

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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## God Is Not a Chump

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

**T**he following letter was sent to the SA mailbox, but I believe it requires a detailed response because the writer captures a feeling often experienced by members of SA:

*Dear Father,*

*I think I've had scrupulosity for a year or two. I feel like I often confess things that are not really sins, but I'm not sure. When I do an examination of conscience, sometimes I cannot think of my sins regarding a commandment, yet I know I'm sinning all the time. I just found your website and recognize myself in some of the "10 Commandments for the Scrupulous."*

*Anyway, I try to confess only sins I've actually committed, but here is my problem: When I think of letting go of my sense of remorse and guilt over my very bad and sinful behavior when I was young (sins of debauchery I have done my best to confess fully), I feel like if I do, I am cheapening what it cost Our Lord for what I've done. In other words, to let myself be happy again feels like I am not grateful; like someone paid a million-dollar fine for me, and I give them a quick "thanks a lot" and go on my merry way (being happy again). How can I let go of my remorse and guilt without getting a sense I am treating God like a chump?*

God is not a chump! A chump is a person who is foolish or easily deceived, so it's actually quite difficult to identify our Father in this manner. Our innermost thoughts, desires, and attitudes are completely and totally revealed to our heavenly Father. He knows and understands our strengths and weaknesses completely. He knows us better than we know ourselves. He cannot be deceived.

It might be better to put the emphasis on yourself instead of on God. I think you're trying to say it's incomprehensible to you that God is totally and completely willing to love and forgive you and that his all-encompassing and redeeming love is unlimited. It's hard for us to comprehend that God offers his love freely and completely to all of his creation at all times and in all places despite circumstances and events we consider compromising.

But it's true. And God's love for you cannot be compromised; it's eternal. Even though you might not understand or appreciate the full extent of this reality, it's true—and it's not dependent on your understanding because it's an unmerited gift from God.

You are not alone in your inability to fully accept or comprehend this kind of love. As a general rule, human beings aren't capable of loving in this manner. The love

we offer another person, and even the love we have for ourselves, is more often than not conditional. Despite our best intentions and efforts, it seems this is always the case. Perhaps we routinely experience conditional love because we're not capable of fully experiencing the building blocks of love—truth, vulnerability, and intimacy—which are also the foundation of authentic relationships.

To know, understand, and accept ourselves means to be willing to see ourselves exactly as we are, not as we one day might be. To experience the truth of who we are means to acknowledge that we are very much a work in progress, constantly growing and developing even though we have a specific past. We are limited by our experience.

Our concept of God, however, goes beyond limits and boundaries. Since God is the creator of time past, time present, and time future, God is not limited in any manner, shape, or form. God is the ultimate reality and the ultimate truth. Nothing about him needs to be shaped, molded, or improved. God is complete.

Yet God the all-powerful creator has freely exposed himself to an unnecessary vulnerability. God has chosen to offer his love to his creation and to permit that creation to freely return or withhold that love.

God invites and enables love, but he doesn't demand it as a condition for life. He doesn't snuff out our life if we refuse to return his love.

When we freely choose to return God's love, he rejoices; when we choose to not to return his love—in whatever manner that might be—God continues to love us.

God even lets his creatures live with a false sense of invulnerability, pretending in some way that they are in control. All the while, God waits patiently and expectantly for an experience of awakening that will again invite a creature back into the authentic dynamic of relationship.

**T**his dynamic experience speaks to us of a wonderful but incomprehensible mystery. It speaks to us of an intimacy in relationship that is so far outside our experience we often believe it's not possible.

When we hear about God's unconditional love and forgiveness, our hearts leap with joy and expectation: Can this be true? Can there be an unconditional love I can claim for myself?

The answer is a resounding *yes*, but that is also the incomprehensible part of the experience that our writer references in his question. It is perhaps the primary reason we try to hold on to remorse and guilt instead of rejoicing and celebrating in the gift of grace we've received. By clinging to something that makes us feel incomplete and undeserving, we're trying to maintain some illusion of control.

God doesn't want us to live with illusion. He wants us to live and celebrate our lives as free children of God.

*God is no chump.* The mystery of God's grace at work in our lives is pure gift to every one of us. Let go of the remorse, let go of the guilt, and let yourself live in the freedom only God can give his creation.

### *Prayer and Reflection*

Jesus, you do not look to condemn any of your children but desire to blot out their offenses and be in full communion with each of us. Help us not to dwell on our weaknesses but on your infinite love for us. Amen.

- When have you experienced the loving embrace of one who deeply loves you? How has this experience touched you personally?
- Do you believe God loves you unconditionally? Explain.

### *Spiritual Exercise*

Journal today about the moments you have felt God's merciful embrace. If it helps, reach out to someone you are close to—a spouse, sibling, or child—and offer some expression of appreciation and affection.

Adapted from *Meditations on Vatican Art* by Fr. Mark Haydu, LC, STL (Liguori Publications, © 2013). To see sample pages, visit [vaticanart.org](http://vaticanart.org).



### ***2014 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreats Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR***

#### ***Friday, Jan. 24 – Sunday, Jan. 26***

Spiritual Life Center, Wichita, KS  
For information, call 316-744-0167 or  
visit [slc.retreatportal.net/calendar/events.aspx](http://slc.retreatportal.net/calendar/events.aspx)

#### ***Friday, May 9 – Sunday, May 11***

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ  
For information, call 520-744-3400 or  
visit [desertrenewal.org](http://desertrenewal.org) and click on "Events Calendar"

#### ***Friday, Dec. 12 – Sunday, Dec. 14***

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI  
For information, call 262-567-6900



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

# MAILBOX

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE • LIGUORI, MO 63057-9999  
NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

**Q** Every New Year I promise God that I will change behaviors or actions that are impediments to my growth. I do well for a couple of days, and then I'm back to my old habits. Since I made a promise to God, is my failure to keep it a sin?

**A** It is most certainly not a sin. You have no moral obligation to fulfill such promises. God understands the struggle it takes to change human behavior and doesn't hold us accountable when we fail.

However, it might help if you pray to God for help and guidance instead of making a promise. That way, you have none of the pressure and all the help you need. If you fail, just try again. Please be at peace in this matter.

**Q** I have distracting and blasphemous thoughts when I'm in line for Communion. When this happens, should I ask for a blessing when I receive Communion, or should I skip Communion and go back to my seat?

**A** The consistent advice of all of the priest directors of SA is to receive Communion. People who struggle with these types of thoughts are most vulnerable to them when they're in line to receive Communion. Nothing would please the Tempter more than for you to go back to your seat. But nothing would be more pleasing to the Lord than for you to receive his Body and Blood and the grace you need in the Eucharist even with all of your distractions and thoughts. Please be at peace in this matter.



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