

Profound **Peace**

Facing Illness with Faith

FR. PATRICK RITTER



Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.
Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

Imprimi Potest: Stephen T. Rehrauer, CSsR, Provincial
Denver Province, the Redemptorists

Published by Liguori Publications, Liguori, Missouri 63057
To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

Copyright © 2018 Patrick Ritter

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Ritter, Patrick, author.

Title: Profound peace : facing illness with faith / Fr. Patrick Ritter.

Description: Liguori : Liguori Publications, 2018.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018036795 | ISBN 9780764828119

Subjects: LCSH: Sick—Religious life. | Ritter, Pat. | Catholic
Church—Clergy—Biography. | Priests—Washington (State)
—Biography.

Classification: LCC BV4910 .R58 2018 | DDC 248.8/6092 [B] —dc23
LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018036795>

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any
means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any
other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the
prior written permission of Liguori Publications.

ISBN 978-0-7648-2811-9

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, DC, and are used by permission of the copyright owner. All Rights Reserved. No part of the *New American Bible* may be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the copyright owner.

English translation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church for the United States of America* © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.

Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists. To learn more about the Redemptorists, visit Redemptorists.com.

Cover image: Shutterstock

Printed in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 / 5 4 3 2 1

First Edition

Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.

Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

Contents

FOREWORD	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	9
INTRODUCTION	11
CHAPTER ONE	
Life Can Quickly Take a Shocking Turn	15
CHAPTER TWO	
A Setback and Experiencing a Miracle	19
CHAPTER THREE	
We All Need a Christian Community	23
CHAPTER FOUR	
Home Sweet (Upside Down) Home	26
CHAPTER FIVE	
Another Setback and More Transitions	30
CHAPTER SIX	
Making Peace with a Lack of Control	33

CHAPTER SEVEN	
Stay Close to Christ Through Prayer All Your Life	36
CHAPTER EIGHT	
God's Gift of a Positive Attitude Is Everything!	41
CHAPTER NINE	
Celebrating the Sacraments of Unity, Healing, and His Holy Word	44
CHAPTER TEN	
Five Years Later	47
EPILOGUE	50
APPENDIX A	
Finding a Smile in the Struggle	53
APPENDIX B	
Prayers Before Surgery	57
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	64

Foreword

Many of us have faced the fear, uncertainty, vulnerability, loss of control, and pain that come with illness and surgery. While we may not have recognized it or admitted it beforehand, most of us had told ourselves for years that we were in charge of our lives and quite capable of fearlessly confronting whatever would come our way—and that we were supposed to live that way as adults.

However, life and its unexpected turns have a way of changing perspective on our many assumptions. Illness not only brings physical suffering, it also causes us to change attitudinally, spiritually, and emotionally. Moreover, illness challenges us to seek and expect in earnest the kind of healing of body, attitude, soul, and emotion that God provides for us. The roads to healing are as varied as our histories and personalities, and God is eager to accompany us personally along the way. One of the

first lessons God wants to teach us is that we are not alone and we shouldn't try to make it alone. God walks within and beside us, as do the many friends he sends to help us.

Fr. Pat Ritter's inviting book, *Profound Peace: Facing Illness with Faith*, is a gentle, sure, and wise guide along healing's path. In these pages, you'll soon see how his experience of multiple serious surgeries and complications opened him to God's love and healing in powerful, life-changing ways. In the midst of the challenges that life unexpectedly gave him, he found peace, courage, and even deeper faith. Active and creative as a busy pastor for many years, he let God teach him vital lessons through illness and surgery: to let go of control, trust in God's love, have confidence in the medical professionals caring for him, keep a positive attitude, learn to be vulnerable, rely on the loving help of family and friends, be open to surprises and the humor in each situation, stay close to God's word and sacraments of the Church, and grow even closer to Jesus in prayer.

Fr. Ritter discovered the foundation of prayer that had been part of his life for years not only brought stability and hope during his trials, it grew even stronger through those trials. In addition, his closeness to Jesus became even more palpable and life-sustaining.

Several years ago, Pope Francis said, “Fear is not a good counselor; he gives you bad advice.” But, as Fr. Ritter puts it, “Fear does not have the last word. God does.” Fear paralyzes, but God gives us the strength to put one foot in front of the other all the way to healing.

If you or a loved one have faced the unsettledness and disorientation of illness, this book will help you walk with God along a path that will bring you peace.

His peace,
Archbishop J. Peter Sartain, DD, STL
Archdiocese of Seattle

Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks to Archbishop J. Peter Sartain for his support of this project.

I greatly appreciate the work and wisdom of Julie Cipoletti, who served as my editor. Without her, this book would never have been published.

I am dedicating *Profound Peace* to my good friend, Fr. Gary Morelli, who died of cancer a few years ago. He was by my side through six surgeries.



Liguori Publications • © 2018 All rights reserved.
Liguori.org • 800-325-9521

Introduction

After answering God's call and enjoying the high energy and full life of serving as a priest in the Archdiocese of Seattle for more than forty years, everything suddenly changed for me.

The life I knew was turned upside down when I faced a series of five separate surgeries on my left hip, a life-threatening infection, and back surgery.

I was blessed to have some of the country's best doctors and medical care, a close and personal relationship with Jesus, and the support of family and my parish community. With their gifts and God's grace, I'm thankful to be here to share my story of experiencing a profound peace in the middle of a personal health crisis.

Are you facing health challenges today? My wish is that this book will help give you the assurance—deep in your heart—that you're not alone when facing the pain, suffering, and challenges involved in whatever your health crisis may be. God

is with you on your journey. I believe that great hope from God will see you through to the other side of any health challenge.

If you spend much time with me, you'll find that I'm a storyteller at heart and love to share a good laugh.

One of my favorite stories involves an old Irish pastor who was just finishing a nuptial Mass for a young couple. Just before they kissed, he decided to give a short sermon. "Stop! You think you're going to live like Prince Charming and Cinderella. Well, let me tell you, you're not!"

And then he went on to describe so many things that can happen in a marriage, like losing a job or having to move. You may get sick yourself, but you can't stay in bed because the children need you. The children will get measles or chicken pox.

I wondered why he was telling them all this when they were so starry-eyed and just starting out, having just pledged to love one another "in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health." But I will never forget what he said next.

"Yes, you're going to have problems like everyone else. But it's how you choose to *deal* with your problems in life that will make all the difference! Now kiss and get out of here!"

And so it is with my experience of facing surgery and illness with faith. You have to face and deal

with your difficulties when they arise, knowing that God is with you and suffers right along with you through your journey.

I hope this book will help you along the way and lead you to the beautiful experience of a profound peace.

I'll be praying for you.

God bless,

Fr. Pat

If you have specific prayer intentions you'd like to send to Fr. Pat, please e-mail his team at PrayerRequestsFrPat@outlook.com and Fr. Pat will be happy to include your requests in his prayers.

Chapter One

Life Can Quickly Take a Shocking Turn

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.

PSALM 23:4

At sixty-four, I was running a vibrant parish in a high-growth area of suburban Seattle and had my future planned. I would retire in about three years and spend part of my time living in sunny Palm Desert, CA. I had worked with the people of the parish and finished a major building project that would serve generations of families to come. My condo was just about paid off. Everything was on track, and I was feeling great.

Then one day I began to drag my left leg. I thought perhaps I had sprained it at the gym the day before. But over the next ten days it got worse, to the

point that some friends took me to the emergency unit. I couldn't walk at all. The doctor wasn't sure what it was. Fortunately I had a priest friend who could cover the three weekend Masses for me. It was just before Thanksgiving, and people brought me so much turkey, I thought I was going to sprout feathers!

The next week I was taken to a specialist at the hospital who took x-rays of my left hip. "You have no cartilage left in your hip," he said. "Someday you probably will need surgery."

"I can't have this problem," I replied. "I'm only sixty-four!" Yet I failed to recall that my mother had hip surgery when she was sixty-two.

After discussing options with my physician, I decided on a cortisone injection to alleviate the pain so I could offer Christmas Masses at my parish. Under fluoroscopy by the interventional radiologist, I received the injection, and then my left leg starting trembling and raised up toward the ceiling. I asked the nurse, "What's it doing?"

"I don't know," she said. "I've never seen that happen."

In a minute it settled down, but then it really began to hurt. I had worked with a trainer at the gym for five years. During that time, apparently the muscles in the left leg had all pulled to the right trying to protect the hip. Now that they were relaxing they

didn't know how to cooperate with each other. All the muscles in the leg hurt. The pain was so intense, I called the doctor and asked if he had time in the next few days to perform surgery! We arranged for surgery in four days. My only personal experience with surgery was fifty-nine years earlier, when I had my tonsils removed as a kindergartner.

I was concerned about my parochial responsibilities, but fortunately I had secured excellent staff members who were more than capable of handling all that was involved in running our lively parish and school. I felt matters would be in good hands, but little did I know how my life would change.

My doctors told me that the greatest fear is the fear of the unknown. Isn't that the truth? I knew I needed God's help to get me through this. I received the anointing of the sick and felt an overwhelming sense of support and love as the parish and school staff gathered to pray for me. I would soon discover that my journey through surgery and illness had only just begun. What I did know was that I had the undeniable sense that God was with me, by my side.

.....*Prayer*

(while lighting a candle or vigil light)

God our Savior, allow me to follow your holy light
and to trust that you are leading me along your path.
Enlighten my tough decisions and burn away from me
any resistance to your will.

.....*Reminder*

Life doesn't always follow the path you have set for
yourself.

.....*Reflection*

Reflect on the shock of a time when your life may have
been turned upside down. Where did you see glimmers
of God's light illuminating your darkness, leading you
along the way?