

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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## Five Simple Truths

*by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR*

**E**ach day I try to be more aware that God's grace is active in my life. God's gift of grace is unmerited, unearned, and makes no rational sense. God loves me exactly as I am this day—not as I one day might be. That's a truth I try to claim each day. I'm not quite at the point where I don't have doubts, but with God's redeeming love and grace, that day isn't far away.

With the help of God's grace, I believe the following five truths:

### 1. God inspires awe and wonder.

It's true that Scripture teaches that "Fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10) and that "fear of the Lord" is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. For a person of biblical times like the writer of Proverbs, whose experience of such grandeur may have been the opulence of an ancient Near Eastern court of king or emperor, a posture of submissive fear and trembling made sense.

However, for a person of our time and experience who routinely stands before the splendor of the unfolding universe, which far outshines the magnificence of any king's court, a more thoughtful posture is awe and wonder.

On the other hand, fear of punishment, embar-

assment, or some other feeling that isn't life-giving is not a manifestation of God's power. Fear paralyzes or freezes us into inaction. It's useful when we're faced with something unknown or threatening, but if your sense of fear is a continuous state of mind, it numbs you and slowly drains grace from your life. God's plan for you does not include numbing fear. God's plan and desire for his people is vibrant and grace-filled life.

### 2. God celebrates his creations.

In the book of Genesis, we read that "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). The summary of God's opinion about his creations is that he is "well pleased." God celebrates his creations, which include his people. To diminish a creature of God after the Creator has judged that creature to be good contradicts God's Word.

It is possible, and indeed admirable, to give praise and thanks to God for the wonders of his creation. It's all the more admirable that when we're praised for a job well done, we give the honor and glory to the Lord.

It's possible to do this without diminishing the person or his or her gifts and talents. When we accept

praise with a grateful heart, we praise and honor the God we serve.

If, on the other hand, through our thoughts, words, or actions we diminish or debase another person's effort, sometimes in an attempt to make ourselves look better, that diminishment or debasement is not God's judgment on their efforts. It's an unsettling and unnecessary pronouncement that doesn't come from God but from some other source.

God builds up and celebrates his people; he does not tear down and diminish either them.

### **3. God teaches us to lead grace-filled lives.**

"Hate the sin but love the sinner" is usually attributed to St. Augustine, but I don't believe that hate in any form is from God.

According to Merriam-Webster.com, the word *hate* is generally defined as "intense hostility and aversion usually deriving from fear, anger, or sense of injury." People use this feeling to cover an enormous range of feelings and situations. You may hear a child express hate with the simple statement "I hate broccoli" or "I hate doing homework." At the other extreme, a leader's hate can cause him or her to exterminate everyone of a certain religion or ethnicity.

Hate is often intertwined with other emotions such as fear or anger, but it is distinctly different from them.

Hate and its expression cannot possibly come from God. People trying to live grace-filled lives don't express hatred even in casual speech. Hate turned inward is even more destructive.

### **4. God wants us to love ourselves.**

Shame is a multifaceted emotion. It's one thing to experience shame as guilt, regret, or even embarrassment because you did something wrong. In small

doses—and with a healthy sense of self and personal responsibility—it can be a helpful emotion.

If, on the other hand, you have a persistent feeling of shame not about something you freely did but about yourself as a person—"I am usually filled with shame"—that is not healthy.

Understand and claim as your personal truth that through the power of your baptism and the power of God's grace, you've been freed from the enslaving effects of sin. When you stand before the Lord, not because of your own merits but because of God's gift, you do so with your brothers and sisters proudly as a child of God. You've been freed from the constant condition of shame by the sacrifice of Jesus.

You are to hold your head high knowing you've been called into life by God and graced with his love.

### **5. God gives us freedom.**

Your daily struggle with scrupulosity compromises your experience of the freedom God intends for you. The anxiety, pain, and suffering you live with because of scrupulosity is *not* God's will for you. You do *not* have this disorder because God has singled you out for suffering and punishment.

Scrupulosity is an emotional and pathological illness that for unknown reasons affects certain members of the human family. And because it's like any other illness or disorder, trying to control, modify, or even find a cure for scrupulosity is *not* contrary to God's will for you.

Scrupulosity severely impacts your ability to make free and conscious choices. This is one reason your confessor often repeats to you that you have not, by any stretch of the imagination, fulfilled all of the requirements for mortal and serious sin despite what you may perceive and how you may feel. It is God's will that you be free and that you enjoy the fullest possible freedom of the children of God.

# Prayer

*God, you are love, and in the Incarnation of your beloved Son you have revealed yourself as infinite, faithful, unconditional love. In contemplating his life and listening to his teachings, we can learn the way in which we are graced and enabled to respond to all that you will us to be. Mary, his mother, the Mother of fair love, has been given to us as a guide, a refuge, and a beacon in our efforts to follow a Spirit-filled life. As the Infant Christ was taught by her to embrace the fullness of human existence, so may we grow in knowledge and love in our journey. Amen.*

Adapted from *Advent and Christmas Wisdom With St. Augustine* (Liguori Publications, © 2013) by Agnes Cunningham, SSCM.  
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## **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/calendar/events.aspx](http://slc.retreatportal.net/calendar/events.aspx)

***Friday, May 9 – Sunday, May 11***

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ

For information, call 520-744-3400 or

visit [desertrenewal.org](http://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



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# MAILBOX

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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

**Q** *It's common practice for many people to "regift" some of the presents they receive. Is that sinful? Part of me says it's silly to think about it, but another part of me worries about it. Can you clear this up for me?*

**A** Regifting is most certainly not a sin. Once you receive the gift, it's your possession and you're free to do with it whatever you wish. You can use it as the donor hoped you would, you can return it to the store for something you prefer, or you can regift it to someone else. Who knows, your regift might be the gift he or she was hoping for.

**Q** *Is New Year's Day a holy day of obligation? I'm confused about this every year because it doesn't seem to be consistent.*

**A** Your obligation routinely depends on the day of the week the event falls on as well as where you live.

New Year's Day, like the solemnities of the Assumption, All Saints, and Mary, Mother of God, is not a holy day of obligation if it falls on a Saturday or Monday. In 2014 it falls on a Wednesday, so you'll need to attend Mass that day.

Also, diocesan bishops can lift the obligation to attend Mass for pastoral reasons. This is why you might experience confusion year to year.



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See page 3 for more information

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