

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Fear of the Unknown

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

I remember a sermon long ago in which the preacher said that, ultimately, all fear and the anxiety that comes with it is rooted in fear of the unknown. He was talking about the kind of fear that grips us when someone jumps out of the darkness to scare us, the kind that makes us clutch the hand of the person next to us in the movie theater when the monster first appears and that gives us sweaty palms as we wonder why the boss has called an unexpected meeting.

For many members of Scrupulous Anonymous, nagging fear and anxiety aren't just limited to specific moments like these—they're constant.

For some members of our group, fear is like background music, influencing every thought, decision, and feeling.

Some people with scrupulosity can't recall even a single moment when they haven't felt fear or anxiety.

Sometimes the fear is amplified by others' imaginations and by half-listening to religious explanations of some future "reality" that causes some to dread the "judgment of God." And it's easy to have our fearful feelings and imagin-

ings confirmed by another person, institution, or supposed authority.

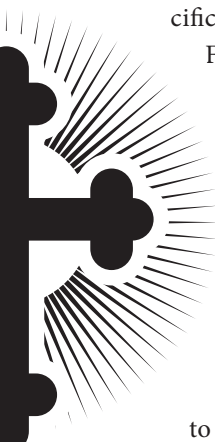
But regardless of the circumstances or the constancy, the root of all fear is the same: fear of the unknown.

All people can quickly relate to any kind of fear. Some believe it's so central to the human experience that a fearless person is suspect, and they discourage people from trying to let go of or face their fear. People who don't just accept their fears must be in some way wrong or even heretical.

Is there a remedy for fear of the unknown, for the constant and nagging anxiety that seems to play itself out again and again? Yes and no.

The future is unknown because it is intended to be unknown. Any person, institution, or supposed authority who suggests a secret knowledge or specific insight into the future is—at best—pulling your leg.

Even though the volume of information available to us expands each day, human beings are limited in what we can see and understand. We can't know the future. We can only guess, and even then we're



often on the wrong track. If the experts of the 1939 and 1964 World's Fairs had been correct, we'd all be driving little self-propelled flying saucers on an invisible superhighway.

Human beings can't know the future, and assumptions we make about it are extremely limited. Imagine, for example, two near-term fetuses discussing what their lives will be like after they're born. Imagine what would happen if they were consumed with fear of the unknown and tried to prepare themselves for what is to come. Many would decide just to stay where they are.

We're not unlike those two fetuses when we try to imagine, discern, or discuss our future. We simply don't know what it will be like. However, that doesn't mean we can't restrain our fear and anxiety.

The best advice our Christian spiritual tradition offers us, advice that has been repeated often by the great saints and mystics, can be summed up in this way: The past has already unfolded, the future is unknown, and all we have is the present. Therefore, we must live in the present moment and in love. To be consumed with regrets about the past, to be occupied with fears about the future, serves only to deprive the present moment of the possibility of love.

Try keeping this sage advice in mind as you read the gospels and the stories of Jesus.

Movie monsters are supposed to scare us. Fears and imaginings, on the other hand, need to be set aside as, with the grace of God, we try to anchor ourselves in the present. Any other behavior is counterproductive and guarantees only more fear and anxiety, which are breeding grounds for scrupulosity and all manifestations of obsessive and compulsive behaviors.

The God of the Second Chance



Though time is too precious to waste, it must never be thought that what was lost is irretrievable. Once the Divine is introduced, then comes the opportunity to make up for losses. God is the God of the second chance. Peter denied, but he had the second chance in which to become as solid as a rock. Jonah, who refused to accept a mission, was given a second chance and saved Babylon. There really is such a thing as a "second birth." Being born again means that all that went before is not held against us.

From *Advent and Christmas With Fulton Sheen*
(Liguori Publications, © 2001)

Reliance on God

The following is adapted from *Advent and Christmas Wisdom From St. Vincent de Paul*
by John E. Rybolt, CM (Liguori Publications, © 2012).

Day 20: Reliance on God

What do you think is most often the cause of our failing in our resolutions? It's that we depend too much on ourselves, we put our trust in our good desires, we rely on our own strength, and that's the reason we don't get any good results from them.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL
CONFERENCE 70

Scripture

More tortuous than all else is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it? I, the Lord, alone probe the mind and test the heart, To reward everyone according to his ways, according to the merit of his deeds. A partridge that mothers a brood not her own is the man who acquires wealth unjustly: In midlife it will desert him; in the end he is only a fool.

JEREMIAH 17:9-11

Prayer

Father, I come to you today aware of my failings. I often resolve to improve, to root out the deadly tendencies I see in myself, but I know I've failed. I bring you myself today in sacrifice and pray that henceforth I may rely on you alone, allowing you to cradle me in your loving embrace.

Advent Action

Saint Vincent was an acute observer of the human condition. He could see in himself and others the "dark side" of the human reality, yet he always returned to the Lord. Today, as you meditate in the quiet of the Advent season, focus on the realities of your heart, both light and dark. Offer yourself to God as you are, not as some ideal version of yourself. He made you, he understands you, and he alone probes the human heart to its depths. Celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, and speak the truth you see in your actions.





SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q *I am 14 years old and in love with my best friend. I want to spend the rest of my life with her and cannot imagine any other way of living. Am I condemned by God for these feelings?*

A No, you are not condemned by God. You are in the throngs of the first stirrings of the human heart as you discover what it means to be attracted to another person and “fall in love.” You are also only 14 years old, and you will have many loves and many stirrings of the heart throughout your life. Your first love may well be your only love, but many more experiences lie ahead. Just be grateful for the gift of love and enjoy it.

Q *My friend says Pope Benedict XVI wants all priests to return to praying the Latin Mass. My parish still uses the English Mass. Do I have to find a parish that uses the Latin Mass?*

A Pope Benedict has not directed all Catholics to celebrate the Latin Mass. The Mass in common use throughout the world is the Mass contained in the *Roman Missal*. The pope did direct that the Latin Mass be more readily available for those who find this expression of the divine liturgy more uplifting and satisfying (On the Use of the Roman Liturgy Prior to the Reform of 1970 [*Summorum Pontificum*]). Bishops in each diocese throughout the universal Church are making this option more widely accessible. But you may continue to attend Mass in your home parish and are not obligated to go elsewhere.

2012 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreat Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR



Friday, Dec. 7 – Sunday, Dec. 9

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI
For information, call 262-567-6900

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