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PART 5 OF 5

Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous (2013)

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

In the October issue, we examined commandments seven and eight for the scrupulous: “You shall obey your confessor when he tells you never to repeat a general confession of sins already confessed to him or another confessor” and “When you doubt your obligation to do or not do something, you will see your doubt as proof that there is no obligation.” These commandments forcefully addressed the issue of resisting your confessor’s directives and also the confusion that the scrupulous condition generates.

In this issue, we conclude our update of the Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous. The ninth and tenth commandments address the seemingly constant fear experienced by people with scrupulosity and the need to put individual trust in Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.



When you are doubtful, you shall assume that the act of commission or omission you’re in doubt about is not sinful, and you shall proceed without dread of sin.

The purpose of this commandment is to free us from the paralyzing fear and anxiety that are often part of scrupulosity. St. Alphonsus says, “Scrupulous persons tend to fear that everything they do is sinful. The confessor should command them to act without restraint and to overcome their anxiety.”

In other words, people in the grip of fear and anxiety caused by scrupulosity should deliberately act against the impulse that paralyzes them and

instead choose a path that could lead to health and freedom.

Alphonsus continues, “The confessor may command the scrupulous to conquer their anxiety and disregard it by freely doing whatever it tells them not to do. The confessor may assure the penitent that he or she need never confess such a thing.”

Alphonsus says the paralyzing experience of rigidity and anxiety is based on “groundless fear.” The fear and anxiety are *not* guilt or remorse felt as a result of an action or inaction on the part of the penitent. The fear and the anxiety are merely *symptoms* of scrupulosity.

The inability to judge the difference between the reality of sin and the fear of sin is a symptom

of scrupulosity. St. Alphonsus says that when this happens, both the confessor and the penitent should presume that the power of grace is at work in the life of God's people and *not* assume there is sin where no sin has occurred.

To sum it up: When making assumptions, assume grace, not sin.



You shall put your total trust in Jesus Christ, knowing he loves you as only God can and that he will never allow you to lose your soul.

One of the most powerful experiences we can have is realizing we're loved by the Lord exactly as we are—not as we one day might be. When we experience this reality through the gift of God's grace, we begin to experience the freedom and confidence of faith that come with this blessing.

This blessing is not reserved for a chosen few. It is intended for all of God's people in all times and in all places.

To me, this truth is liberating. I'm already the person I am, with all my strengths and talents and with all my weaknesses and liabilities. To know deep within my heart and in the crevices of my spirit that God loves me exactly as I am gives me a framework for self-improvement and continued growth: I can grow when I'm invited to grow—not as a condition for love, but rather as a consequence of that love. God, who invites me to grow daily in his grace, doesn't simply wait for me at the end of the journey as a reward for perseverance. He walks *with* me each step of the way.

For many people with scrupulosity, the experience of God's love is often tainted and skewed by their very poor perception of who they are before God. Scrupulosity distorts the fiber of grace that

enables the gift of God's life and the gift of the Spirit, twisting them into an obstacle to God's grace and life. When that happens, we experience God's love as a cancer that must be removed.

But nothing could be further from the truth. God's love sustains and nourishes us. God's Word can remove the darkness that envelops our perceptions and judgments about ourselves and our relationship with God.

Begin with Isaiah 43:1–4. The words of the Lord will speak to you, reminding you that “you are precious in my eyes.” Follow Isaiah with Romans 8:26–39. Paul's letter assures us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.

End your reflection with the first letter of the apostle John, in which he reminds us that love consists in knowing “not that we have loved God but that God has loved us” (4:7–19). This essential insight correctly places the emphasis on God's love for his people and his creation, not on our own ability or inability to love. I find those words reassuring.



I've been the editor of the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter longer than anyone else and therefore have developed expertise in this area. We've learned a great deal about the disease called scrupulosity since the original Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous were published, and these revised commandments may contradict portions of the original and the second versions. In those instances, I wrote about the contradiction and offered pastoral direction to help readers understand the reason for the contradiction.

I hope these revised and updated Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous will be a useful tool for the spiritual formation of the members of Scrupulous Anonymous. When we practice these commandments—not with perfection, but with normal human effort—they are channels of God’s grace and help.

The practice of these commandments doesn’t guarantee peace and freedom from undue anxiety, but it’s a step in the right direction. A pattern of trust and belief in the power of God’s grace is much more healthy and grace-filled than a pattern in which scrupulosity guides our decisions.

To read all ten commandments in one document, go to Liguori.org, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on “Scrupulous Anonymous.”

Visit scrupulousanonymous.org



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

Friday, Jan. 24 – Sunday, Jan. 26

Spiritual Life Center, Wichita, KS

For information, call 316-744-0167 or
visit slc.retreatportal.net

Friday, May 9 – Sunday, May 11

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ

For information, call 520-744-3400 or
visit desertrenewal.org and click on “Events Calendar”

Friday, Dec. 12 – Sunday, Dec. 14

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI

For information, call 262-567-6900



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

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Q *Earlier today a curse word came into my head, and I think my mind decided to direct it toward God. Was that a mortal sin? I feel like I decided to direct it toward God on purpose. How do I prevent such thoughts?*

A There is no sin in this matter. There is no mortal sin. There is no venial sin. There is no sin in any possible way you can think of. At any moment, we each have a sea of thoughts going through our mind. But just because two thoughts occur at the same time doesn't mean they're related. They're random thoughts. You didn't control them—you can't control them—and you're not responsible for them. Human beings are unable to control our thoughts, and that is not sinful in any way.

Q *I laughed in church. The priest made a mistake in the Mass, and then he made a silly comment and I laughed. Is this disrespectful and sinful?*

A No, it is neither disrespectful nor sinful. You laughed at something that was silly, which is a healthy response. I would be more concerned if you did *not* laugh on the occasions when laughter is a reasonable response. Your response is one indication that you are in touch with your feelings. Your response was most appropriate.



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