

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPТОRISTS

JULY 2016
Vol. 53, No. 7



Scrupulous Anonymous
One Liguori Drive
Liguori, MO 63057-9999
ScrupulousAnonymous.org

Look Not on Our Sins

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa

We pray one of the most comforting prayers of the Mass in the rite of peace, immediately after the Our Father. The petition “look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church” is especially comforting to me because I understand that the lived faith of the people of God far surpasses significant sin—both of commission and omission.

We don’t often celebrate our lived faith; in fact, we often take it for granted even though every day we see countless examples of faith in action. They’re sometimes dramatic, but they’re usually small, ordinary, and overlooked.

Dramatic witness of faith can be found in the countless missionaries who suffer hardship and death as they serve in countries that aren’t hospitable to the Christian practice. This has always been so, and it will continue to be so as long as missionaries preach and live the gospel.

But some powerful witnesses of faith are so ordinary we take them for granted. One example is an overworked and overstressed mother’s taking the time to patiently answer her child’s question. She could easily dismiss him or park her in front of the

television or computer, but she chooses to be present and to parent.

Another example is the young student who chooses not to join in the routine playground bullying of another. Another is the young athlete who compliments another player—even an opponent—for a well-executed play.

These are ordinary examples of lived faith in action. We might think these actions are too ordinary to be faith-filled, but they are manifestations of grace and blessing.

For people with scrupulosity—who recognize the impulse of sin before the impulse of faith and belief—faith is also present in both dramatic and ordinary forms. A dramatic example is found in the lifelong struggle of a man with scrupulosity who tried to remind himself every day of the difference between his fears and reality. Small step after small step, each graced and faith-filled, he came to understand that the Lord was patient with him and understood his struggle. In his later years, with the compulsions and obsessions of his youth less active, he is more at peace.

Still other men and women have shared hard-fought small victories in the midst of immense struggle:

- resisting the impulse to immediately return to the confessional
- confessing only once a month
- replacing an anxious thought or fear with a positive action
- learning to live in the present regardless of how it feels, trusting that the decision to do so will slowly counteract the scrupulosity

Such manifestations of faith need to be discussed much more often, especially from our pulpits. I don't understand preachers who see sin everywhere but don't also see the power of faith. Their sermons are often filled with gloom and doom, and God seems so very far away.

The Eucharistic Prayer reminds me of the ultimate “end of the story” of salvation. I share this perception with the people I'm called to serve: *Jesus wins, God's reign has been restored, the light has replaced the darkness, life has overcome death*. Why can't we live in *this* perception of faith? We shouldn't deny the reality of sinfulness, but we must bring into sharper

focus a more integrated and positive experience of God's life and love.

People with scrupulosity needn't ever be reminded of their weaknesses and failures. Their awareness of failure is present to the extreme. But if, by the grace of God, all anxiety, guilt, and need for repentance could be balanced with confidence in the mercy of God, consciousness of the free gift of God's redeeming love, and a conviction of knowing we've been loved by God, everyone—not only people with scrupulosity—would be in much better shape.

This is why Pope Francis is accentuating the positive during this Year of Mercy. His exhortation to priests to be understanding, gentle confessors and preachers of God's Word is intended to widen our focus. Or, as the old song we sing during Lent reminds us, “There's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea....There is mercy with the Savior, there is healing in his blood” (words by Frederick W. Faber, 1814–1863).

We can all use a little more mercy and a little more healing. Perhaps praying “look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church” often is a good place to start.

Excerpt from the English translation of *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* from *The Roman Missal* © 2010, International Commission on English in the Liturgy Corporation. All rights reserved.

Reflection

The following is abridged and adapted from *Summer Meditations*
by Fr. John Bartunek (Liguori Publications, © 2016).

Summer heat waves make life uncomfortable. They drain your energy and empty your reserve supply of motivation—especially if they coincide with jobs that require sustained effort or repetitive actions. Summer is a lovely season with plenty of benefits, but its weeks of scorching heat and suffocating humidity put our determination to the test.

Increased heat is necessary for the growth meant to happen during summer in both the plant and animal kingdoms. The stronger sunlight, the increased humidity, and the warmer temperatures create an environment that helps growth. In other words, nature brings on the heat for a reason. It isn't an inconvenient obstacle but a required condition for expansion in the natural world, regardless of how uncomfortable it may make us feel.

That kind of discomfort, in fact, has a similar purpose in our own spiritual expansion. Working through difficulties and challenges with determination can lead to spiritual growth, just as exposure to the summer sun is required for growing a bumper crop of corn.

As a priest, I frequently encounter people

suffering from a lack of determination. It's easy to make a good decision in a moment of light and grace, but somewhere along the way to completion the initial good feelings and clarity wane. A heat wave comes and drains our energy. We begin to second-guess our decision because it is proving to be tougher than we thought or we just don't feel like persevering. So we change course instead of following through. When this becomes a habitual pattern, we never really mature, and our lives begin to lose zest and vigor.

The best way to develop healthy determination is to take time to reflect on our motives. In perfect weather, we need to make sure that our decisions are flowing from wise principles and authentic values, not whims or fashions. When the heat wave comes—and it will come—we need to admit the adverse feelings it stirs up and distinguish those temporary sentiments from the perennial principles and values that are at the heart of our motivations and decisions. The more we intentionally live from the deeper level, the stronger we become.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

MAILBOX

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE • LIGUORI, MO 63057-9999
NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q *With election year in full swing, my old fears and anxieties are bubbling up. Can you share any advice when it comes to casting our ballot?*

A I addressed this matter in an article in the October 2012 issue of *Scrupulous Anonymous*. You can access it on our website, ScrupulousAnonymous.org. I've also posted a similar article on my Scrupulous Anonymous Facebook page.

Q *A parishioner friend of mine is going to Communion at Mass. She is in her second marriage, which was not blessed by the Church. Is it better for me to speak to her or to just tell the priest?*

A How about this? Don't tell the priest and don't go out of your way to tell your friend what you think. You have no idea what state of mind her conscience is in and what pastoral and canonical help she may have engaged. If she wants to enter into anything more than a casual conversation with you about that matter, share with her your understanding of what is required. However, if she chooses not to include you in a more far-ranging conversation, it's none of your business, frankly.

ScrupulousAnonymous.org



Please help us continue Scrupulous Anonymous and other Liguori Publications ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is Redemptorist Fathers dba Liguori Publications, Federal ID 43-0653409. To make a donation, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

© 2016 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. **Policy on Copying or Distributing:** *Individuals* may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous* provided 1) you don't remove this copying/distributing policy and 2) you don't seek or accept payment for the copies. **Nonprofit organizations** may quote SA in publications offered at no cost as long as you identify *Scrupulous Anonymous* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (Liguori Publications, ScrupulousAnonymous.org). **For commercial or other purposes**, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is an apostolate of the Redemptorists (redemptorists.com).