

“In the face of almost overwhelming anger and violence active in our culture and world-at-large, we ask, ‘How can we bring about healing and reconciliation?’ Sr. Mary Margaret Funk offers a means: inner work. With the grace of the Holy Spirit, we can train our minds to uproot angry thoughts and actions that fuel violence in our world. *Renouncing Violence* is a timely, important, and practical guide to the necessary inner work to become vessels of healing in our world.”

— Fr. Daniel Chowning, OCD

“Once again Sister Meg has taken the ancient desert spirituality and made it meaningful for twenty-first century city dwellers. She has a wonderful way of being faithful to her Roman Catholic tradition while stretching us to experience God’s all-encompassing compassionate love. Meg turns the tables on some age-old interpretations of Jesus’ behavior in the temple: the wrathful God who demands atonement for our sins and the Church as God’s instrument for punishment.

“She is an excellent teacher. As a Benedictine living in Mexico and often surrounded by violence, I might have preferred a ‘quick fix’ to my situation; but then anyone who knows Meg Funk would never go to her for easy, ‘out-there’ solutions to their problems. A word of advice: don’t miss the appendices.”

— Patricia Henry, OSB
Monasterio Pan de Vida, Torreon, Mexico

“This is a necessary book at a time when, as Meg Funk puts it, we are ‘in a global bad mood,’ and angry voices and violent actions grab the headlines. She makes a convincing argument that the Christian tradition—in Scripture, in the life and death of Jesus, in the coming of the Holy Spirit, and in the practice of prayer—offers a way out of retaliation and violence. As challenging as this book is, it is also reassuring: if the renunciation of violence is our response to the magnitude of God’s love for us, Funk asserts that it is the Spirit who gives us the capacity to find our way to reconciliation and peace.”

— Kathleen Norris
Author of *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*
and *The Cloister Walk*

“In the book *Renouncing Violence*, Sr. Mary Margaret Funk takes a uniquely monastic view of violence and its end. There are no charts or graphs on violence, but rather windows into her monastic practice, wisdom, and faith.

“She asks the question, ‘Was Jesus angry or God wrathful?’ and through Scripture and discernment the answer makes itself known. She then turns the light on herself. If hatred and anger is a primary cause of violence, is there a way to transcend or leave them behind and move on to a new and free place of love and compassion?

“I enjoyed and learned the most from her personal stories and self-reflection, going deep into her own anger, searching for a solution and ultimately finding it. Her understanding of thoughts and where they came from, helped along by her many years of work with Buddhists, was particularly interesting and useful. The phrase, ‘World peace begins with inner peace’ seems to be the heart and soul of this book.”

— Ven. Kusala Bhikshu

“In the current time, violence is pervasive and pronounced. Violence grips our collective and individual spirits. In her book, *Renouncing Violence*, Sr. Meg Funk skillfully invites us to return to the deep-seated roots of the monastic tradition in an effort to renounce that which has taken hold of us during this tenuous and volatile time. By renouncing violence in all forms, we rediscover who we are and return to that which we are called to be—people of love and compassion, becoming healers for that which violence has destroyed. As Sr. Meg emphatically states throughout her book, in renouncing violence we shift from harm to healing. *Renouncing Violence* is needed now more than ever. The book invites us all to practice training our minds and hearts from self-consciousness to God-consciousness for a world in desperate need of peace, reconciliation, and freedom from the forces of evil.”

— Mary M. Heintzkill, MTS, BCC
Director of Spiritual Care and
Mission Integration Ascension Health

Renouncing Violence

Mary Margaret Funk, OSB



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To those who fetch, bless, and are blessed by Holy Water

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Hans Christoffersen, publisher at Liturgical Press, made this book happen. Beyond dialogue, he brought writing toward literature.

Preface

“Violence” needs no introduction. *Renouncing* violence needs a whole book. The intent of this book is to gentle down. Calmness prevents and scatters violence. When violence is tamed, we find peace of heart. A working definition of violence is “form or forces that cause harm.” We can do something about violence. I’ve known that there’s no wrath in God, no anger in Jesus, and that we have the Holy Spirit to help us. So why, then, is facing violence and refraining from contributing to the cycle of violence so hard? We can ever so confidently take the opportunity to pause and properly respond rather than react. This book can help us proceed with confidence. Through renunciation, both individually and together, we can reduce, redirect, refrain, and reprogram our instinctual propensities toward retaliation, recompense, and rage.

How I Came to Write This Book

The *first phase* was listening and hearing that something new was happening these recent years. Too many people,

too often, were reporting their bouts of fear and doubt. The new normal was anxiety from within and fear from without. Oppositional soundbites prevail. Gaps of silence shout at the dinner table. Numbness has fogged over conversations.

The *second phase* was pausing myself and listening to my own disquietude. During the summer of 2016 I watched the PBS evening news summary of both the Republican and Democratic conventions. By election day in November I realized that I was saturated with the affliction of anger. I got permission to make a retreat with Sister Catherine Griffiths, SNDdeN. In February 2017, I flew to Boston, made my way to Ipswich, and stayed with Sister Catherine for a week at the provincial house of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. This eighty-three-year-old nun prayed out my anger. I realize most souls don't have a Sister Catherine. I also realize that I was not cleansed for my lifetime. I needed to guard my heart lest anger return, bringing seven more demons stronger than the first.

The *third phase* was waiting on the Spirit to direct me to something I should do about this new normal. We are in a global bad mood. What in our tradition would be helpful for us in these times? I realized that my own anger paralyzed me from taking discerned action. I've had an ongoing practice of *lectio divina*. I gradually encountered¹ my received tradition. I found compelling evidence that Jesus reversed violence through his death and resurrection, that there is no anger in Jesus, only love. He came to com-

plete creation. I also found solid evidence that there is no wrath in God and that the church was commissioned to extend the reign of peace and well-being in this life and the next. This message is a stunning, solid foundation that helps me to be firmly confident in my faith, both as a way into the action of believing and a way to know the substance or content of my faith claims. This sound Christian tradition that I discovered through *lectio divina* eclipsed some earlier formation that presented me with content to the contrary.

These three phases converged with significant conversations, especially with Hans Christoffersen, publisher at Liturgical Press, that prompted me to write a proposal for this book, *Renouncing Violence*.

The sweep of the book came easily. Some chapters needed several drafts, but the content was never stuck or without compelling sources, which I share in footnotes. I've attached a rather hefty bibliography for readers who want to do their own homework on this earlier monastic tradition. It's only recently that these classic sources have become so widely available in English and in reader-friendly translations.

Structure of This Book

Chapter 1: About Renunciation

First, I look at the why of renunciation. To get out of the cycle of violence we employ a countermotion that checks

aggression and replaces unconscious reaction with discerned response. Between the impulse and the response are poise and endless possibilities. Renouncing is the opportunity to change and lift up toward God for the common good. We respond with a root action deeply benefitting our domain of the humble human. How we know what to renounce is to find our vocation, our way of life. Then we renounce what is not a good fit for our designated calling for this lifetime. I share a method of renunciation that I know through the monastic tradition. When our way of life is renunciation, then it's natural to renounce violence. Renouncing is a poised but active way of living. We pause and then lean in to the right and good rather than react from our default defenses.

Chapter 2: About Jesus

Jesus initiates us into the reign of God. We imitate Jesus by healing harm today like he did in his historical times. This chapter has three parts that examine closely the historical life of Jesus. We encounter how the early church and those who knew him as Jesus of Nazareth told the story of Jesus.

Part 1 lists twenty-two pericopes (distinct passages) of healing. Jesus is the revelation of a new time when all will be well. Jesus is our way out of violence and into the reign of God that begins now and goes on for all eternity.

Part 2 considers the often-asked question, “Was Jesus angry?” through an exegesis of the four gospel passages that report Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. Through careful study we see that, in Jesus, there is no wrath. This incident is often used to justify angry reactions that harm others. Jesus did no harm; he only healed. The four reports in the four gospels give four versions of Jesus doing symbolic action on behalf of the new reign of God. Jesus is the new temple dwelling among us (John 2:19).

Part 3 lingers with the passion narrative. So many details of that profound event report that Jesus could have reacted with destructive emotions and what is called “righteous” justified anger. Yet, in every account, he was measured and used the tragedy to extend compassion.

Jesus overwhelmingly healed and endured suffering for our sakes. He loves us very much, especially the most vulnerable ones among us. We conclude that there is no anger in Jesus. There is no evidence that he rains down the wrath of God, but there are numerous stories about his healing ministry. This teaching is important because if we see Jesus as a wrathful human it justifies anger and retaliation in our personal and social disputes.

Chapter 3: About How God Has No Wrath

Although the biblical literature uses anthropomorphic images, there is no wrath in God. God created us out of

love, sustains us, and continues creation in us. This chapter gave me an opportunity to manifest my own creedal statement of death and what happens after. What do I believe? For some years I used Julian of Norwich as my revelatory text for sustained *lectio*. Her teachings are a transmission for me. I found that her voice was my own deepest self. This *lectio* is how this book became a teaching on renouncing violence. It makes sense to align our beliefs about God, our deepest sensitivities in our hearts, and do the humble work of inner reconciliation. The progression continues: if there is no anger in Jesus and no wrath in God, then what? I have every reason to be confident in this God who holds me in the grasp of love, not only because this is my own near-death experience,² but also because this too is the experience of others. The moment of death especially reveals God's love.

Chapter 4: About How God So Loves the World

Jesus breathed on his disciples the Holy Spirit to give us a profound peace. I examine John 20:17, on forgiveness. The cause of Jesus' in-breaking into our world was to continue the creation that is the fulfillment of Love. In John's account, we do not find the themes that postulate Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection as atonement, expiation, reparation, justice, or sacrificial offering. Jesus came

and dwelt among us. This is God loving the world so much that the Son was sent from all eternity. This good news is critical for us today. We have the revelation to move from violence to peace. Renouncing violence attends to this Easter experience in the Gospel of John. This Fourth Gospel confirms that there is no wrath in God and no anger in Jesus. The Great Commission is to extend this reign of God (Matt 29:19). Even now this has already begun.

Chapter 5: About Discernment

Through the action of the Holy Spirit we know when, how, where, and with whom to respond in the face of violence. The way forward is to renounce violence. Then, through discernment, we find the skillful means of sorting out right action so that there is the surge of God's presence that replaces harm with healing and replenishes nature with peace. We not only do the right action but also act out of a right intention and motivation so that we continue the ministry of Christ in our times like he did two thousand years ago.

How does that practice of discernment work? I share one example of discerning what is the question and the appropriate response. I use the story of writing this book. I'm demonstrating how the process of discernment works.

Chapter 6: About Anger

We encounter obstacles to hearing the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit. For me, my dominant obstacle is anger. In this chapter, I tell the story of my own anger regarding a dispute with a chaplain. He was my foe, but, by the grace of God, he became my friend. Other people have other afflictions, like greed or depression, but for me it is anger. The story gives witness that through prayer we can get on the other side of anger, root it out. Then it is imperative to be vigilant.

Chapter 7: About Practice

Renouncing violence is training the mind to move like a muscle, not acquiring more content for the thinking mind. This is a learned skill that requires the kind of practice one does when learning Zen, yoga, music, or a new language. There's direct encoding and patterning of brain pathways. There are also ways into the heart through training the mind. We can change both as individuals and as distinct communities. This chapter brings forward the desert tradition of contemplative living.

Chapter 8: About Holy Water

This chapter is simply an invitation to use holy water. The observance of holy water creates zones of peace through

the sign and gesture of the cross. We say this prayer: “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” The sacramental usage of holy water is a received tradition. We can be confident that through faith this holy water blesses, purifies, and preserves this ongoing conversion into the reign of God where harms are healed and evil is prevented. We notice the prescribed prayers used to bless ordinary water, then we join our faith with the ancient blessings of the devout. We appropriate the use of holy water ourselves in our own gestures of blessings. This revelation gives us confidence that holy water is a way forward to replace harm with healing, doubt with confidence, and fear with peace.

This book intends to show how the Holy Spirit directs us. We renounce our ways of living that cause harm. We, ever so gently, by the Holy Spirit, respond with deliberately chosen actions. What comes with discernment is also the actual grace to renounce violence. The gesture of using holy water embodies our prayer that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit purify, bless, and sanctify, thereby reversing violence and revealing love.

This book includes a holy water prayer that is easy to memorize:³

Father, Son, and Spirit
Through these sacred waters,
calm, heal, hold,
Now and Forever. Amen.

Chapter One

About Renunciation

Renunciation is the essential, elemental, and simple expression of one's vocation, one's calling. For me, it was to be a nun. And then the graces of that calling were provided. So, it was not the strenuous, sacrificial, blood-wrenching, searing, hemorrhaging of just grasping for my own desires. There is something very natural and noble about finding a fit and stepping up to its requirements. I've seen it in marriages and in people who have dedicated themselves to a single life. I've also seen it in people who have various sequential stages of a vocation because of circumstances. I have witnessed inner strength and resilience to step into one's vocation to shoulder the consequent responsibilities.

My vocation to be a nun required renouncing other options that would have been another way of life. Being a nun is a specific way of life, not just a lifestyle that has phases that are sporadic and casual. Being a nun is the whole of my life, *all* of my life.

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In the early 1970s, church law gave Benedictine sisters the option to make the solemn vow of total renunciation. The intent behind this particular legal expression of the vow of poverty was a stricter interpretation regarding one's opportunity to acquire property. This rigorous vow governs all things that the individual nun may have brought with her from her former way of life, that might come her way at the death of her parents, or that she acquires through some other income stream. All income would automatically become property of the monastery. The individual sister would have no executive power to receive, use, or redistribute things.

How this works practically is that all goods are held in common. Through permissions of the superior, each sister is given the things that are necessary for her well-being and work. A system of accountability, permissions, and blessings of obedience replaces the economics of owning, possessing, and distributing things. It is a total renunciation not to have exclusive personal power over things. In fact, it's to not *have* things but to *use* things with the blessing of obedience.

While this may sound strict, it was a grace-filled moment when I signed my papers. I remember talking with the lawyer who drew up these agreements and got us aligned with both civil and canon law. He sat back in his chair and said, "Well, this is nothing different than the way

my wife and I hold things together for the sake of the family.”

Renunciation is a way of good order to direct one’s individual preferences, and desires, and ways of holding things in common for the sake of the common good, that is, the family or the community. Renunciation is a way for the individual to have good order. Renunciation is also a way to focus one’s energies. It is fitting to have one’s deepest desires met. Renunciation is also an opportunity to go beyond oneself for the sake of others. It is sweet to take on responsibilities that ensure other people’s desires are fulfilled, maybe even at some sacrifice. There’s a sweet spot when vocation is at work and at the same time making a difference for others.

Renunciation, in and of itself, will seem to have a missing piece if, indeed, there isn’t an overarching and underpinning belief. The why of renunciation is the result of having a calling, a vocation from God. We discover our calling and then follow our heart’s desire. At some point, we decide and reside in that “good fit.” This place where I live in my own skin feels solid and right. Vocation is like a good pair of walking shoes. It fits so well you walk without being aware of your feet. Sometimes it’s not the shoes (my vocation) that has been tough, but the terrain. I’ve had some years where the trail was obscure, the passages narrow and steep. The monastic way of life could give Tibetan Sherpas

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pause. Monastic life tends toward high-minded striving that can be extremely risky. Even in recent years I've suffered from delusional aspirations of my own making. Humility takes my hubris seriously. I smile more at this "work in progress."

After we accept and know our vocation, we renounce all manner of our former ways of life. This is different for each person. What is God for someone else? God's will for them? God's way for them? God's way is what we call "vocation." The *before* that existed before realizing my vocation is no longer my heart's desire, my way toward God. I am called to renounce all that is not God even if it might be a good for someone else. I renounce anything that is not God for me.

Renunciation, whether or not it is a vow, as in the monastic life or marriage, has accompanying benefits. First, it relaxes me into being who I am. I have a radar that knows when I am off-center, off-message. A second benefit of renunciation is that I feel confident that, through my way of life, I support other people's way of life, both by example and by using only the resources I need so that there are resources for others. I renounce grasping. I don't need anything more. A third benefit of renunciation is that there is a sweetness about having only what I need, living the life of the early church in the Acts of the Apostles where each one is given what they need, and following the Rule of Benedict, which says, "and be not grieved if someone needs more."¹

An Opportunity to Practice Renunciation

Some thirty years ago in our monastery we were permitted to have a little television in our rooms. It was understood that nuns would watch wholesome programs. This practice of a personal television would not even have been considered before Vatican II, but with the softer interpretation of rules, televisions infiltrated the monastery. We're talking about little, tiny TVs. Nuns would watch sports or news or some cozy programs. I had a little Panasonic television that I had brought home from Catholic University when I was living in a dormitory as a graduate student.

One time, I fell asleep with it on and woke up with the volume too loud for the hall. I also looked at it and said, "This is nothing I would watch." And it was very easy and very natural, I remember, to unplug my television and take it down to the infirmary where sisters would welcome a device to use when sick. I never looked back; I never had a television in my room after that. I realized that the TV was part of my former way of life as a student.

When I let it go, I realized how much more peace I had in my space. I could recover the idea and the meaning of a cell, which is not for entertainment: it's for prayer, it's for good order, and it's for silence. And more than that, I realized that indiscriminate watching of television was harmful to my calm mind, especially commercials. It's not that I watched bad programs, but it was too loud, too much, too exciting, and away from a calm, listening presence in

my cell. Sometimes I accompanied somebody else and watched a program or I targeted something specific to watch, but as such, I renounced television. And the other side of not having that noise is that there are no triggers to return to my former way of life. Renouncing television calmed my mind.

This detachment gave me more agency that I can do this or that or not. I could look at a program or not look at a program to be free from any addictions of “Oh, that’s my night for this program.” When that lifted, when I had no programs that I needed to watch or see, it was like sitting on a porch swing in a very gentle breeze. So, renunciation is a sweet opportunity to reclaim one’s vocation of a well-ordered and happily directed consciousness. Renunciation is the opportunity for well-ordered time, place, space, things, and relationships: energies in readiness.

When I was privileged to be part of a delegation from the Monastic Dialogue Board, we met with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, India. Some years ago, he said that the Tibetan word for monk was “to be content.” Another word for a monastic is a “renunciate.” This is obviously a fine description for those of us in the monastic way of life. Yet, it seems to me that it is also fine for my three brothers and two sisters. All of them—whether married with family, single with children, or gay—have made choices that focus their vocation.

A New Practice within “The Practice”

A singular grace came my way at the inception of writing this book. I accepted an invitation that seemed to come from a very deep place in my heart: “Write the book using the practice of renouncing violence.” Immediately I took up what seemed to be a new practice for me, that is, to do this project accompanied as much as possible with a distinct practice: I’d stop when eyes signaled fatigue; I went for a walk sooner rather than later in the afternoon to give comfort to tense muscles; I yielded to getting a cup of decaf coffee or herbal tea no matter what time of day or night. When I noticed entanglements, as in fussing with the content, I’d shut the book or ask the callers on the other end of my phone if I could call them back later. In short, the process was to renounce anxiety, confusion, intensity and replace those moments with calm attention, quiet prayer, relaxed body and mind. The practice was to be calm, gently attentive with a steady writing pace punctuated by poise, pausing often for peace. This practice was not limited to my mind but also to the way I touched my computer, paged books, searched in the library or referenced the Scriptures for that perfect quote and accurate citation. Renouncing violence was a personal invitation and I was surprised how easily the opportunities invited me to shift from aggression to collaboration with time, things, and even conceptual abstractions. The book was long gone to

the publisher, but this practice was stated specifically on my *Bona Opera* (resolutions for Lent based on good works, prayer, and fasting), submitted on Ash Wednesday for a Lenten resolution, blessed by my superior. So, renouncing violence came to be a way of life, not just another book!

Renunciation is a skillful way of living, but how does it address the forms and forces that cause harm? Is there a way out of the cycle of violence? The next chapter is about Jesus. We can entrust ourselves to live into the revelation that Jesus reverses harm and that healing happens.

Chapter Six

About Anger

As we saw in chapter 2, Jesus reversed the cycle of violence. We examined the actions of Jesus healing harm, doing symbolic action to usher in the reign of God, ending the ancient temple sacrifice. We also saw that Jesus endured suffering rather than reacting with righteous anger during his passion and death. Our faith teaches us that just as Jesus harbored no anger, reversed the victim-atonement-redemption cycle, so can we. There is no wrath in God. The church is the pastoral continuity of the reign of God in ongoing revelation during our times.

Violence begets violence. Renouncing violence is the only way to get on the other side of the afflictive emotions and find the peace we desire. Jesus breathed the Holy Spirit on us and this Uncreated Energy we call God is at work in and around us. Through the Holy Spirit we can discern what action we should take in the face of whatever force or form violence takes. When our consciousness is covered in anger or another one of the afflictions, we can't hear, feel,

or know the Holy Spirit. This chapter is a teaching on anger. Anger, my foe, became my friend, but only after years of inner prayer and ascetical work. Thanks to the mercy of God!

A Dispute with the Chaplain

Several years ago, when I was prioress of my monastic community, I had a dispute with our community's chaplain.¹ The archbishop appointed this priest to provide liturgical services reserved for an ordained clergyman. I observed troubling events that prompted me, as superior, to believe he wasn't helping us but rather was not a good fit for our community. I wanted him replaced.

"We need another chaplain," I told the archbishop. He said, "You just might get somebody worse, or no priest at all."

I went to my council of advisors within my community. They said, "He's good enough. He gets along with the rest of us."

I fussed and fumed. My displeasure with the chaplain continued to bloom into a full affliction of anger. It appeared I could do nothing. I had to go to Mass like all the other nuns and listen to him, but no one listened to me, the superior. He also had a residence on our monastery grounds. He got a stipend, a house, all the services provided

by our community of about one hundred nuns at the time. My anger swelled into a full fog over my consciousness. I was long past the tipping point of a working relationship without inner resistance.

I'm not sure what the turning point was, but one day I asked our Lord: if I couldn't get rid of the chaplain, would our Lord help rid me of my anger? Every day for three or four months I went to the monastery's oratory where there hangs a large crucifix. The oratory is an intimate space with room enough for about eight nuns to sit in the presence of the crucified Christ. Each day, and sometimes a few times a day, I would sit there. I would lay my angry thoughts at the feet of our crucified Lord.

At first, I would pour out my tears of frustration. I wasn't contrite. I was right. I wasn't soft-hearted or converted or reconciled to the fact that I could not relieve myself of this chaplain whom I felt interfered with my way of praying in church. I still attended the Masses where he was the presider, but I still wanted him replaced with a chaplain I thought more suitable for my community. I felt no compassion for the man; I felt only my hard heart. I continued to put that anger with point-by-point detail at the feet of Jesus. I continued to ask God to remove that anger. As awful as it felt to me to encounter this chaplain every day, it was worse carrying around this heavy, cold, hard heart. So, I had, in effect, two problems: the chaplain and my anger.

When I sat before the crucifix in the oratory, whatever angry thoughts or feelings came, I lifted them up and mentally placed them at the feet of Jesus. You probably can guess the outcome. First, I began to feel a certain ease. It carried over into the liturgies which were officiated by the chaplain. There was ease too in my consciousness. Walking from here to there, I no longer obsessed with the thought of this chaplain. Then I experienced a shift in mood whenever I would sit at Jesus' feet. I would be present and nothing—no thoughts at all, certainly no angry thoughts—would be there. It was just me at the feet of our Lord. I imagined myself somewhat like the woman at the banquet who poured her tears and the ointment on Jesus' feet and dried it with her hair (Luke 7:36-50). Of course, it wasn't quite that dramatic, because I merely sat there, dwelling in Jesus—just sitting there, time and time again, at the feet of Jesus. The sitting was the prayer.

After about a year, the entire affliction passed. By the grace of God my anger moved past that glaring conscious stage of alert rage against the chaplain. He remained with our community for years beyond my terms as prioress. In those post-leadership years, I was able to reach out to him. He was battling cancer and received my full support and that of the community during some grueling years of treatments both here in Indianapolis and in Chicago. In his final

days, he lived in his home monastery. When I visited him, I felt only compassion for this man struggling with a terrible illness. A few months later, I attended the funeral that celebrated his life. My foe became my friend.

My anger affliction also became my teacher. My dispute with the chaplain wasn't the biggest problem I faced in my time as prioress. My anger was. My attachment to my own righteousness was formidable. It created a steady stream of wrath and sarcasm that radiated around me. Living in this state of rage was destructive mainly to me. The most serious damage was that it produced a very hard heart. I lacked compassion toward the chaplain, who, in the time my anger was directed at him, was in the early stages of cancer. My anger was more dangerous to me than if I had cancer. Anger was ingesting me, eating away all the light in my eyes.

Something else happened too during my hours before the cross. By the grace of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, I encountered the first stage of conversion. I realized that the situation was out of my control and power. As long as I was carrying this affliction, I was going in the wrong direction and taking my community with me. So there was a *metanoia*. There was a change of thinking. And there was the recognition that I needed help. I wanted our Lord to lift this affliction from me because it was harmful to others and to me. The one thing all people with addictions realize is that you can't get on the other side of addiction by your own efforts. You need help. I needed help.

The harm to me was that I could not pray. The directive of the Holy Spirit saved me: I was to take this affliction and lay it at Jesus' feet. The affliction was my prayer. I lifted up my hard heart to God.

The ongoing process is to listen to the prompting of grace. In my case, I found a prayer form, sitting in front of our Lord Jesus crucified on the cross, where I could lay out my heart. The way out of this affliction was a grace. Earlier in my journey, I perhaps would have thought that some aspirational prayer would relieve my suffering. But I needed grace, and I also needed to sit there every day and be humble at the feet of Jesus, to bow my head and kiss those feet, and to put my hand in his side, asking for help. I needed this personal gesture as well as formal prayer, which I continued to do with community: Liturgy of the Hours, Mass, and other gatherings.

Also, I realized that just going to confession would not ease the grip of this affliction, either. Once, during one of our community penance services, I was tempted to go to confession to this chaplain, but as I was walking toward his confessional I pivoted to another priest because I realized I was going to use confession to let him have a piece of my mind!

My affliction didn't ease quickly. It needed long, pleading prayer—even at the point when my mind became conscious of the change I wanted in my heart. It took a long

time to move that anger out of my heart, out of my body, out of every cell that was infected with the intoxication of self-righteousness, the scourging thought was that I was so right and everyone else so wrong. This disease, this virus, this absolute infection of anger didn't move out suddenly. It took time. And it moved out in surprising ways. I never had a moment of conversion during my sitting in the oratory or at the common prayers in chapel. My affliction of anger moved out gradually and in various places—while I walked or drove a car or wrote my correspondence and did the other work of daily life. In other words, rooting out an affliction of anger takes time, it takes form, and it takes a steady practice.

This isn't merely a question of resolve. I refrained from resolutions because I knew they wouldn't do it. They would serve only as measurements of my failure to live up to my own resolve. It took kind of a natural, organic pattern of letting go and moving on, because my desire was to not be angry. I saw that anger was an obstacle to my prayer, my relationships, my service, and the well-being of my body. Anger causes anxiety and agitation. When I'm perturbed, I react more quickly to triggers because I can transfer that anger instantly to somebody else. It's a learned response that prowls about, seeking whom it may devour, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 91:5-7. It is the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks

in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday. My adversary was like a roaring lion, walking about seeking someone to devour (1 Pet 5:8).

The experience of my anger with our chaplain and how that affliction eventually left me after lingering at the feet of our Lord showed me how I can change behaviors I no longer want. It was, in one sense, quite a gentle transformation. And yet, my anger was extirpated, literally pulled up by the roots. It is a grace available to all of us who suffer an affliction of anger.

Notice also why this story of anger is chapter 6 in this book: We saw in chapters 2 and 4 that Jesus reversed the victim-atonement-redemption phenomenon. We did careful analysis of Jesus' symbolic action in the temple. Jesus had no anger. The emotional state of Jesus is not the subject of the content in Scripture. Jesus harbored no anger, even during his passion and dying on the cross. There is no wrath in God. The church is the pastoral continuity of the reign of God in ongoing revelation during our times.

In the early monastic tradition, "right effort" is to do the inner work of renouncing anger; then God springs up. God is there all the time, but an affliction like anger places a dense fog in our consciousness. When the anger was lifted, I was naturally meek and kind. I did not have to practice being kind to the chaplain. The affliction shifted like the weather; the storm passed. On the other side of

anger, I did not need a reconciliation with this chaplain; I simply could relate naturally and with appropriate emotions. He received my change of heart graciously.

You might ask if my affliction of anger returned from time to time over these years. The answer is yes, but it was not as protracted or as stubborn. Chapter 7 gives some detail about how to prevent and to move out afflictions before they become such full-blown passions.