

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous
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Feelings

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa

Why do human beings experience love? Why am I capable of loving another person? Why do I find some people so appealing, so attractive, that I look forward to their return when we've been separated? Why do I extend the benefit of the doubt so easily to someone I love but not so easily to others?

Why do I feel physically and emotionally connected to people I love? Why does my heart skip a beat when I see them? Why are *their* thoughts and concerns often *my* thoughts and concerns? When they feel pain, why do I share it? Why am I willing to try something new or unusual if *they* invite me to do so, when my natural reaction is to resist such opportunities?

Why are human beings naturally attracted to relationship? Why is it so important that we connect with other human beings? Why are we willing to trust and be vulnerable on the chance it will lead to some expression of intimacy? When a relationship fails, what makes us get up, dust ourselves off, and try again? Why can't we just walk away and be satisfied with our isolated self?

Why are human beings hardwired for relationship? Why do we intuitively understand that something is

out of whack with a person who is isolated, disengaged, and alienated? Why do we so often mistrust solitude or aloneness in another person even though we often perceive the same situation in our own life as a very wise and healthy choice?

The feelings, emotions, perceptions, judgments, and experiences that make up all human relationships also make each of us human. We're not truly human, fully alive, and integrated unless we can recognize each of these components at work in our lives.

Here's something to reflect on and pray about: If human life consists of these components, and if healthy integration of each component is *necessary* for us to live to the fullest, doesn't that mean these components are gifts from God—blessings, graces? Aren't we pleasing God and fulfilling God's plan when we acknowledge what we feel, learn from our successes and failures, and continue to grow in God's love for us and in our love for God?

The obvious answer is yes. How else could we be human if not for the experience of relationship and the ability to fall in and out of love with all of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions?

At the same time, we must also admit that because real power, mystery, and awe are necessary to the human experience, some real fear and anxiety must be considered. Anything that influences our thoughts and behavior in unguarded and uncontrolled moments is potentially harmful.

Some people say that the best response is to live a measured, controlled, and disciplined life. We assume we're not at the mercy of our thoughts and feelings, that our emotions needn't rule us, and that we choose how we act and what we do and don't prefer.

In this way of thinking, every thought, feeling, emotion, judgment, and perception must be measured, and the emphasis quickly moves away from the natural ebb and flow of the human experience. We dedicate ourselves to determining whether each thought, word, and action is pleasing or displeasing to God. If we imagine it pleases God, we consider it to be an ordered thought, feeling, or emotion. If we imagine it displeases God, we consider it disordered. Order brings grace; disorder reeks of sin.

But who really lives an ordered life? Are we not all in some fashion fundamentally disordered? From a theological perspective, this fundamental disorder is perceived as sin, some

of which is original, but most of which is anything but original. Is every thought, word, and action sinful in some manner? Can anything just be natural, reflective of the way God created us?

For many people with scrupulosity, the daily struggle of trying to attain perfection—a well-ordered and well-managed life—is the ultimate dream. Unfortunately, it's also the ultimate fantasy. No one's life is so well ordered and well managed that she never experiences an unwanted thought, feeling, or emotion, including the most intense.

Intensity isn't an indicator of sin. Intensity is rather a simple measurement of feeling and emotion. Some heinous sins are committed with no feeling whatsoever before, during, or after their commission. Intensity is *not* a good measurement of morality.

Can a person with scrupulosity understand that an intense experience can simply be a feeling and nothing more? The not-so-obvious answer is yes, it is very possible. Wherever grace abounds, the healing power of God will be made manifest.

People of faith never abandon belief in the power of God's grace, not even when we're feeling the most intense feelings. In fact, I believe that in the intensity, grace is all the more abundant—not sin, but rather grace.

To listen to Fr. Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," on Radio Maria USA go to radiomaria.us/scrupulosity to access podcasts or listen live at 2 pm Eastern Time

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

To e-mail a question to Fr. Santa: Go to radiomaria.us/scrupulosity and complete the form.

Reflection

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

Jesus answered, "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

John 3:17

Jesus is not here to condemn us. Jesus is here to love us. Jesus is here to make sure we understand the enormous, boundless love out of which God has made us. Jesus is here to teach us how to love ourselves with the same nonjudgmental, noncondemning love God has for us.

Upon awakening each day, we need to make choices: Shall we face the day with love or with fear? Shall we put our lives and wills into God's hands or try to control events and the people we encounter? Shall we look for the positive or dwell on the negative? Shall we treat ourselves gently when we make mistakes or condemn our humanity?

Life is meant to be a continual adventure where we perfect our skills at loving God, ourselves, and others. Remembering that God loves the whole

world, we can start by speaking courteously to all. We can listen respectfully to others' opinions and ideas. We can thank others when they serve us a meal or wait on us. We can send hope to someone who is struggling with grief, depression, or loneliness.

Any time we show love to any of God's children, we are honor God with that same love. We have been sent by the risen Lord to manifest the deeply personal love God has for the world.

Ponder How does God's love touch my life?

Prayer Lord, you prove the power of love over death. Help me show love in thought, word, and action.

Practice Today I will have a conversation with someone I usually avoid.



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

Friday, Sept. 25 – Sunday, Sept. 27, 2015

Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center

5602 Highway 317

Belton, TX 76513

254-780-2436

Friday, Jan. 15 – Sunday, Jan. 17, 2016

Spiritual Life Center (Wichita, KS)

7100 East 45th Street North

Bel Aire, KS 67226

316-744-0167



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Q *Father, recently you wrote “Why is it that people understand that they shouldn’t use a manual for an old car to try to fix a new model but don’t understand that the same principle applies to moral manuals, catechisms, etc.?” I’ll tell you why: That’s moral relativism. Cars change, but morality doesn’t. We don’t change Church teaching just because people don’t want to follow the rules anymore.*

A Unfortunately, there is a significant error in your reasoning. Morality does change, and the moral theology of the Church is always changing. To change or adapt the moral teaching of the Church when confronted with new information is not relativism; it’s good pastoral practice. There are numerous examples of significant shifts in our moral perceptions and teachings throughout the centuries. Anyone who tells you otherwise is badly uninformed and in significant error.

Q *I have a constant need to go to confession. The minute I receive the sacrament, I think of something I forgot or misspoke about, and I have to return to the confessional. Can you say something about this that might help me?*

A You do not have a need for repetitive confessions; you have a need for a certitude that does not exist. There is no such thing as a perfect confession. Even if by some wild stroke of luck you were able to confess something so completely and perfectly that you were completely satisfied with it, it would very quickly not be perfect enough, and you would again have the urge to return to the confessional. This is the manifestation of religious scrupulosity within the context of obsessive-compulsive disorder. The only way to lessen the compulsion is to resist the ritual. It’s difficult—but not impossible.

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