chaucer, she recorded her visions in a book she called *Revelations of Divine Love*.

Her simple advice to all who came to her seeking guidance and wisdom: "It's going to be all right, folks. All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." When seekers asked her how they should live in the meantime, she answered: "Live kindly."

Juliana's remarkable visions occurred smack in the middle of the High Middle Ages, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, wherein occurred what historian of spirituality Dominican Fr. Richard Woods calls "a mystical revolution." In those troubled times there took place a great renewal of spirituality in the Western world. Juliana of Norwich was a part of this great renewal, as was Mechtild of Magdeburg, Hildegard of Bingen and others.

One of the foremost Catholic theologians of our own time, Karl Rahner, remarked once that if our religions do not reconnect with their own mystical traditions and offer us a dynamic and practical spirituality that is relevant to our ordinary living and that connects us in real and meaningful ways with divine mystery, then these religions have absolutely nothing to offer us as we journey into the 21st century.

Source URL (retrieved on *08/27/2014 - 04:51*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/live-kindly