

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Responding to the Call

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

Human beings are innately curious about God. Our earliest ancestors, preoccupied with survival, may not have acted on that curiosity. But at some point, the desire for a relationship with God was first acted upon. Someone became aware of something greater than himself or herself, began the search, and then realized that the “something greater” seemed to be returning the favor. The seeker was also the sought.

The process is the same today. In our world of distractions, voices, and choices, the biggest challenge is to identify the stirring—or as some traditions name it, the “call” within us—as spiritual. We might think it’s something else and turn to a different job, relationship, exercise program, diet, or some other trendy pursuit, never considering that what we’re hearing is the ancient call of the Holy One who seeks *us*.

Alphonsus Liguori, a saint and spiritual teacher of the eighteenth century said, “We desire because first we have been desired.” Alphonsus and many other spiritual teachers believed that within each of us exists an innate call or stirring to spiritual wholeness and unity. We respond to this innate part of ourselves differently at different times in our life.

If you feel a need that cries out for attention, you may be moving to a point of movement in response to God’s call. If the distractions that once got you through the day or night no longer work, you may be ready to experience life in a completely different way. If you nod in agreement as you listen to another person, all the while believing there must be something more—the “yes, but” of life—you may be feeling a call to deeper spiritual development.

A true spiritual call from the Holy One will not simply disappear or go away. A response is required. A true spiritual call propelled the great men and women of the Bible. It’s the first step on a path to a relationship with God, the first step on a wonderful journey that leads to wholeness and holiness.

Many people of different faith traditions are making this journey. Some have been on it for a long time; others are taking their first small steps. But none of them has completed the journey—it’s ongoing. At no time can we proclaim that we’ve arrived, that the journey is finished, that nothing is left to discover or appreciate. The spiritual journey is an eternal quest.

Many men and women with scrupulosity mistakenly believe that their disorder recuses them from the spiritual call. Their primary relationship is not with the Holy One, but with an illness that distracts them, dominates their feelings of self-worth and caring, and filters reality through the lens of sinfulness. They feel they must choose between a relationship with God or a skewed relationship with scrupulosity. They want a relationship with God, but they don't believe it's possible.

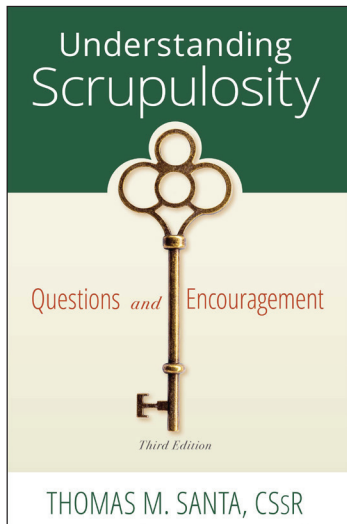
The pastoral advice and direction we offer each month in this newsletter provide a strong, positive, attainable directive: Scrupulosity is a condition, a disorder, but it's not the

primary identification of who you are as a human person and child of God. Scrupulosity can make a relationship with the Lord seem impossible, but that's an error of perception. This error of perception is *not* a sin; it's a manifestation of the disorder.

Nothing can rupture your relationship with God. Any perceived separation, no matter how intense, no matter how real it might seem to be, is a distraction or an obstacle—but it's *not* a reflection of the actual relationship.

We are created by God to be in relationship with God. We are the sons and daughters of a loving Father.

That is the eternal truth. That is the reality—even when it's temporarily obscured by scrupulosity.



Hot off the Press!

The new edition of Fr. Tom Santa's highly acclaimed book *Understanding Scrupulosity* is here!

Based on a half-century of questions and answers from the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter, *Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions and Encouragement* addresses sin, thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and sexuality, as well as confession, self-worth, prayer, and God's grace.

This third edition includes new information on identifying and understanding behaviors associated with scrupulosity and explains medical breakthroughs in treatment.

To order, go to Liguori.org.

Moderation in All Things

The following reflection is adapted from [*Vices and Virtues: Knowing, Accepting, and Improving Yourself*](#) by Alejandro Ortega Trillo (Liguori Publications, © 2015. All rights reserved. Available in English and Spanish).

Temperance is moderation or self-restraint in satisfying bodily appetites. It's not a matter of stoically repressing them, but of controlling them, channeling them, keeping them within limits. Appetites in and of themselves are good, but they need to be supervised by our intelligence and controlled by our will.

A practical rule of thumb for limiting bodily appetites is contained in St. Ignatius of Loyola's precept "as much as." We must eat, drink, sleep, rest, and so forth as much as necessary to meet our physical needs; in other words, *as much as* is healthy. Any symptom of excess or overload indicates crossing into intemperance.

Food is perhaps the most difficult area for temperance. We must watch three aspects: quantity, quality, and scheduling. Cover the energetic, metabolic, and structural needs

of the body by using the 80/20 rule: If 80% of what we eat is nutritious food—what we need—the remaining 20% can be food we like. And nothing is better for the stomach than to feed it at regular times.

Christ valued, appreciated, enjoyed, and shared legitimate pleasures. It was he who brought joy to a wedding by turning water into wine.

Looking at temperance as enjoying everything in the right measure as opposed to depriving oneself of things we like brings a sense of freedom. Temperance sharpens our senses, fine-tuning them to be more open to enjoyment. We become more sensitive to the needs and hardships of others. We discover that pleasure is not found in things, but in ourselves.

These are the legitimate and enjoyable rewards of a temperate life.



Listen to Fr. Tom on Radio Maria USA

Fr. Tom Santa's live call-in show, "Understanding Scrupulosity," is back on Radio Maria USA Thursdays at 11 am ET.

To listen: Go to radiomaria.us and click How to Listen.

To call in: 866-333-MARY (6279)

To e-mail a question to Fr. Santa: Complete the form at radiomaria.us/scrupulosity.



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Q *Revelation 7:1–8 says that only 144,000 people are the elect of God and will be saved. What happens to the billions who aren't part of this small group?*

A With the exception of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the vast majority of Christian traditions and the biblical scholars of mainstream religious traditions agree that 144,000 is a symbolic number used by the author of Revelation to mean a great multitude. The number was never intended to be anything other than symbolic and doesn't reflect an accurate accounting on a heavenly ledger.

Q *I recently heard a presentation on the sacrament of reconciliation. The presenter mentioned canonical penalties. Now I'm concerned that I might have some of these penalties. What should I do?*

A A canonical penalty is a punishment for violating Church law (as opposed to violating one of the Ten Commandments). I can't imagine why anyone would mention canonical penalties in a discussion of the sacrament of reconciliation because the Church applies these penalties only in very serious circumstances—never for routine behaviors and practices.

Don't let your heart be troubled by this issue. It's really of little concern to you and only heightens your anxiety and complicates celebration of the sacrament. It's an unnecessary worry and concern.

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