

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPТОRISTS

FEBRUARY 2014

Vol. 51, No. 2



Scrupulous Anonymous
One Liguori Drive
Liguori, MO 63057-9999
ScrupulousAnonymous.org

PART 1 OF 2

The Joy of the Gospel

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Recently Pope Francis released a document called an *exhortation*, a communication that encourages and enlightens. Exhortations aren't orientated toward doctrine, and they aren't as influential as encyclicals, but they're nonetheless important in the life of the Church.

Called *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*), this exhortation speaks about the new evangelization, the missionary transformation of the Church, and the challenges of today's world—all within the context of exhorting the people of God to find joy in the gospel. Members of Scrupulous Anonymous will find the following section particularly reassuring:

I want to remind priests that the confessional must not be a torture chamber but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy which spurs us on to do our best. A small step, in the midst of great human limitations, can be more pleasing to God than a life which appears outwardly in order but moves through the day without confronting great difficulties. Everyone needs to be touched by the comfort and attraction of God's saving love, which is mysteriously at work in each person, above and beyond their faults and failings. (44)

These words come from the Holy Father's pastoral heart, from his sense of the struggles of the people of God. His feelings and convictions are not the result of study or lofty academic pursuit, but rather of his personal experience in the confessional listening to people who came to the sacrament to receive God's grace. Surely some of the people who sought his support and his guidance struggled with scrupulosity.

In *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis makes at least three distinct points that relate to scrupulosity. First, he acknowledges that the experience of confession can be very painful. People with scrupulosity don't seek this misery and suffering. These feelings are the debilitating effects of the obsession, compulsion, and ritual that play out within the sacrament. The ritual brings short-lived relief that is soon replaced with even more doubting, anxiety, and frustration as the cycle repeats itself with no end in sight.

Second, the Holy Father understands that the effort expended by scrupulous penitents is not rewarded proportionally by the sacrament. Usually when we expend significant energy, we experience a

comparable return. But for people with scrupulosity, the energy is consumed by the scrupulous ritual of confession, doubt, anxiety, questions, more confession, more doubt, and even more anxiety. There is no sense of sustained relief or accomplishment, no sense of pleasing God or of pleasing self. There's just more of the same, again and again.

Pope Francis reassures us that even “a small step, in the midst of great human limitations” is pleasing to God. The confession of sins does not have to be perfect, complete, or exhaustive: The effort itself is pleasing to God.

Third, the Holy Father recognizes that scrupulosity is a burden carried all day, every day. It's frequently unnoticed by those we associate with, but it's nonetheless very real. He understands that “great difficulties” rob people of the knowledge that they are loved by God. Scrupulosity makes the smallest defect, sin, or failing into a very heavy load. Scrupulosity exaggerates the effects of sin and encourages the false belief that a person is somehow cut off—permanently barred from the fullness of God's grace. Pope Francis assures us that we are loved by God in ways we cannot even begin to comprehend.

In his introduction to *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis says,

God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy....No one can strip us of the dignity bestowed upon us by this boundless and unfailing love. With a tenderness which never disappoints, but is always capable of restoring our joy, he makes it possible for us

to lift up our heads and to start anew. Let us not flee from the resurrection of Jesus, let us never give up, come what will. (3)

I believe that if the Holy Father could speak to our group, he would assure us that he understands that the burden of scrupulosity is exhausting. So many times we are tempted to give up, to let feelings of desperation and depression overwhelm us. That's when we need to remind ourselves of these words of Pope Francis' and hold on to the conviction that the Lord has not abandoned us. We may not feel his love and his concern, but his grace and his life are real.

The Lord invites us to “lift up our heads” and to believe we are nonetheless loved and forgiven by God. The illness and manifestation of scrupulosity may attempt to strip us of our dignity as children of God, but God's grace will never be defeated. In the words of the Holy Father,

I realize of course that joy is not expressed the same way at all times in life, especially at moments of great difficulty. Joy adapts and changes, but it always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved. I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress. (6)

Next month: Imputability and responsibility

New Wineskins, New Hope

The following is adapted from *Peaceful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time (Weeks 1–9)* by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (© 2012, Liguori Publications).

[Jesus said to them] “No one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”

MARK 2:22

Reflection When we repeat the thought and behavior patterns that keep us stressed and unfulfilled, the wineskin of our life is ready to burst.

Jesus challenges us to discard our old habits of anxiety and doubt and face each day with a new attitude of love and hope. We can face the world with confidence in God’s love. We can let go of yesterday’s troubles and worries and focus on doing our best today. We can approach our responsibilities with a fresh outlook, trusting that God will show us what to do and how to do it. We can refuse to project into the future and instead put our energy into enjoying all that today offers us.

Jesus shows us a new way of living with God as our source of love and strength. We can bring our fears about finances, bills, and employment to God and wait for guidance. We can go to God when we are tired, lonely,

or ill and receive comfort and love. We can sit in solitude with God and rest in the silent healing of God’s grace.

When life’s pressures, tasks, and requirements make us feel like we are about to implode, we can remember to discard our old way of meeting life’s demands and take up the new way that Jesus teaches us: Surrendering to God’s will of love of God, ourselves, and our neighbors.

Ponder What old habits do I need to discard?

Prayer Lord, you are the new wine of life, love, and peace. Bless me with the willingness to pour out love and joy into the lives of my sisters and brothers.

Practice Today I will try a new approach to a familiar task.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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

Q *My dog passed away after being part of our family for 15 years. I know he was just a dog, but that doesn't mean I don't feel incomplete and mourn his passing. Is it a sin to mourn the loss of a pet?*

A Grief and the effects of loss are natural, totally understandable, and not sinful in any way no matter what the cause. Pets and their human companions relate to each other in very strong ways. When their bond is ruptured through death, healing is necessary. In time your mourning will be replaced with a memory that will be satisfying—incomplete, of course, but nevertheless satisfying.

Q *English is our priest's second language, and I can't understand him during Mass. Is Mass valid even when you can't understand the priest?*

A Yes, without question. When you travel in a foreign country, you go to Mass even though it's celebrated in a language you don't understand, and it's valid. It's the same at home. Celebration of Mass and your participation in it are much more than the words.



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

Friday, May 9 – Sunday, May 11
Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ
For information, call 520-744-3400 or
visit 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

liguori.org



Please help us continue Scrupulous Anonymous and other Liguori Publications ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is Redemptorist Fathers dba Liguori Publications, Federal ID 43-0653409. To make a donation, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

© 2014 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. ScrupulousAnonymous.org **Policy on Copying or Distributing:** *Individuals* may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous* provided 1) you don't remove this copying/distributing policy and 2) you don't seek or accept payment for the copies. **Nonprofit organizations** may quote SA in publications offered at no cost as long as you identify *Scrupulous Anonymous* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (Liguori Publications, liguori.org). **For commercial or other purposes**, 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. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists (redemptorists.com). Scripture texts in this work are taken from the *New American Bible*, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Inc., Washington, DC. All Rights Reserved.