

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

MARCH 2015  
Vol. 52, No. 3



*Scrupulous Anonymous*  
One Liguori Drive  
Liguori, MO 63057-9999  
[ScrupulousAnonymous.org](http://ScrupulousAnonymous.org)

## Relationship Is Essential

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

**T**he year 2014 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the popular musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Most of us can hum a few bars from at least one of its songs. It's now considered a classic, but did you know that when the show was first conceived, its central theme wasn't clear to its creators?

"Why would anyone spend their hard-earned money to watch a story about the struggles of a Russian Jewish peasant and his wife and five unmarried daughters? What is this show really about?" they asked. The answer was found in the song that became the opening number: "Tradition." It showed us why we should care about these people and set the stage for a story about tradition.

Throughout 2015 we're celebrating another, much more important, fifty-year anniversary: the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1965. Here, too, the participants had questions: "What is this council really about?"

For some, the council's most lasting impact involved moving the furniture around and celebrating Mass in the local language.

But was that really all that happened?

Actually, no, but it's taken about fifty years for

many of the changes to become clear. Pope Francis has brought the meaning of the council into even more focus. What we've learned from Francis has been very important for our Scrupulous Anonymous family.

**F**rom my perspective, Vatican II was primarily about relationship. The Church that had emerged from the turmoil of the Council of Trent and the reality of life in the sixteenth century was highly structured, hierarchical, and law centered. It served us well for a very long time, but it ran out of steam as the needs of the Church and its people dramatically changed.

Vatican II changed the Church's emphasis. Its new understanding is summarized best with its identification of the people as the people of God. I don't think we understood how dramatic this identification truly was, but fifty years later it's coming more and more into focus, assuming a living and energetic clarity.

We're still learning what it means to be the people of God. We're still learning what it means to proclaim that we're in relationship with each other and with God.

This is a whole new way of being, a whole new way of seeing. It takes time and effort and, perhaps most of all, persistence, patience, and perspective.

Pope Francis is making this experience of relationship all the more clear: “Who am I to judge?” he asked early in his papacy. This makes absolutely no sense to people with a juridical and dogmatic point of view, because the whole point of law and dogma is to judge, define, and sort. But “Who am I to judge?” makes total and complete sense from the position of relationship because relationship doesn’t separate or exclude—it integrates and includes.

The Church’s difference in emphasis is an essential reality for those who believe, as Jesuit Fr. Teilhard de Chardin once wrote, that “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

Understanding what it means to be in a relationship with Jesus as people of God is important for everyone, but it’s important in an additional way for members of the Scrupulous Anonymous family. Our relationship with Jesus isn’t earned or merited; it’s a gift of grace bestowed upon us at baptism. It’s not a relationship we can lose. It’s not a relationship that is totally and at all times at risk, fragile, or fleeting.

God doesn’t give us this relational gift of grace and then hold that relationship over our heads until he decides to take it away because of our error or weakness. Relationships can become seriously stressed,

but they don’t usually suffer mortal damage. They can, but they usually don’t. From that perspective, it’s easier to understand everyday human faults, foibles, and failings.

**I**f we can learn to think about our relationship with Jesus from the perspective of grace and not put as much emphasis on law, sin, number, kind, and the other baggage that weighs us down, that would be a good first step toward understanding what it means to be in a relationship with Jesus as people of God. If we can begin to use some of the other skills we’ve developed through the healthy relationships we’ve enjoyed with family and friends, perhaps we can apply those experiences to our relationship with Jesus.

This kind of graced effort can result in significant healing and restoration even in people with scrupulosity. The effort alone will help us grow in our appreciation that as people of God, we walk with the Lord and the Lord walks with us. We’re not alone, isolated, or alienated—rather, we are loved, forgiven, and welcomed each day into his loving embrace.

And that’s what it’s all about. The meaning of who we are and what we’re called to do is the Christian *tradition* of the powerful activity of grace and the movement of the spirit.

We just need to see it more clearly—and claim it for ourselves.

[ScrupulousAnonymous.org](https://ScrupulousAnonymous.org)



# Reflection

Adapted from *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*  
by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2011).

**W**e are each a little kingdom made in God's image of goodness and love. Yet sometimes we feel impatient, anxious, overwhelmed, over-burdened, and under-appreciated. We feel negative, depressed, and lonely. We feel that God has abandoned us. We feel that no one cares about us. We feel lost in a spiritual desert.

Any time we feel off-center and out of control, we have become a divided kingdom. This is the time when we must take a deep look inside ourselves to discover the source of the division. Often we are grieving a loss—job, friendship, marriage, our children heading off to college, health, a loved one's death. Grief is complicated. We go through cycles of anger, blame, bargaining, and depression before we let go and accept reality. We need to be especially gentle during times of grieving.

Sometimes we are afraid—of failure, change, letting others down, the consequences of our ac-

tions, the future, death. Fear paralyzes us. It is an inability to love ourselves in the moment. When we recognize the fear, we can reassure ourselves of God's unconditional love and pray to be guided by that love.

Once we acknowledge the source of our inner division, we feel reconnected with God, the source of our wholeness, and find our way out of the spiritual desert we have experienced.

**Ponder:** What divides my inner kingdom?

**Prayer:** Lord, you speak words of unity and love. Forgive me for not listening. Show me how to live an integrated life of faith, hope, and love.

**Practice:** Today I will pray for a spirit of wholeness; I will fast from divisiveness; I will join in a community gathering.

**Be sure to listen** to Fr. Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," on Radio Maria USA. The show airs Wednesdays at 2 pm Eastern Time.

**To listen:** Go to [radiomaria.us/scrupulosity](http://radiomaria.us/scrupulosity) to access podcasts or listen live

**To call in:** 866-333-MARY (6279)

**To e-mail a question to Fr. Santa:** Go to [radiomaria.us/scrupulosity](http://radiomaria.us/scrupulosity) and complete the form.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

# MAILBOX

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

**Q** *Can prayer become an unhealthy ritual? What are the warning signs?*

**A** Any human activity can become ritualized; we tend to repeat thoughts, words, and actions that help us or make us feel better. Prayer can become an unhealthy obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) ritual. The most obvious warning sign is when prayer becomes a burden, when it becomes something you're compelled to do, often with an impending sense of doom and dissatisfaction. Another sign is that prayer makes you anxious.

This is a wonderful topic to discuss with your confessor and spiritual director.

**Q** *When does a thought become a mortal sin? Many thoughts run through my head all day and all night. I never have a moment when I'm not distracted. Sometimes the thoughts even seem to be blasphemous.*

**A** Every human being has random thoughts cascading through his or her head. The only people who don't are engaged in a level of mindfulness that takes years of highly disciplined spiritual practice to achieve.

So, if we all have random thoughts of various intensity and feeling, how can such thoughts be our responsibility?

If there is no freedom, there is no sin. To say otherwise is to suggest that God created us in such a manner that we are constantly at serious risk of sin.

That is not my understanding and experience of God.

*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.*

© 2015 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. **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, ScrupulousAnonymous.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, photocopying, 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.