

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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PART 3 OF 4

## The Words of Absolution

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

**T**his month I continue my four-part series on the words of absolution prayed by the priest in the sacrament of reconciliation:

*God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

These powerful words invite our meditation and reflection. Unfortunately, because of the anxiety they feel in the confessional, people with scrupulosity can't fully appreciate the power of these words and the amazing grace they proclaim. This series will help us appreciate this sacramental encounter with Jesus.

This month we consider the following passage: *through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace.*

The reconciling grace of God, given to each person every day by the Spirit of God in our midst,

cannot be measured and is never in short supply. God's gift of grace is abundant in the world, in our communities, and in our relationships. We are direct instruments of God's grace and blessing when we act in God's name, when we become a source of blessing for another, when we encourage another, and when we demonstrate a characteristic of the Spirit of God.

When the priest acknowledges in his prayer that the Church—which includes all of God's people—is responding to God's grace and sharing God's blessings, he gives praise and thanks to God for the gift of the Spirit. Our actions are indeed the gift of the Spirit, as the apostle Paul taught so many years ago: "For 'In him we live and move and have our being'" (Acts of the Apostles 17:28). Grace is the animating spirit of the people of God. Because of grace, each thought, word, and action in response to this gift is an act of ministry, the gift of the Spirit of God.

In union with the ministry of the Church, the sacrament bestows the pardon and peace of God on those who celebrate and receive this special grace. We cannot be separated from God. Our reconciliation has been completed through the sacrifice of Jesus. This should reassure us and settle our restless hearts.

**T**hat being said, God's pardon and peace also need to be experienced by the individual person. This is where the ministry of reconciliation becomes all the more pronounced.

First, the effective ministry of reconciliation—the peace and pardon of God—comes from God, but it also depends on each of us. Each person who receives and accepts the grace of reconciliation must respond to the gift of grace by living as a person who believes he or she is reconciled to God.

Second, the people of God, who confirm the reconciliation by their thoughts and actions, are essential ministers of God's healing and reconciliation. It would be grossly incomplete if the pardon and peace came only from God but were not experienced by each of us and by the community of faith.

This is the great gesture of reconciliation, the sanctifying grace of the sacrament—but it's also the place of unresolved conflict and other feelings.

Through the sacramental grace we receive, we're invited to cooperate with God's grace—to accept and practice what it means to be pardoned of our sinfulness and be filled with God's peace. When the priest prays the prayer of absolution, he reflects God's grace at work in the world *and* expresses the hope that the people of God will accept this grace and choose to manifest the power of the reconciliation in their thoughts, words, and actions.

The fullness of the grace of reconciliation is incomplete if it's not gratefully received and shared. God's Word is intended to be listened to *and* put into practice at all times.

This dynamic is often difficult for people with scrupulosity to embrace, especially people who are tempted to confess past sins over and over again because of fear or anxiety or because of some sense

of incompleteness and imperfection. Although not sinful by any stretch of the imagination, the inability to believe fully and completely in God's pardon and peace has consequences.

The most obvious consequence is the inability to believe and therefore to be sustained and comforted in knowing we've received the complete gift of reconciliation. In a very real sense, scrupulosity deprives us of the animating spirit of God's grace in action. Instead of relief, completion, or satisfaction, people with scrupulosity feel a deepening sense of alienation and the personal fear that the act of reconciliation didn't bring them closer to God but instead widened their sense of separation and alienation.

**W**hen we don't feel reconciled, it's difficult to believe we can be instruments of God's reconciling grace in the world. In fact, we feel like an *obstacle* to God's grace. This feeling deepens the burden and anxiety and often produces gloom and doom that rob us of happiness and satisfaction. Scrupulosity becomes more than an affliction—it becomes a scourge.

The consistent advice of all of the priest directors of Scrupulous Anonymous and the testimony of all of the saints insist that sins must not, under any circumstances, be confessed more than once. It is imperative to cooperate with the grace received in the sacrament by accepting that each penitent is granted the fullness of God's pardon and peace.

The power of the grace of the sacrament flows from the abundance of God's love. It isn't contingent upon our individual perfection, attention, or ability or to fully accept what that grace provides.

# Reflection

The following is adapted from *Faithful Meditations for Every Day in Ordinary Time (Weeks 11-22)* by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2013).

**O**ur words reveal who we are. Our words give people hints about our innermost thoughts, our worldview, perception of others, priorities, personal values, and principles. We use words to build committed, trusting, loyal relationships.

Our actions also reveal who we are. Our actions connect us to people's lives, create human experiences, and stimulate a variety of responses. Our actions reflect a lifestyle that gives people a sense of our life's direction. People come to believe and know us by our words and actions.

Our words and actions can cause difficulty in our relationships when they don't nourish goodness, life, love, intimacy, understanding, forgiveness, and peace. Our words and actions become a destructive force in the community when they intimidate the weak and promote misunderstanding, hatred of others, conflict, division, abuse, and violence. Our words and actions can manipulate

minds and hearts, keep them in the dark, and deprive them of freedom. We must be aware of how our words and actions build or destroy life and relationships.

People of faith trust the life-giving words and actions of God in Jesus. Our lives are nourished by the Word of God and Jesus' teachings. Our words and actions flow out of our life with Jesus. Our direction is always a movement toward Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life. We're called to make the words and actions of Jesus our own, leading others to the gift of eternal life.

**Ponder:** What do my words and actions say about me?

**Prayer:** Lord, you have the words of eternal life. Help me believe and trust in the power of your Word.

**Practice:** Today I will be faithful by sharing this meditation with a friend.

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

**Friday, Dec. 12 – Sunday, Dec. 14**

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI

For information, call 262-567-6900 or visit

RedemptoristRetreat.org and click on "Calendar"

**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

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**Q** *I'm no longer an active member of the Knights of Columbus, but when I first entered the Knights I made promises as part of the initiation ceremony. I no longer regularly fulfill these promises. Am I committing sin in this matter?*

**A** The Knights are a wonderful fraternal organization. I'm a fourth-degree Knight myself, and I find the support and encouragement of the Knights to be helpful and inspirational.

That being said, let me also clearly state that the "promises" you made during your initiation are not binding under sin in any way, shape, or form. You're free to fulfill the directives, and you're free not to fulfill them. The choice is freely yours.

**Q** *I'm 73 years old. Sometimes I recall sins from my youth that I'm sure I confessed as completely and as fully as possible. How can I arrive at a sense of peace with God when I worry about these sins?*

**A** The best way to arrive at peace with God is to trust that you've been forgiven. It's natural that you might remember a past sin—sin has a way of being both recalled and remembered. Unfortunately, the contrition and sorrow we felt many years ago within our celebration of the sacrament seems to fade and become less and less clear with age.

It's good, then, that the sacrament is thorough and complete. Regardless of how you might remember something, your sins are forgiven. Be at peace.

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