

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous  
One Liguori Drive  
Liguori, MO 63057-9999

## Excessive Criticism

A friend regularly sends me e-mails that are critical of the president of the United States. The president can do absolutely nothing that pleases my friend. My friend's extensive mailing list suggests that he intentionally does no self-censoring and delights in letting everyone know his opinion.

Now, I understand that this president irritates some people. The previous president also irritated some people, and undoubtedly the next president will too. I suppose all of this irritation is a normal part of our national dialogue.

What concerns me about my friend isn't his politics. It's that he's engaging in an ever-escalating form of criticism that goes beyond dialogue and discussion to the point that the criticism itself seems to be more important to him than the subject or focus.

And it's not just the president anymore: His list of targets is ever expanding. I wonder if he stands outside at night looking at the sunset, thinking God used too much pink and not enough orange!

*Fr. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.*

*Measured* use of criticism—the occasional disagreement with another person or the critical diagnosis of a specific problem—is a healthy expression of the gifts of judgment and perception God gave

us. But *excessive* use of criticism is ultimately unhelpful in large doses, as is any negative behavior that engages our feelings, taps into our senses, or provokes an emotional charge. Excessive criticism concerns me because it's so damaging to the human and spiritual person.

We pay a price when we use our gifts or talents beyond their intended use. When we haven't exercised for a long time and suddenly go on a ten-mile hike, the sore muscles, blisters, and lack of energy we experience the next day aren't a surprise. Muscles have a way of reminding us that they cannot be abused in this manner.

Excessive use of criticism affects us in the same way; unfortunately, our spiritual self isn't as easily informed of abuse as our physical self is, so we must be even more vigilant.

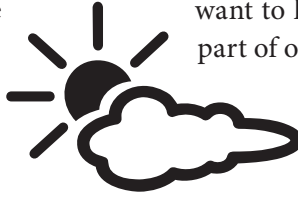
## HOPE FORGOTTEN

When our first reaction is to be critical, to be mistrusting, or to find fault, we eventually forget how to be enthusiastic and hopeful. Instead of being surrounded by joy, peace, and energy, we're sullen, anxious, empty, and tired.

Excessive use of criticism drains us of imagination, dreams, and hope for change. We can become suspicious, mistrusting, full of anger, and convinced there is nothing of value around us. We often become hard-hearted, demanding, unrelenting—frankly, the type of person no one wants to be around.

Jesus constantly encountered people unable to believe in something bigger than their personal experience or perception of life. He was subjected to a constant chorus of criticism from the scribes and Pharisees because he didn't fit *their* image of what the Messiah should be. He didn't fit *their* definition of what God desired for his people. Jesus couldn't do anything they would find life-giving, grace-filled, or a source of blessing. Eventually, Jesus was so saddened by the scribes and the Pharisees that he lost patience with them (see Mark 3:1–6).

I have a feeling that many of the scribes and Pharisees feasted on the half-truths, innuendos, and anger that fuel unjustified criticism. Instead of feasting on love, patience, gentleness, forgiveness, and the other gifts of the Spirit of God, they slowly fell into the all-consuming pain and anxiety of people who can no longer celebrate life. Jesus disliked being around them, and it wouldn't surprise me if their friends and families felt the same way. So, it seems, it may well be with my e-mail friend.



## HOPE EMBRACED

I've been tempted to add my friend's e-mail address to my junk-mail list so I no longer have to pay attention to his daily diatribe, but I keep hoping he'll send an e-mail that's positive and life-giving. After all, grace abounds and the power of the Spirit of God is untiring and unceasing.

As we celebrate Easter, one thing we might want to leave deeply buried in the tomb is any part of ourselves that is excessively critical.

The feast of the resurrection speaks to us of light and life. Jesus invites us to embrace a way of life that is nourished by hope, animated by grace, and filled with a sense of blessing. If any part of us makes living a resurrected life difficult or even impossible, now is the time to have the courage to let it go, to leave it in the past, and to embrace the vision and the hope of a future free of such pain and anxiety.

For yesterday is but a dream,  
And tomorrow is only a vision:  
But today well lived  
Makes every yesterday  
a dream of happiness,  
And every tomorrow  
a vision of hope.  
Look well, therefore, to this day.

SANSKRIT PROVERB

From *Prayers for Coping With Cancer*,  
Liguori Publications, 2009.

# Our Need to Contribute

The following is adapted from *Spiritual Blueprint: How We Live, Work, Love, Play, and Pray* by James L. Papandrea, MDiv, PhD (Liguori Publications, 2010).

A secondary vocation isn't necessarily the same as one's occupation, though it can be. Vocation is more than a job. It is a calling, a pull from some force drawing or driving a person toward a particular mission in life. That force may be God, or it may be simply the result of the talents we were born with and the way we were raised. I do believe, however, that when a calling comes from God, it is accompanied by the spiritual gifts to fulfill that calling.

We all have an inborn need to exercise the talents and gifts we have. This is related to the need to be wanted and needed and to be useful. Humans have a need not just to belong, but to contribute. This is intimately connected to the way community plays a part in our identity.

Your secondary vocation is most likely related to your spiritual gifts and talents and to your unique personality. Therefore, the more your occupation can overlap with your secondary vocation, the more fulfilling it will be.

We also have a need to express ourselves through creativity. This doesn't necessarily mean something "artsy." Many people think they're

not creative, simply because they're not interested in (or good at)

creating art. But since we are all created in the image of a creative God, everyone is creative in some way. It's often just a matter of trial and error until a person finds the right creative outlet.

But suppression of a person's creativity can lead to an uneasy feeling—a feeling that life is being wasted—and eventually even to depression.

A person's secondary vocation can change throughout life. As we grow, our relationship to the world around us changes, so the way we contribute might also change.

God may call us to one thing, only to call us to something else later. But no experience is wasted—everything we've done and are doing prepares us for what's next.





# SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

One Liguori Drive • Liguori, MO 63057-9999

**Q** *When a priest says, "I forgive you all your sins past and present," does he mean even if you didn't confess each sin? I've confessed in Lourdes and Fatima "all the sins of my life," but my sins were very serious. I trust in the mercy of God. I'm just afraid I won't present him with a complete sheet of confession.*

**A** Your sincere willingness to present yourself for forgiveness within the sacrament means all your sins are forgiven, with no exception and no conditions. The power of the grace of the sacrament of reconciliation is that our Father, through the sacramental encounter with the person of Jesus and the power of the Spirit of God, completely forgives our sins whether they're confessed in Lourdes, Fatima, your hometown, or anywhere else no spiritual tourist might ever visit, and it's complete regardless of how mortal or venial the sins. Be at peace.

**Q** *Canon law 988 §1 and Baltimore Catechism question 794 say people who honestly forget to confess a mortal sin are still forgiven, but if they recall the mortal sin afterward they must confess it in the next confession. What about people with scrupulosity? Should they confess forgotten mortal sins or simply go forward fresh with each honest confession?*

**A** First, I urge all people with scrupulosity to stop reading the *Code of Canon Law* and the *Baltimore Catechism*. Doing so will only increase the anxiety and questioning. You may think you'll find relief, but you won't.

Second, *all people*, not only those with scrupulosity, should "go forward fresh with each honest confession." That's the purpose of the sacrament and the best spiritual practice and attitude *all* can acquire. God bless you.

2010  
Scrupulous  
Anonymous  
Retreat

Friday, May 14, 2010—Sunday, May 16, 2010

**Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.**

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, Arizona

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