



Enjoy Life, Don't Explain It

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Many feel the false comfort and illusion that clarity can seem to promise. Certainly those with scrupulosity are familiar with this trap. The dictionary says clarity is understood as “the quality of being coherent and intelligible” and “the quality of being certain or definite.” Both descriptions are appealing, but a closer look reveals that clarity is a mixed bag.

Being coherent and intelligible are worthy qualities to strive for. Both can improve conversation and understanding. On the other hand, being “certain, definitive” is not necessarily a value that delivers all that it potentially suggests is achievable. In conversation, for example, a certain and decisive person can come across as dismissive and closed to opposing ideas. Therein lies the trap.

When a person is certain and definite to the point of being dismissive and unpersuadable, trouble begins to brew. More often than not,

disappointment will be a much more frequent guest in such a situation rather than satisfaction. The situation might be worse: extremely unpleasant or obnoxious.

Unfortunately, I have occasionally encountered people who are struggling with scrupulosity whom I might gently identify as both obnoxious and unpleasant. Not because they are obnoxious and unpleasant people but rather that the intensity of their single-minded pursuit for clarity makes them seem so. Caught up in the emotion and energy of the manifestation of their scrupulous condition, they're not the least bit open to any kind of persuasion, discussion, or even the manifestation of sacramental grace. Everything is blinded and colored by their obsessive and compulsive pursuit of the false promise of clarity and their profound disappointment when they don't experience the peace they think they'll achieve.



Some people's intense, single-minded pursuit for clarity makes them seem obnoxious and unpleasant.



When I encounter this kind of behavior, I've learned there's nothing I can do other than witness the pain and suffering. I can't interrupt the ritual and frantic energy, suggest another path, or offer help. The all-consuming behavior is unpleasant both for me and especially for the person who's experiencing the pursuit of unattainable clarity at that particular moment.



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A simple, inconvenient truth is that nothing in life is as uncomplicated as promised. There is very little in life, if anything at all, that is absolutely and essentially experienced exactly as a person might assume. There's always nuance, different shades of meaning, different perceptions, and the depth of human experience that colors even those things that we might believe are self-evident and clearly known. If there's any hint of a blurring of meaning or understanding, a scrupulous person often will judge the event or experience as unsatisfying and try to acquire something that's completely clear, undebatable, and unwavering in meaning or purpose. It's truly a fool's errand, but it still may be pursued as a coveted goal and the ultimate prize.

This search for clarity is the energy that drives the experience of question after question that's the normal and operating reality of a person with scrupulosity and OCD. There's never a satisfying

answer for such people. There's always something more that needs to be explained, some detail that must be filled out, some experience and depth of feeling that needs to be put into perspective. Despite one dead end after another, the scrupulous person's pursuit continues, and the illusion is dominant and pervasive.

A more useful and healthy practice that's helpful in managing the strong impulses of both scrupulosity and OCD is to resist the tendency toward clarity and instead embrace a sense of awe, wonder, and mystery. This stance is a conscious choice to enjoy life and not explain it. It's a choice to accept the compulsions and the distractive energies common to every person in one form or another, not as an experience that needs to be mastered and controlled but with a sense of wonder that doesn't deny responsibility. This wonderment echoes the awe of the Apostle Paul: "What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate" (Romans 7:15).

Understandably, as people try to integrate a sense of mystery into life and resist the allure of clarity and certitude, doubt and anxiety will crop up. All risks, even those designed to help a person, initially produce some level of anxiety. However, after practice—and when the positive feeling becomes a little more familiar—the anxiety begins to disappear and is replaced with a growing sense of contentment and peace. I think of the absence of anxiety and the presence of peace as a manifestation of the grace of God at work in my life.

The scrupulous condition makes some choices and options, even healthy ones, challenging at best. The intense anxiety and doubt that often accompany a decision to change makes change difficult but not impossible. Perhaps the insights in this column will help you on your spiritual journey. Perhaps they'll give you the encouragement to take the necessary steps toward a life that's free and sustainable, marked by grace. It feels good to rest confidently in the spirit of God. ✨

Embracing the Icon of Love

As we look at the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help and place ourselves in a space of prayer before it, we become aware that we are before something filled with holiness, and we are drawn into God's presence through the eyes of Mary as she looks at us.

The process of unlocking the miraculous dimension of the icon is discovered through contemplative prayer. Through the prayer practice of gazing, we enable ourselves to step from our regular routine and place ourselves in a posture of silent prayer.

Icons are created to give us the opportunity to enter into the space of the holy. Mary's gaze draws us into the icon, enabling us to give ourselves to the divine energy contained therein. In this space, we encounter the miraculous experience of the icon of Our Mother of Perpetual Help. The way into the miraculous space of this icon is through the prayer of gazing.

The Prayer of Gazing

Prayer is descending with the mind into the heart and standing in the presence of God. This is truly the practice of praying with icons. It is important that in whatever prayer petition we use that we have the icon at eye level.

The prayer of gazing is a powerful form of contemplative prayer. Our eyes behold the beauty and glory of God present before us. As you begin your prayer of gazing, quiet yourself and become aware of your breathing. As distractions come

into your mind, gently acknowledge them and let them go.

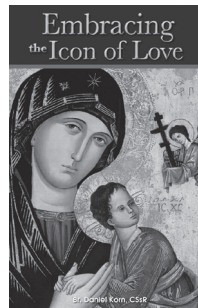
After a few minutes of silence, close your eyes and become aware of your desire to be with God at this moment. Ask God to help you release anything distancing you from the closeness of God.

Let your eyes make contact with the image. Go with whatever thoughts enter your mind about the icon. Usually they will lead to feelings and thoughts about the mystery of Christ. When distractions occur, let your gazing be the tool that brings you back to reflecting on the icon.

Close your eyes and try to retain a sense of the icon in your awareness. Then let it fade to a formless presence and remain in this silence as long as you wish. Conclude your prayer time by praying the Our Father slowly in a low voice. ✨

The eye with which I see God is the same eye with which God sees me.

Meister Eckhart, OP



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Feast of Our Mother of Perpetual Help is June 27

***Icons are more than religious art.
They are passages into the world of mystery.***

Mailbox

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Q. *Father, I know this is an unusual question, but I don't know the answer. Is nudity sinful? On vacation we accidentally found ourselves on a nude beach, and I insisted we leave immediately. My husband tells me that I am just being prudish but I was more concerned about sin.*

A. No, nudity is not sinful. As you discovered on your vacation, there are varying degrees of public nudity that are acceptable in different cultures. Some cultures are quite open about it and some are not. What's important is the safety of children and vulnerable adults in any such situation. Exploitation is the concern, not nudity in and of itself. It's also important to consider your comfort level. If it causes anxiety and concern for you, just move to a section of the beach where swimsuits are worn.

Q. *My grandson is marrying a wonderful woman at a "destination wedding" in the Caribbean. I wasn't asked to attend the wedding, but I've been invited to their reception when they return. Would it be a sin for me to attend the reception since it may seem that I'm giving them my permission to be in a marriage that's not blessed by the Church?*

A. Being at their reception doesn't give them permission to be married or bestow your blessing upon them. The reception is a social event that celebrates a significant milestone in your grandson's life. It would be appropriate for you to attend it and enjoy the party. ☀



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