

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

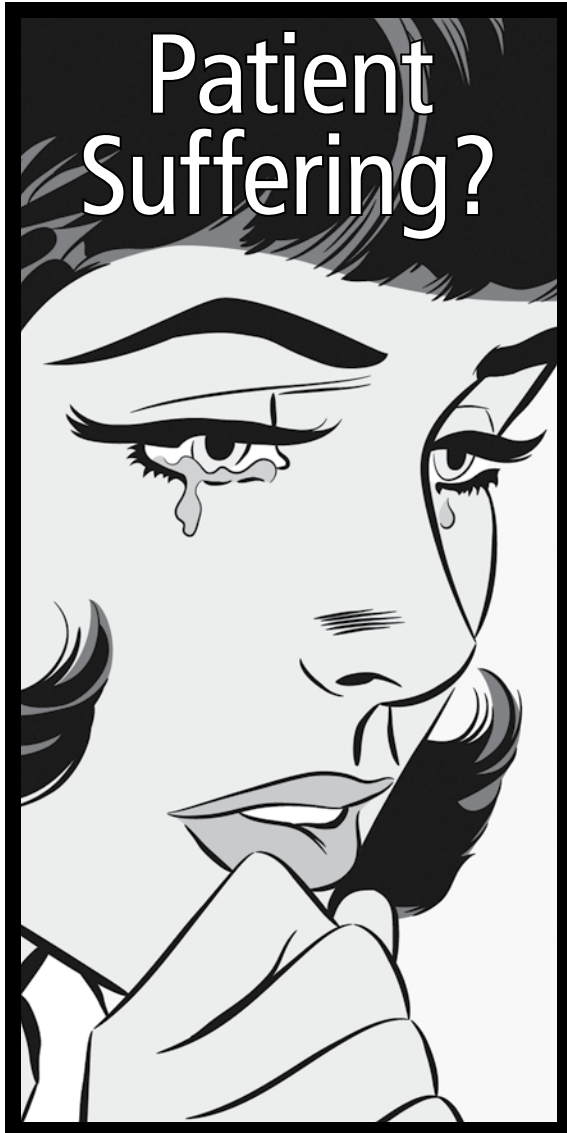
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I occasionally hear from SA members a refrain I find a little puzzling and contradictory to my own understanding. The refrain involves a deeply held belief that God deliberately inflicts scrupulosity on certain people to test their faith. To pass God's test, they must endure "patient suffering" and resist any remedy. To do otherwise would displease God.

This understanding and perspective contradicts my perspective—and Church teaching. The Church doesn't teach that God inflicts suffering on his people. Illness and suffering are a consequence of the presence of sin *in the world*. They are not wielded by God to punish sin in individual people. God doesn't single people out for manifestations of illness and disease. Both the just and the unjust experience suffering and pain.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that "illness and suffering have always been among the gravest problems confronted in human life. In illness, [we experience] powerlessness, ... limitations, and ... finitude" (1500). The Church also reminds men and women of faith that in the compassionate Christ encountered in the Gospels, we experience a resplendent sign: "God has visited his people" (1503). Jesus "took our infirmities and bore our diseases" (1505). Jesus is firmly on the side of the person who suffers—Jesus is not the person who inflicted the suffering.

Seek healing from professionals

We should not be paralyzed by the belief that a person's suffering is God's will. It's well worth the effort to embrace the concept that Jesus walks with the person who suffers. A story from the Gospels illustrates this important distinction.

In John 5, we are invited to reflect on an encounter between Jesus and a man who could not walk. He had been reclining on a mat by a healing pool for years but couldn't get into the pool. If this man thought of himself as a victim, would he have continued to struggle day after day to get in the pool and receive the healing power of the love of—Jesus? No. Without the struggle, without the desire to be healed, without the conviction that he *could* be healed, he would have stayed in the shadows feeling sorry for himself, and Jesus would have passed by.

Taking the stance of a victim is *not*, by any stretch of the imagination, patient suffering. Resisting help and refusing to consider the possibility that relief is possible is *not* a virtue.

When a person has an illness for a long time, he or she can get tired and begin to give up hope. The person may even fear hope, knowing disappointment is possible. It's hard to keep hoping for something in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

That being said, if we don't take a risk, it's almost impossible to heal. There is no substitute for taking a risk or a leap of faith—it's part of the healing process.

On the other hand, when we work with professionals and suffer as part of the healing process—that is when patient suffering is a virtue. In that case, patience is an acknowledgment of the process and a realization that not all good things happen

instantly. More often than not, healing is slow and deliberate. Change is marked in very small steps.

Seek healing in the sacraments

The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is appropriate for people with scrupulosity who are truly patiently suffering. As a healing sacrament and one of the sacraments of reconciliation, anointing of the sick can be a significant experience of God's grace for the person who has any disease.

People with scrupulosity should receive this sacrament when it is communally celebrated within the parish so they can experience the grace of this sacrament. I've been told by many with scrupulosity that the anointing of the sick has become a significant part of their healing journey.

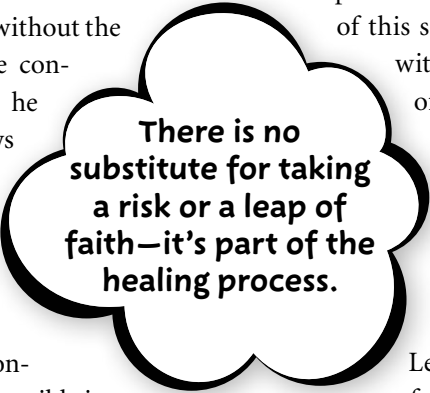
As we begin our Lenten journey toward Easter, an appropriate spiritual practice for the readers of the SA newsletter seems obvious. In place of the traditional Lenten practice of giving something up for Lent, it may be more helpful to choose to reorient our perception and understanding.

Ask for the grace to actively participate in your personal journey of healing from scrupulosity.

If you are burdened with an obstacle to healing—the belief that scrupulosity is God's will for you—ask to be freed from this perception.

Seek the grace of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick as a dynamic expression of your personal belief in the healing power of the Lord.

When we actively commit our energy and desire to the process of healing, the power of grace flows, and what is hoped for often becomes a reality, not just a dream or a fantasy of some unknown day or time in the future.



There is no substitute for taking a risk or a leap of faith—it's part of the healing process.

Worth the Journey

The following is adapted from *The Catholic Briefcase: Tools for Integrating Faith and Work* by Randy Hain (Liguori Publications, © 2011).

Putting God first and blending your faith with every aspect of your life will promote balance and peace and help you on your faith journey toward a deeper relationship with God. Of course, this is easier said than done. It's a challenge that takes time and effort.

Around the time of my conversion to the Church, when I was still struggling and praying about how to lead an integrated life, a friend recommended I read the writings of John Paul II. One of the first works I encountered was his 1988 apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*. This passage made a great impression on me: "The unity of life of the lay faithful is of the greatest importance: indeed they must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ."

John Paul II gave words to what I had been seeking. The mission of the lay faithful forces us to consider the workplace as fertile ground in which to do God's work. As we know from numerous Scripture passages and Church teaching, we are all called to lead lives of holiness and to be witnesses for Christ. Our workplace vocation is necessarily a critical component of responding to that call.

Why is this important?

Promoting this integration will help us become better Christians and reverse the negative effects—mental, emotional, moral—of keeping our faith separate from the rest of our lives. Consider this relevant perspective from my friend, frequent ministry collaborator, and mentor, Deacon Mike Bickerstaff: "We can no more stop being Catholic at work or in the public square than we can stop breathing. To do the latter is to die physically. To do the former is to die spiritually. We must resist a culture that promotes reaching for the lifestyles of the rich and famous. Jesus said that no one can serve two masters (see Matthew 6:24). The danger has been much evident in the workplace, where excessive attention to career has resulted in failed marriages and devastated families. Our jobs (careers) should support our vocations. Our vocations must never be sacrificed or neglected to support our jobs. This understanding is at the heart of integrating our faith throughout our daily lives."

The challenge is to adopt new practices and strategies, not as a bunch of new "to-dos," but as part of a broader, unifying approach to balance and integration. It isn't easy, but it's worth the journey.





SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

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Q *I read that it's a sin to watch TV or use my computer on Sundays because in doing so I'm forcing someone to work on the Sabbath. I'm afraid that if I do this in the future and don't confess it, I won't have a firm purpose of amendment. Can you please help me?*

A Your source on this matter is very much in error. I am further reminded, when I hear this kind of advice from people who are supposedly providing pastoral and spiritual direction, of these words of Jesus': "They tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4).

Ignore the directive and do not concern yourself about the supposed outcome. There is no sin here—only incomplete pastoral advice.



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Q *Lenten regulations of fast and abstinence confuse me. I try to keep the rules and regulations, and I find myself anxious and worried. I'm sure I'm missing something and committing grave sin.*

A The Lenten regulations are quite simple. In general, fast *and* refrain from eating meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On the other Fridays of Lent, you needn't fast, but you do refrain from eating meat. And that's it.

These rules are for people who are in good health and not pregnant. Skipping meat is for people aged fourteen and older; fasting is for people aged eighteen through fifty-eight.

In this case, fasting means eating only one full meal per day. It should be simple in quantity and quality (from a spiritual point of view, a gourmet meal on Good Friday is not a good idea). And on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, it shouldn't contain meat.