

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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## Gratitude of the Heart

*by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR*

**A** very close friend shared one of his spiritual practices, a practice each of us can easily incorporate into our everyday routine.

Before he goes to bed, he identifies three people, events, or experiences of the day for which he's most grateful. As he identifies each, he says, "Thank you, God, for this blessing and this grace." Some days it's easy, and on other days it requires a little more effort and creativity, but it's always worth the effort.

This spiritual practice makes him aware of the awesome power of God's grace and blessing alive and at work in our world. As we get caught up in the routine and ordinariness of each day, we might not notice God's grace. It's always there, but we can't enjoy its fullness if we don't notice it. It comes to us only when we acknowledge and gratefully accept each gift from God. Gratitude brings us even more grace and blessing as we grow in awareness of the created love and care that surround us.

The practice of expressing gratitude each day is good for all people, but it's especially appropriate for people with scrupulosity because it can balance the negativity and anxiety of the disease. Scrupulosity makes us hyperaware of what may be wrong, what is

lacking, what is incomplete, and what is potentially sinful. If this is your daily experience, a healthy helping of gratitude may be a very real blessing.

**I**f you decide to incorporate this spiritual exercise into your daily routine, first spend a few moments identifying the people, events, and experiences that routinely are conduits of God's grace for you. This first step is easy, and it often leads to an awareness of blessedness you may have taken for granted. By deliberately recalling such moments, you heighten your awareness and appreciation for unexpected moments of grace.

Next, examine your experience of scrupulosity to determine whether any of it is grace-filled. At first this may sound ridiculous and not at all helpful, but it doesn't have to be.

For example, maybe for years you've struggled with an unwelcome thought, but now you feel a little less anxiety and fear about it. This "little less" is something to be grateful for, something you may recognize as a grace and blessing.

At a recent Scrupulous Anonymous retreat, a gentleman I've known for many years shared with

the group that he'd finally reached a sustained period in which certain thoughts and desires no longer wreaked the spiritual havoc they once did. When he examined the spiritual and emotional progress he'd made over the years, he was able to clearly identify the grace and blessing he now enjoys. He said he is quite surprised and pleased to acknowledge this progress and grace. He never expected or imagined it possible.

After Mass, another woman said she often thanked God for having the guidance and the support of a regular confessor over many years of struggle. She realizes that many people, through no fault of their own, never have such a blessing. Although she continues to struggle with her scrupulosity, she doesn't struggle alone. That's a grace she identifies and is thankful for.

Another woman wrote a letter saying how grateful she's been over the years for the SA ministry. For years she was unable to contribute to the cost of producing and mailing the newsletter, but it was always in her mailbox each month. Her economic situation changed, and now she contributes to the costs of production, in a sense passing the newsletter on to a new generation who find themselves in the same circumstances. She recognizes this as a grace and a blessing.

My experience of the spiritual practice of growing in gratitude is that once I take the time to pay

attention to the graces and the blessings I've received, I soon realize I'm blessed in ways I didn't notice or expect. It's so easy to identify events and experiences that are lacking or disappointing. Identifying blessings and grace seems to demand a little more positive effort.

**D**uring December, we regularly encounter grace. Central to our spiritual practice is Christmas, the solemnity in which we celebrate the Word of God's taking to himself the experiences of what it means to be a human being. I don't think it's out of the realm of possibility to imagine Jesus thanking his heavenly Father for the grace and blessings he received each day. It's more than appropriate to join our voices with Jesus' as we, too, praise and thank God for the manifestation of God's grace in our world.

The spiritual practice of gratitude of the heart is well worth our effort. It manifests the blessings of God at work in our lives, in our community, and in our relationships, work we may often take for granted.

With just a little effort, we can join our voices with those of the countless men and women of faith who pray with our Blessed Mother, "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior" (Luke 1:46-47).

To make a donation to Scrupulous Anonymous, go to [ScrupulousAnonymous.org](http://ScrupulousAnonymous.org) and click on the Donate button or send a check or money order to Scrupulous Anonymous, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057. Your tax-deductible donation will help defray the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter to those without Internet access.

# Reflection

Adapted from *Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*  
by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2010).

**W**e tend to demand perfection according to our own taste, habits, or standards. We often judge others. We criticize others' behavior, actions, words, way of life, style of dress, parenting skills, intelligence, or possessions. We hold on to grudges and resentments and have a hard time letting others be who they are. We make the mistake of thinking we have power to change others.

Yet only God's power can change us. Only God knows where we need healing. Only God knows the deep wounds that distort our thinking and prevent us from loving ourselves and others the way God loves us. Only God has the power to touch our hearts and forgive all that prevents us from being fully human and holy.

Only God knows who we really are. And God loves each of us just as we are, unconditionally, without reservation, and for all eternity.

**Ponder:** Whom do I need to forgive?

**Prayer:** Lord, we are all part of your divine body. When I judge others, I judge myself. Forgive my lack of unconditional love. Show me how to love and accept all people and live with joy.

**Practice:** I will ask God to bless someone I find irritating, threatening, or unworthy of respect.

**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 feel guilty if I don't fast on all the Fridays of the year. What should I do?*

**A** My best advice: Don't be stricter on yourself than the Church requires. Some people find a regular spiritual practice of fasting to be something they can do, and therefore it makes sense for them. For others, like you, it seems not to be something they can do at this point.

Since you're not obligated to do it, try to remove the sense of obligation and failure you feel by choosing some other form of penance you can successfully do on Fridays.

The Church doesn't demand severity or extraordinary penances; something simple is just as useful and effective.

**Q** *Must we choose a new resolution or spiritual practice at the beginning of the year? I thought resolutions were optional, but a friend says some new spiritual resolution is required.*

**A** There is no requirement to make a new year's resolution. It's a practice many people engage in, and the beginning of a new year seems to be a good place to start, but there is no obligation.

Technically, the new year that begins January 1 isn't the start of the new year in the liturgical calendar. The new liturgical year begins with the first Sunday of Advent, which occurs about five weeks before January 1.

[ScrupulousAnonymous.org](https://www.ScrupulousAnonymous.org)



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