

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPТОRISTS

APRIL 2014
Vol. 51, No. 4



Scrupulous Anonymous
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ScrupulousAnonymous.org

Rules Upon Rules

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

In the Gospels of Lent, we routinely encounter a group of people who seemed to be a favorite focus of Jesus' teachings: the Pharisees, one of the religious groups within Israel who influenced the daily life of the people. Every facet of life was regulated, influenced and, in a very real sense, controlled by the Pharisees' interpretation of what was required to be religious. Perhaps this is why the Pharisees seem to come so clearly into focus during Lent.

Pharisees—and all observant Jews in the time of Jesus—had to obey more than 600 specific commandments to live in a way thought to be pleasing to God. Some of these commandments were undoubtedly very useful, and Jesus left them intact and unchallenged. Still others seemed to be the specific focus of his teaching, and occasionally of his frustration and even anger.

Jesus was saying that the teachers of the Law, including the Pharisees, had placed too many burdens and expectations on the people. Jesus offered a new way of living that gives praise and glory to God. "Come to me,....my yoke is easy, and my burden light" (Matthew 11:28–30).

This is not an invitation to ignorance or to a life

without expectations, rules, or requirements. It's an invitation to something more, not something less. People who accept the yoke of Jesus accept a way of living, a perception and understanding of life that can lead ultimately to freedom and the fullness of life.

Today we understand this way of living as the way to a life that is everlasting. It has challenges, struggles, and difficulties. The burden and the yoke are easy and light, but both are part of the invitation and the way of life.

St. Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, teaches that if we love God we can do what we please. At first glance, this teaching might be understood as a kind of *carte blanche*, but it is most certainly not. Alphonsus understands that when we enter a relationship with God, it will so fill us, so change us, and so capture us that it's impossible to choose anything, do anything, or hope for anything that doesn't ultimately give glory and honor to God.

This doesn't eliminate the possibility of weakness, failure, and sin, but it places those things into a larger context as part of the process of human living that ultimately pleases God.

As human beings not unlike the Pharisees, we can find it quite easy to get swept up in the details of life. It's tempting to take refuge in learning and obeying the rules—down to the most minute point in many instances—and be assured that this is God's will for his people. We might even fall into the temptation and sin of insisting that this is the only way to live, perceive reality, and ultimately give glory to God.

The gospel and the preaching of Jesus calls us to something more. It calls us to a way of perceiving life that celebrates God's presence not only in the details, but also in the people, the events, and the circumstances that are part of God's creation. If we can learn to see as Jesus sees, if we can learn to perceive life in the kingdom of God, we will truly understand what it means to experience both the yoke and the burden of the Lord. It will free us and not weigh us down. Our hearts and our spirits will soar, and we'll be able to believe and participate in confidence in all that the Lord has given us each day.

This is a particularly difficult challenge for people who struggle with the burden of scrupulosity. The details seem so important and so necessary—and indeed they are, but not to the point that they deprive us of peace. Balance is required, and therein lies the real struggle.

If we are inspired by Jesus' spirit at work in our lives through the power of God's grace and desire to embrace the kingdom, we must

change our perception. For people with scrupulosity, it may be most helpful to review areas and experiences that aren't dominated by scrupulosity. Even the most persistent manifestation of scrupulosity isn't active in all the nooks and crannies of life: Certain events and experiences are free of the influence of scrupulosity. By examining such areas and experience, people with scrupulosity can learn and feel what it's like to be free from the burden and anxiety of fear, questions, and never-ending doubt.

Once we experience this freedom in one part of life, we then have some of the skill and feelings that will enable us to also recognize this freedom in the areas we struggle with.

Changing our perception is never easy, but it's worth the effort and the struggle to make it happen. Be encouraged by the men and women of Scripture who were inspired by Jesus to take the first step to believing in an entirely different manner. It was certainly not easy for the man born blind to have his sight restored. It was not easy for the woman at the well to believe that God loved her despite her mistakes. It wasn't easy for the Prodigal Son to accept his father's love despite his father's assurances. Yet, with God's grace, these men and women took the first step and received the strength and commitment to change.

It can be the same for us today; it's not simply a story from long ago in a land very far away. It's our story, for our time, in this place.

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



Meditation for Saturday of the Third Week of Easter

The following is adapted from *Hopeful Meditations for Every Day of Easter Through Pentecost* by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2013).

So Jesus asked the twelve, "Do you also wish to go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."—John 6:67–69

Reflection Having spent months and months with Jesus, the Twelve have learned to believe in his words because they have seen him in action, and his actions bear witness to what he preaches. Their minds and hearts have gradually awakened to know him as the Christ. They have now made the decision to put their whole selves—their thoughts and feelings, their very lives—into his care.

The decision to trust God is not always easy to reach. Sometimes the people in our lives have hurt us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Sometimes our suffering has been so deep that we have retreated behind a protective wall where we think we are safe from harm. We make the unconscious resolve to never trust anyone again.

Yet the Spirit within us is constantly encouraging us to come out from behind the wall. The Spirit leads us to people

who will love and accept us as we are, giving us new chances to learn to trust again. As we learn to trust other people, our trust in God deepens. We become aware of God's movement in our lives, aware of God in the world around us, aware of God in others. We gradually take down our protective wall and open fully to life and the love and joy it has to offer. We learn to turn to God with all our longings, and we come to know that God will give us everything we need.

Ponder Can God trust me?

Prayer Risen Lord, you give me everything I need and long for. Teach me to call on you when I am suffering. Help me to believe and know you answer me.

Practice Today I will ask God for what I want and need, and then let go of the outcome.



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MAILBOX

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Q Thank you for the SA newsletter. I am a Catholic with OCD. One manifestation of my OCD is scruples, which at times has been severe and debilitating to my faith. Through prayer, medication, and counseling, things have gotten a lot better. I still have my challenges and will probably struggle all my life, but I'm optimistic, and with God's grace have been making good strides toward mental and spiritual health.

A Thank you for sharing your struggle as well as your success. It is very important for the members of our group to hear about the power of God's grace at work in the lives of others who struggle with this illness.

Q I promised God I would stop twirling my hair until abortion ends, but I still do it every once in a while in a normal way that girls do. I'm finally able not to do it continuously, but because I promised God, is it a sin if I do it every once in a while?

A No, it is not a sin in any way, manner, or form. This kind of promise made to God is a result of piety and devotion, but it holds no moral obligation whatsoever. God doesn't hold us responsible for these promises no matter how serious our intention may be at the time the promise is made.

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



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DesertRenewal.org and click on "Events Calendar"

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