

FINDING
SANCTUARY

FINDING SANCTUARY

Monastic Steps for Everyday Life



Christopher Jamison

Abbot of Worth



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To my brothers, the monks of Worth
and to my predecessors, the abbots of Worth

Abbot Victor Farwell
Abbot Dominic Gaisford
Abbot Stephen Ortiger

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The monks of Worth with the five men from *The Monastery* television program, first broadcast on BBC Two in May 2005: Tony, Gary, Anthony, Nick and Peter. At the time the program was filmed Tony was 29, single, living in London and producing trailers for a sex chat line; Gary was 36, single, and a painter and decorator from Cornwall; Anthony was 32 and worked in a legal publishing company in London; Nick was 37, single, and studying for a PhD in Buddhism at Cambridge University; Peter was married, a retired teacher and published poet who lived in Bristol.

Prologue

The BBC TV series *The Monastery* involved five very modern men living the monastic life for forty days and forty nights while TV cameras tracked their progress. The sight of monks responding thoughtfully and helpfully to ordinary people's struggles was a surprise to millions of viewers who had presumed that monks were out of touch. Accepting people as they are was assumed to be the preserve of enlightened liberals, not of cloistered monks.

Yet the five men were not only accepted; they were also challenged. They were asked to listen continuously and deeply to themselves, to other people, and to God. Forty days later, this profound listening had reshaped their hearts and minds as it has reshaped the hearts and minds of many generations of monks and nuns. These men left *The Monastery* more in touch with life than when they had arrived.

The sense that the Christian monastic tradition has something special to offer is growing among contemporary people of all religious beliefs and those with none. To everybody's surprise, *The Monastery* attracted an audience

of three million viewers, and was very favorably received by critics and public alike. The Worth Abbey web site received 40,000 visits in the month following the first program, and during that same period hundreds of people signed up to come on retreat at Worth.

The people who came on retreat here have, to some extent, provoked this book. Those with no background in religious faith have been its particular inspiration. They are a new generation of people who have not lapsed from faith but for whom religion is a closed book or, as one put it, “just a good source of jokes.” Their honest searching and their willingness to listen to new insights have been encouraging and humbling for us monks. People want to learn from us, and they tell us that our way of life is precious not only for ourselves but for them too. It appears that our founder, St. Benedict, still has lots to say to people today.

Benedict wrote his Rule for monastic living fifteen hundred years ago when he was abbot of Monte Cassino, the monastery that sits atop an inspiring mountain south of Rome. Italy was at that time a country torn apart by barbarian invasion and confusion, so Benedict understood not only the spiritual way but also the barbarian way. The name “Rule of Benedict” often misleads people into thinking that Benedict wrote a book of rules. In fact, he wrote a book of insights about Christian living, with some practical suggestions (rules) about how to put those insights into practice. The insights are still guiding people today, even though

PROLOGUE

many of the rules have been adapted to local conditions, as Benedict asked that they should be.

In every generation, monks and nuns bring together the realities of their day and the wisdom of the Rule in a new fusion born of contemporary experience. This fusion is the energy that enables monasteries to continue to be places of sanctuary today as they have been for centuries. And that sanctuary can be recreated in the hearts of all people of goodwill. If you are looking for sanctuary in your life, then Benedict invites you into that place of peace with the opening words of his Rule: “Listen carefully, child of God, to the master’s instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”





Introduction

“**W**hy did you become a monk?” I am asked this question so often, and it’s not easy to answer. I imagine it’s roughly equivalent to being asked to explain why you married your spouse: the person asking might want to know your views on marriage (why didn’t you just live together?); or it could be that they want to know why you married this particular person rather than another; or it might be part of a discussion about your recent divorce. Each situation requires a different answer. Similarly, I have offered various answers for various contexts. But the answer I really want to give is: “I don’t know.” I do not know why I became a monk, because the reason I joined is not the reason I stayed. I joined thinking I could save the world by being a monk; I stayed because the monastery became the place where I discovered my own need to be saved. Before I could offer sanctuary, I had to find it.

My personal story, like everybody’s, has some ordinary and some extraordinary elements. The extraordinary element is that I was born in Australia to Australian parents with no English connections, but following my father’s

appointment to be managing director of an Australian company based in England, we emigrated to England, along with my three elder brothers, when I was still a baby. The ordinary element is that I was a cradle Catholic, went to a Catholic school run by monks who were both able and kind, and then went on to university pretty uneventfully. While at university, I knew that I did not want to follow in the footsteps of my father and brothers and go into business. Thanks to the ministry of some fine university chaplains, I found myself led to regular meditation and to working with those on the margins of society—in particular, travelers. Through a series of chance encounters I found myself staying at Worth and realizing that the monastic life here contained all the elements of life that animated me, as well as some inspiring monks.

Did Christ call me? Of course. Did He leave me a voice mail? Of course not. If you want to pinpoint a moment when He called me, it was when I was sitting in my college room one night reading the Bible. Age nineteen, I had decided earlier in the year that it was time to read all the gospels on my own, and at that time I was reading Matthew's. I read chapter 10 verses 37-39, which conclude with Jesus saying: "Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it." That touched a chord and seemed to me to describe the dilemma I faced: finding everything that a career offered and losing what I valued, or losing what was on immediate offer and finding something else at the hands of God. Seen in those

terms, the decision is not difficult; working that decision through in practice and explaining it to everybody else is much harder. So I gave it a go, thinking I would probably not make it past novice; and, to my surprise, I grew into the life more and more.

Throughout this book, the call of Christ is the hidden assumption. I say “hidden” because I won’t keep on repeating it; I say “assumption” because the insights of Benedict assume the insights of Christ. The Rule of Benedict is a commentary on the gospel, and it is woven out of quotations from the Bible. This book will help you to enter into the teachings of Benedict, but it will not assume that you, the reader, are Christian. What it will assume, however, is that Benedict and his monastic tradition are Christian. It is certainly true that Christian monks share much in common with our monastic brothers and sisters of other religions, especially Buddhist monks, but a word of caution is needed when talking about these similarities. The monastic life of celibacy and prayer is strikingly similar in the Catholic and Buddhist traditions; it is one of Worth’s privileges that we have a very warm friendship with the Buddhist monastery at Chithurst here in West Sussex. We have good dialogues, but we recognize that there are differences as well as similarities between us. We Benedictines are Christian believers, and so to understand us fully requires an understanding of the teachings of Christ.

If your response to God and to Christ is: “I do not know what to believe,” then that is fine: just keep an open heart

and mind as you read this book. *Finding Sanctuary* is written very much with you in mind, and I offer you a story to illustrate the point. One day some old men came to see Abbot Anthony of Egypt, the most renowned hermit of his day. In the midst of them was Abbot Joseph. Wanting to test them, the old man Anthony suggested a text from the scriptures and, beginning with the youngest, he asked them what it meant. Each gave his opinion as he was able. But to each one the old man said: "You have not understood it." Last of all he said to Abbot Joseph: "How would you explain this saying?" and he replied: "I do not know." Then Abbot Anthony said: "Indeed, Abbot Joseph has found the way, for he has said: 'I do not know.'"

This story is taken from *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*, a collection of ancient wisdom that often shocks us into reconsidering our assumptions about how life works. These fathers and mothers were the first monks and nuns of the Christian tradition, and they lived in the desert areas of the Middle East during the fourth and fifth centuries. The most famous of them was Anthony of Egypt, about whom there are many stories such as the above. Viewed from our perspective today, these monks and nuns inhabit a strange world full of demons and temptations, angels and miracles. Some seem very odd people, who lived in ways that offend modern sensitivities. One of the strangest of all was the Syrian, Simeon Stylites, who lived on top of a column but was considered a saint by those who came to visit him. On reflection, if David Blaine can fast for forty-

four days inside a Perspex box hanging over the Thames and have 250,000 fans come to visit him, then maybe the desert fathers were not so peculiar after all! Even in their own day, however, they were considered strange; yet the rich and powerful sought them out for advice. They had left behind the busyness of their day and found a sanctuary that others envied. Their wisdom was and is precious.

Within their desert sanctuary, the fathers and mothers of the desert became some of the first great spiritual teachers and some of the first psychologists; they plumbed the depths of the soul, and from those depths they invited people to look at spirituality in ways that are imaginative and challenging. Benedict was born in 480, just at the end of their heyday, and he revered them as his mentors. They are remarkable guides, combining wit, insight, and wisdom in a mixture that we moderns can only envy. As we go through this book, the sayings of the desert fathers and mothers will accompany us on our journey in search of sanctuary.

Our search involves learning how to build a sanctuary in the midst of everyday life. So, to begin with, I invite you to consider the busyness of modern life and what causes it. Then I ask: what steps can somebody take in order to find sanctuary there? I have chosen seven steps from the monastic tradition and each step leads to the creation of a particular part of the sanctuary: the door, the floor, the walls, the roof, or the windows, not forgetting the furniture and fittings. This sanctuary is built by heart and mind, but it is no less real for that.

FINDING SANCTUARY

The Abbey Church at Worth is a large building, but it is very simple in design and it is always open, day and night. I hope that the sanctuary that you build in your life as you read this book will be as spacious, as beautiful, and as welcoming.



PART ONE
Everyday Life





How Did I Get This Busy?

Recipes for busy moms, tips for busy teachers, workshops for busy executives—these are just some of the courses around today that help us cope with being too busy. People speak and act as if being busy is a force beyond their control, as if somewhere back in history a malign spirit of busyness invaded the planet. There was a time, in the good old days, when people had time, and life moved at an easy pace. But modern society changed all that, and now we are stuck with a way of life that is a breathless rush. “People don’t have time like they used to”—and we all nod in agreement.

I have recently taken to asking those who come to the monastery on retreat where they find sanctuary in their lives today. Some of them admit frankly that they do not have any sanctuary; they are just too busy, and that is why they have come on retreat. This busyness is so endemic that even the act of coming on retreat for forty-eight hours evokes in them strong feelings of guilt. “I’ve had to leave my spouse to look after the children,” they say, or “I should be working”; and so they feel that simply being in the monastery

is self-indulgent. Then I ask them: “Why have you allowed yourself to get into this state?” The question throws them, because until that moment most had assumed that the excessive busyness of their lives was somebody else’s fault. They and many others have an unspoken assumption that modern life is busy, that being busy is one of the penalties of living in a developed country in the twenty-first century, and that one day they will make a life decision to escape from all this . . . but not yet.

“Busy” is, of course, a relative term, a fact humorously illustrated by the advertisement that shows a man on a bike stuck behind a stationary but solitary bus on a Caribbean island. The cyclist complains: “Man, this is gridlock!” Leaving aside for the moment the relative nature of being busy, the foundations of our contemporary feeling of “being too busy” are worth a closer look.

Put simply, if somebody says they are too busy, then either they *are* too busy or they *think* they are too busy. Either way, the responsibility lies with them; they choose to lead a busy life, or they choose to think that they do. When I have said to people on retreat that they have chosen to be busy, they find this impossible to accept. Yet the experience of the five men seen in *The Monastery* suggests that this is truer than most people realize. Several of them had great difficulty just accepting that they didn’t have much to do and that they had to be silent for long periods. Stillness and silence were truly foreign to them and, at first, not that welcome: Tony and Anthony in particular

kept using their mobile phones for days after their arrival and found it difficult to settle into not being busy. So some explanation is required of the way this choice for busyness is made. In Britain, it is rooted in the way life changed in the eighties, so a quick look at that upheaval may offer a fresh perspective on the pressures that make people so busy in Britain today. Other developed countries could tell similar stories.

Twentieth-century Britain once had a raft of organizations, such as trade unions and professional bodies, that dictated much of the pace of ordinary life. For example, trade unions protected people from working long hours for poor pay and professional associations enabled doctors, lawyers, and other professionals to regulate the way they worked. But by the 1980s British industry was falling behind commercially in the global economy, and it fell to the Thatcher government to tackle the problem. Their solution was to destroy or reduce the power of institutions such as trade unions. This would enable market forces to operate more freely and so force the British economy to modernize; the demands of the market would now dictate every aspect of life. This applied not only to the working classes but to the professional classes as well. Far from protecting people, the state now sought to maximize competition in order to ensure that market forces decided everything in the lives of its citizens. For example, the national institutions that provided water, gas, and electricity were sold off to private companies, which cut costs while trying to meet the demands of the customer

in new ways. Even the National Health Service had to create an “internal market.”

◆ ————— “WE’RE ALL
CUSTOMERS NOW” ————— ◆

This market economy led inevitably to the emergence of a consumerist approach to life, with the slogan: “Let the customer decide.” In this consumerist world, people are offered the promise of purchasing whatever they choose from an ever-expanding range of continuously improving products. In the traditional marketplace the stallholders always sold the same thing in the same way, in the same place and at the same time; but in the modern marketplace everything is bigger and better than the last time, and it’s available wherever and whenever you want it. So now, anywhere at any time, you can buy the latest version of everything. While theoretically the consumer can say, “I’ve had enough,” and stop consuming, in fact the market works hard to make sure the consumer never says that.

So British society now defines a person as a consumer. This is neatly illustrated by the transition in announcements on the rail system by which travelers have ceased to be “passengers” and have become “customers” instead. Even schools and hospitals (and not only private ones) now treat pupils and patients as customers. We are all customers now.

Now this consumer-driven outlook is dependent on some hidden assumptions: first, the assumption that there

is an infinite supply of goods coming from an infinite production line. The second assumption is that the consumer will have to engage in endless productive work in order to earn the money to fund the endless consumption.

Where the professional classes once led a leisurely life, now they have become stressed out. Where the working man once relied on a job for life in a stable industry, now “he got on his bike and looked for work.” We are all in thrall to consumption, both our own consumption and that of the customers who provide our wages. This is the context with which we have chosen to collude, and we are all too busy as a result. In this sense, we *choose* to be too busy.

In simple terms, the consumerist lifestyle forces people to work too hard in order to fulfill their consumer ambitions. The desire for the bigger car or the better vacation drives people to overwork, and those caught up in this cycle have difficult decisions to make about whether to give up some of these ambitions in order to make room for sanctuary. Armed with this understanding, you can stand back from our culture and question it. You are a free person and you can choose how busy you want to be. Freely choosing to resist the urge to busyness is the frame of mind you need before you can take any steps toward finding sanctuary.

◆ — “GET AWAY FROM IT ALL?” — ◆

Much of the modern tourist industry is built on the assumptions I have just outlined. The promise of a respite from being too busy fuels the language of travel brochures: “Want to get away from it all? Take the family to Disney World!” Tourism offers temporary respite from this world of frantic busyness by offering yet another consumer product as the antidote: the package vacation. All the hard work needed to be a consumer now needs an extra consumer product to take away the pain of that work.

The “it all” of “get away from it all” is an assumed world of ceaseless activity to which there is no answer other than to leave it behind for a week or two by going on vacation. Even before the eighties, the hippy movement of the sixties and seventies inadvertently canonized this belief in the inevitability of busyness by inviting us to drop out from society; if dropping out was the only solution, this implied that changing society was impossible. People are assumed to be too busy because they have to run too fast in order to survive in this greedy and aggressive society.

As well as tourism, other industries are springing up around the too busy belief: health spas called “Sanctuary” offering “heaven,” radio stations called “Smooth” offering relaxation, and “alternative therapies” that “eliminate all stress.” Now these relaxation products are valuable offerings, but they only deal with symptoms.

Alongside these solutions to busyness are answers in a different mode; a response I have had from some people coming here on retreat was: I can't stand having nothing to do, my hobby keeps my hands and mind focused on something other than my own troubles, in fact I *like* to keep busy. These are what one person called a sort of "anti-sanctuary"—an alternative busy place to go to take your mind off things. Pets, sports, hobbies are all busy occupations, each a personally chosen busyness, an antidote to the enforced busyness of the consumerist society. Yet even these can be turned into consumer products designed to make this exhausting society more bearable but in turn creating more exhaustion.

The tourist "get away from it all," the relaxation products, and the pastimes are providing a respite and a refuge from the consumer/producer world of busyness but from *within* that world itself. They provide only temporary solutions because they are not addressing the real issues; like many consumer products they are instant substitutes for the real thing. Instant coffee is a poor substitute for real coffee. For Benedict and the monastic tradition, the real thing is found in quite a different place.

◆ — MONKS AND BEING BUSY — ◆

By now you may well be asking yourself: but what do monks know about the pressures of modern life and how

busy people are? My reply is that while our society has in recent years given way collectively to busyness to an unprecedented degree, the temptation to busyness is not a new one. A story told by one of the desert fathers, Abbot Arsenius, illustrates this. Arsenius was a Roman senator in the late fourth century and tutor to the sons of the Emperor Theodosius. Just thirty-four years old, he secretly left Rome and sailed for Egypt—a midlife crisis on a grand scale. But he was not eloping with a new partner to some paradise hideaway. He had gone to Egypt in order to join a community of monks, finally becoming a hermit renowned for his silence and austerity. Among the many stories told of him, the following one relates to our theme.

One day, in his cell, he heard a voice calling to him: “Come and I will show you the works of men.” He followed the voice and it led him to a place where an Ethiopian was cutting wood and making a great pile. He struggled to carry the pile but in vain. Instead of taking some off, however, he cut more wood, which he added to the pile. Then once again he tried to carry it and once again he failed. He kept this up for a long time. Then the voice led Arsenius on further, to where a man was drawing water from a lake and putting it into a broken container so that the water ran back into the lake. Going on further still, he saw two men on horseback carrying a beam between them, one beside the other. They were trying to enter the door of a temple; but the beam would not fit crosswise and neither would draw back to let the other go first so that the beam might

go in lengthwise. The story concludes with the voice saying: “Let everyone be watchful of his actions lest he labor in vain.”

That brief desert tale from a former leader of the superpower of his day is almost chilling in its relevance for us. We are piling high material wealth that we cannot carry and even when we succeed in carrying it, most disconcerting of all, our pride prevents us from delivering it. The men on horseback are excluded from the temple; their pride prevents them from entering the holy place where they might find rest. The fathers and mothers of the desert knew better than we do how being busy producing and consuming can be a substitute for facing the deeper realities of life. Unlike us, they resisted this tendency.

Drawing on this desert tradition, Benedict knew that as abbot he could spend too much time being busy with the wrong things: “Above all, the abbot must not show too great concern for the fleeting and temporal things of this world, neglecting or treating lightly the welfare of those entrusted to him” (Rule of St. Benedict [RB], 2:33). The “above all” is telling: Benedict knew that this was a particular temptation for those in positions of responsibility. Rather than undertake the difficult task of looking into his own soul and the souls of his monks, the temptation for an abbot is simply to keep busy. So monks and lay people alike face the same temptation to busyness. The advantage we monks have is a tradition that acknowledges this danger and provides some remedies for dealing with it.

◆ — WHERE TO BEGIN? — ◆

The real antidote to busyness must be sought outside the consumerist world, and Benedict describes that place for us. He was aware of the barbarian world at his gate, and he knew that he had to create a space beyond that world. In recent years my monastic brethren and I have taken to calling that space “sanctuary.” Benedict does not use that term himself, but the word does sum up for a modern audience many of Benedict’s deepest aspirations. Finding sanctuary leads us from the problem of busyness to a real spirituality that brings peace. The quest for sanctuary resonates deep into the heart of several contemporary dilemmas and at the same time contains within it the solution to these dilemmas.

For those in search of sanctuary, the root meaning of the word itself actually describes where to look. Sanctuary has two meanings: the primary meaning comes from the Latin root word *sanctus*, meaning “holy.” So the first meaning is “a sacred space,” and deriving from this comes the secondary meaning: “a place of refuge,” a place where someone on the run can escape to. Put simply, the vacation packages and the relaxation techniques may provide the secondary meaning of sanctuary: namely, a refuge; but they certainly cannot provide the primary meaning: a sacred space. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that a consumerist place of refuge will always be insecure because it is not rooted

in a sacred space. The sacred cannot be manufactured by the consumerist society because the sacred cannot be manufactured. The sacred is a given fact of life. The sacred is found when we recognize it as sacred; the sacred is not found when we recognize it simply as an item we fancy or as a convenient pause for breath. As one woman put it when she had been on retreat at Worth: "I have started to understand that sanctuary is not just time out, a pause in a relentless continuum, but an opportunity to do some intense listening, made oddly unique through the company of others."

In his Prologue to the Rule, Benedict lays down a simple basic marker about finding the sacred sanctuary: "Let us ask the Lord: 'Who will dwell in your tent, O Lord; who will find rest upon your holy mountain?' After this question, brothers, let us listen to what the Lord says in reply, for he shows us the way to his tent. 'One who walks without blemish,' he says, 'and is just in all his dealings, who speaks the truth from his heart and has not practiced deceit with his tongue'" (RB, Prologue:23-6).

The basic starting point for entering sacred sanctuary is the quality of your day-to-day dealings with other people. You cannot mistreat people one moment and then find sanctuary the next. Finding the sacred space begins with the recognition of the sacred in your daily living.

This truism needs to be carefully unpacked by any person who is sincerely seeking sanctuary. It must not be shrugged off with either "Of course," or "I'm interested

in peace and quiet, not morals.” The peace that Benedict offers is symbolized by the motto of the Benedictine Order: this is the Latin word for peace, *Pax*, surrounded by a crown of thorns. There is no peace without sacrifice and there is no peace without justice. Those simple insights are most commonly applied to peace between nations or races, but they also apply to everybody’s ordinary life and social relationships.

In *The Monastery* one of the participants, Tony Burke, reached a crisis point on the thirty-eighth of his forty days. He had taken his stay in the sanctuary of the monastery to heart. His job at that time was making videos to promote a sex chat line, and the thought of returning to his old way of life was worrying him. On his last night he had a profound experience of the presence of God and he knew his life would have to change. Among the several effects of this experience, one was that he gave up his job. He now works for a regular advertising agency and spends time each day in meditation. If you want to find the sacred space in your life, then you must want to “walk without blemish.” You will, of course, fail to live without blemish; but failing is quite different from not even trying.

—◆—
VIRTUE: THE DOOR TO
THE SANCTUARY
—◆—



In this chapter I hope I have opened up a new perspective on the origins of busyness, and on some contemporary solutions that cure the symptoms but not the disease. I want to end it by offering a way into sanctuary, a door through which we can enter sacred space. I have already hinted at it by saying that the way you lead your daily life is a key part of finding sanctuary. At the start of his Rule Benedict offers his monks a reminder that the ordinary decencies of human life are crucial to the spiritual search. The following short extract is a masterly summary of how to pursue human virtue as an essential part of the real spiritual life:

“You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when somebody needs your love. Bind yourself to no oath lest it prove false, but speak the truth with heart and tongue” (RB, 4:22–7).

Before we can take a step into the sanctuary, we have to find the doorway and that doorway is virtue. To help you locate this doorway in your own life, I suggest that you take that extract from the Rule and use it as an examination of conscience. One way to do this is to take each sentence and put “I” or “my” into it. So now it reads: “I do not act in anger or nurse a grudge. I rid my heart of all deceit. I never give a hollow greeting of peace and I never turn away when somebody needs my love. I speak the truth with heart and tongue.” If this personalized version is hard to say, then keep it before you as both a summons each morning and a checklist each night. Review the moments in which you have been true to those words and rejoice in those moments. Admit to yourself those moments of the day when you have failed to live out this ideal. Gradually, day by day, let the words move from your head to your heart until they start to shape your day and its relationships. The doorway to sanctuary is the doorway to your heart.

Interestingly, this kind of advice about virtue is now being written into codes of practice for businesses: deceit and lies have proved fatally destructive of some of the world’s largest companies such as Enron, WorldCom, and Andersen’s. Put simply, virtue is necessary in professional life today, and tra-

ditional virtues are now being taught to executives. All this is part of the resurgence of virtue as a necessary part of the fabric of society. The signs are everywhere that the leaders of the consumer/producer society are themselves aware of many of this society's corrosive effects. They now see that virtue enables a person to protect and foster all that is best in their lives—both their personal lives and their professional lives. Virtue enables people to work with conviction and for the good of others; it prevents the vices sweeping us away into a busy whirl of chasing corrupt fantasies.

Of course, some business leaders see virtue as just a useful tool for increasing consumer confidence; they are annexing virtue into the consumerist society, making it another producible/consumable product. But what I am proposing is different from that. If we see virtue as simply the right way to live, no matter what the cost, then virtue is sacred. Virtue is the door into the sacred sanctuary because virtue is not a consumer product; it is not just a refuge from our anxieties nor a pause from a busy life; not something we can purchase in order to relieve the symptoms of modern life. Virtue is the recognition of the sacred in daily life. As we open the door of virtue in our personal and working lives, we will open the way into a sanctuary of peace for ourselves and for others. We are enabled to lead a unified life with the same values at home and at work, a life that is transparent and has nothing to hide.

Virtue is not sufficient to create sanctuary but it is a necessary way into it. Benedict is well aware that the doorway

of virtue can put people off, so that they never open it and enter. “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset” (RB, Prologue:48). Yes indeed, virtue is a narrow door, but the space beyond that door is infinite—the infinite space of real sanctuary. The sanctuary that you purchase as a holiday or as a therapy comes to an end; the myth of endless consumption is just that: a myth. As we enter sanctuary through virtue rather than by buying our way in, we can choose to leave consumption outside the door. By entering through this door, we can concentrate on creating new and sacred places in the large space that lies beyond consumption. Virtue is the true door into the sanctuary of infinite space.



STEP INSIDE



Having located the doorway, you now need to step into the sanctuary. This is a sanctuary of heart and mind where the normal laws of physics do not apply. You will not discover it all at once because this sanctuary is infinite. So in a moment you will go through the door and take your very first step inside; yet as your foot approaches the floor you will realize that you have to lay down that floor yourself. In the sacred sanctuary God gives you the plan and he shows you how to build it. Nobody can do it for you; each sanctuary is part of the same divine plan and yet each is different, personal to

the one who dwells in it. It is unique because the sanctuary dweller is also the sanctuary builder.

So I invite you to go through the door and take your first step inside. The floor under your feet is the material that underlies the whole life of the sanctuary. It comprises something that so many people today say they are craving: silence.

