

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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PART 3 OF 5

## Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous (2013)

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

*In our August issue, we examined commandments three and four for the scrupulous: “You shall not repeat your penance or any of the words of your penance after confession—for any reason” and “You shall not worry about breaking your pre-Communion fast unless you put food and drink in your mouth and swallow it in the same way as when you eat a meal.” These commandments expressed specific concerns relating to the sacrament of reconciliation and the eucharistic fast.*

*In this issue, we focus on behaviors and uncontrolled and unwanted thoughts that ignite concerns about sacrilege and/or disrespect for God and his saints. Both commandments address the fear of losing control: commandment five addresses bad thoughts and desires, and commandment six focuses on expression of feelings and emotions.*



**You shall not worry about powerful and vivid thoughts, desires, and imaginings involving sex and religion unless you deliberately generate them for the purpose of offending God.**

All people have vivid thoughts and desires. The power of human imagination reflects our ability to dream and create. Since it’s a gift from God, imagination gives glory and honor to God when we use this gift in service of our brothers and sisters.

This powerful gift is deeply dependent on our sensory perceptions. What we see, feel, hear, smell, and taste is part of what it means to be a living being. It’s how God intended human life to be.

For example, when we smell the aroma of freshly baked bread, we might take a deep breath to enjoy the fullness of the smell. We deliberately smell the bread, and we fully intend to enjoy the smell—the action has our full consent and is totally expressive of our intent and purpose. But our other senses don’t shut down—as we smell, we also taste, feel, and touch.

What might happen if, taking a cue from the warm overall feeling we get from the fresh bread, our senses also express the same feeling we experience in a romantic moment? Does this new feeling—which is perhaps highly sexual—mean we’ve chosen to deliberately sin against God? *No*. It’s simply a feeling being expressed by one part of our senses in response to another part of our senses. Only the sensation of smelling the freshly baked bread is deliberate; *the other feeling is simply complementary and not intended*.

This interplay between thoughts, feelings, imagination, and all of our creative and sensory responses is completely normal. This is the way God intends us to experience and enjoy life. People who don’t experience life in this way have a severe physical and/or pathological illness.

Most of our experiences aren’t as highly specialized and focused as this. Usually we’re not focusing on one sensory expression but are rather experiencing the full range of such expressions in all we experience. Occasionally, as in the bread example, we deliberately focus our sensory skills on one particular activity or experience. Other times our sensory gifts focus our attention in a manner that isn’t deliberate or freely chosen but is nonetheless fully experienced and perhaps even enjoyed.

For example, we take a break in the afternoon from work and walk outside for a quick breath of fresh air. Out of the corner of our eye, we see a young woman who is vibrant, full of energy, and very appealing. She reminds us of ourselves when we were about her age or perhaps reminds us of our beloved spouse, and we find ourselves daydreaming of a time long in the past. That daydream may bring

back an emotional experience that was part of our relationship, and we’re now vividly and powerfully remembering and enjoying it.

Did we somehow provoke this memory and choose to set our imaginations on a path that recalls the vivid details of a long-ago moment? No, we chose to take a walk and get a breath of fresh air. But complementary moments can occur at any time and place. To avoid them, should we choose out of an abundance of caution to eliminate such experiences from our life? *No*. That is most certainly not God’s will.

When all is said and done, it’s not the memory or the sensory perception that people with scrupulosity fear most. They don’t even fear the sin.

What people with scrupulosity fear more than anything else is not being fully in control. Their error, which is not deliberate or sinful, is in perceiving that people who don’t have scrupulosity are always fully in control of their senses, their imaginations, and their responses.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Part of God’s creation includes the daily experience of not being in control of everything.



**You shall not worry about powerful and intense feelings, including sexual feelings or feelings expressed during emotional outbursts, unless you deliberately generate them for the purpose of offending God.**

Everything I’ve shared with you that concerns thoughts and desires is also directly applicable to feelings and emotions. Often a specific thought

or desire is also accompanied by feeling and/or emotion. God gave us the ability to express our emotions, and doing so gives direct glory and honor to God.

On very rare occasions it may be appropriate to stifle a feeling or expression as inappropriate; however, it's usually healthy to permit feelings and emotions to be expressed. For example, it would be inappropriate to burst out laughing at an event in which silence is the expected and normal response. Such an outburst would be correctly identified as immature.

This commandment would be unnecessary if we were simply concerned about forming proper social skills. However, many people

with scrupulosity choose to stifle, ignore, or downplay intense feelings and emotions for no other reason other than an aversion to feeling as though they've lost control. Many people with scrupulosity believe that loss of a persistent sense of discipline somehow displeases the Lord and that it can never be appropriate to be intentionally expressive.

*But nothing could be further from the truth.*

If a joke is funny, laugh hard. If you feel anger because you've been wronged, then anger is the correct response. If you feel sad and begin to cry, let yourself cry. Laughing, crying, and being angry are not sinful acts—not mortal, serious, or venial.



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

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Spiritual Life Center, Wichita, KS

For information, call 316-744-0167 or

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# MAILBOX

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**Q** *What does the new healthcare mandate mean for Catholic employees? If I buy the insurance, will I constantly be in a state of mortal sin?*

**A** I'm not dismissing your anxiety when I say that there is a difference between rhetoric and reality. There are strong and impassioned positions about this, but at the same time there is reality, which includes the inability for any person, corporation, or business to purchase any service or product—including insurance—that is 100% ethical in all facets. Even the Archdiocese of New York has encountered this reality. Accept insurance coverage and make your moral decisions within the context of the reality, not in the context of the rhetoric.

**Q** *Is there a strict moral obligation to pray at certain times of the day?*

**A** No. Many saints, for example our own St. Alphonsus Liguori, strongly recommend prayer within the context of invitation, not obligation. There is a formal prayer structure within the Church called the Liturgy of the Hours, which consists of morning and evening prayer, a meditative prayer called the Office of Readings, and an evening prayer before going to bed. This prayer obligates ordained members of the clergy, but there is no obligation for the people of God.



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See page 3 for more information

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