



Celebrate Theological Diversity

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

If you live in a highly developed country with no war on its homeland, no nationwide natural disasters, and little economic turmoil, you might have certain expectations. What would you think, for example, if you went to a florist shop and it had just one kind of flower? What would you think if you went to the meat counter at your local supermarket and the butcher sold but one cut of meat? What if you wheeled your cart from the counter and pushed it through the aisles, only to discover one brand of mustard, one kind of pasta, and only one cereal? In each instance, you expect variety, nothing less. You'd be surprised and likely annoyed if you experienced anything besides a variety of choices.

It's reasonable to state that we humans are usually comfortable with variety. We typically celebrate diversity. We're not easily satisfied with sameness and predictability when it comes to food, flowers, plants, and, well, you get the point. But we may be picky and less amenable to variety and diversity when it comes to people. Most people I know will turn their heads and offer opinions upon spotting a teenager with blue hair, a dozen facial piercings, and tattoos all over. Some also will look askance at a person of an ethnic origin or gender preference different from theirs in an unexpected place. People appreciate variety and expect diversity, but not necessarily in all places, times, and circumstances.



Theology is an area where rigidity is the norm, not diversity and variety. A dogmatic, orthodox definition of religion often is thought to be the only correct one, with little tolerance for any deviation from that which has been established. Some who think like this even declare that this lack of diversity and variety of understanding and opinion is God's will. People with scrupulosity tend to think this way, not necessarily because of a deeply held theological position, but because they falsely believe a firm viewpoint will be certain, comforting, and predictable.

Let's contrast rigid understanding with the evidence. Is God—who created diversity and variety in plants, animals, grains, people, personalities, sunsets, climates, seasons, genes, and DNA molecules—intolerant of the diverse ways his creation understands him? Does God affirm there's only one way to understand him, one way to experience him, one way to worship him, and that other ways are wrong, lacking, incomplete, unsatisfying, and—most importantly—heretical?

In short, no. That thinking doesn't reflect the divine opinion or judgment of our Creator God. It lacks the creativity and energy of humanity's experience of God. It does, however, sound like the opinions of those who have lost the ability to see the big picture, who are threatened by what they can't control or organize, and who want to make rules for everyone else to follow so they don't have to deal with the truth that overwhelms them. The louder the rule, the more intense they insist it be obeyed. Their rules represent and generate fear.

In truth, a diverse appreciation and understanding of theology is historically accurate and biblically based. For example, St. Paul sings the praises of Abraham. In his praise of our ancestor in faith, Paul praises a man who was quite comfortable living in the midst of diversity and many different points of view, none of which made him less of a believer in God.

In an ancient world of diversity and variety, in a world of many gods and many understandings of what God expected from his creation, Abraham recognized the presence of the One God. His profound, revealed, and foundational experience of God gave birth not to unity or sameness, which you might expect from such an awakening and encounter with the sacred, but rather even more diversity. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the three great monotheistic religions of our day—all claim Abraham as an ancestor in faith.

Unfortunately, also born was a world of violence and intolerance. Again and again, some heirs of the experience of Abraham demand the primacy and correctness of their experience and are intolerant of other faiths and beliefs.

Life is difficult. Life is challenging. Every day we're blessed with many possibilities. We experience great joy and deep sadness. We have terrific successes and monumental failings. Hopefully, all of us are blessed and continue to be blessed with people who love us. We can gather together with friends and neighbors and enjoy

the fruits of our labor. With an abundance of God's blessings filling our lives, we have so much to be grateful for. As we express our gratitude to God for our experiences, it's also important for us to understand and appreciate the diversity and variety we face every day.

No matter how we understand or experience God, might it not be God's will and hope for his people—everyone—to resist the urge to demand from others that which seems to be in conflict with what God has created? Might a better stance in life be to celebrate and respect even that which we might not understand or prefer, recognizing that other ways of believing are expressions of variety and diversity? As we ponder, let's close with this Easter prayer: "May our creative God continue to bless us this day! Amen!" ✨

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God's Heart Revealed

When we look upon the cross, we see God's heart laid open for us. On the cross we see God's compassion and determination to meet us where we are, love us for who we are, and open us to healing and wholeness.

The cross is not proof of God's love but a consequence of God's love and of the wound that all humans bear. The cross is the salve, the healing balm that goes directly to the source of that wound.

The essence of the wound that afflicts us all is the illusion and belief that we are separate from God. This illusion makes us look to ourselves as the center of our lives, actions, and security. The fact is, God is the center: God loving us unconditionally and holding us in existence. Whenever, in any way, we forget this, we reopen the wound. That is why so many of our best intentions are destructive or ineffective. They place us once again at the center of our lives. They inflict and reinforce our illusion of separation from God who is love for us.

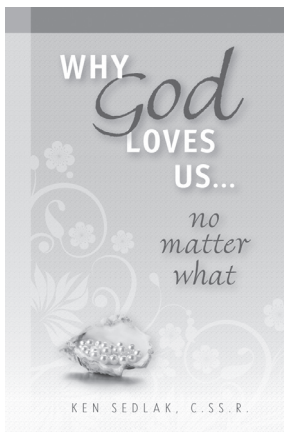
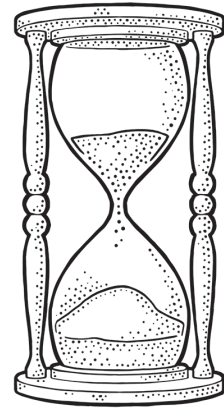
When I hear confessions I often wait until the person has completed the list of things for which he or she is sorry and then I ask, "Of all these things you've mentioned, which one is the most important to you right now? Which one would you like to have God help you with?" It is a way of trying to help the person connect to God rather than their feelings of guilt.

Very often their answer is, "Patience. I want to be more patient with my husband, my wife, my children, and the people I work with."....We will not overcome impatience by being impatient with ourselves. Trying to change ourselves usually doesn't get very far because we are caught in a spiral of self-destruction.

For these people St. Alphonsus' advice would translate into, "Instead of taking this change upon yourself, start with God's patience and love for you. Whenever you catch yourself being impatient, remember God's patient words, 'You are my beloved....'" Remembering God's patient love gently and patiently releases the pressure that comes from our reliance on our self, our ego-mind, and will. Remembering God's patient love reminds us that God is the center of our lives and to make room for healing. ✨

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Mailbox

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

Q. *I have many intrusive thoughts, some of which are blasphemous. I do everything I can to get rid of these thoughts, but they seem to persist. Some days the thoughts are so strong it seems that they are the only thoughts I have in my head.*

A. Some people with OCD experience a manifestation of their illness with this kind of suffering. You aren't generating the thoughts and are in no way responsible for them. Regardless, they are still unpleasant and even frightening, and I understand your desire to try and get rid of them. However, and this is the cruel part of your suffering, the more effort you expend trying to get rid of them, the more intensely you will feel them. Try to think of them as part of what is going on in your life but not the central experience of your life. In other words, try not to give them any attention or effort. This often helps people who suffer in the manner you're suffering. It's not a cure, but it is one effective way to manage this part of your illness.



Q. *Divine Mercy Sunday is the Sunday after Easter. My friends tell me the Church requires me to go to confession on this day in order to receive the fullness of the special graces that are part of this feast. This doesn't sound right to me, but I thought it wouldn't hurt to ask.*

A. There's no requirement for you or anyone to go to confession on Divine Mercy Sunday. Celebrating reconciliation sacramentally is one of the pious practices associated with this special day, but it's not required and it most certainly isn't an obligation. God will bless you with an abundance of grace, all that you need. This is why we understand grace to be a gift of God. Grace is not a reward.

**Divine Mercy Sunday
is April 8, 2018.**



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