



## ***Rules Need Not Rule Your Life***

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

The Pharisees were a primary focus of the teachings of Jesus. The all-male Pharisees comprised a religious group within Israel that influenced the daily life of the people from the moment they got up in the morning until they went to bed at night. Two thousand years ago, there was no separation of church and state as we have grown accustomed to today. All facets of the lives of the Israelites were regulated, influenced, and controlled by religious authorities.

Something of what this experience might have been like is evident in some of today's Islamic societies, where culture, tradition, and custom are not options. Those strictures form and animate the fundamental issues and choices that are a part of normal everyday life. The people who live in these societies as native-born citizens and visitors are expected to follow the rules at all times.

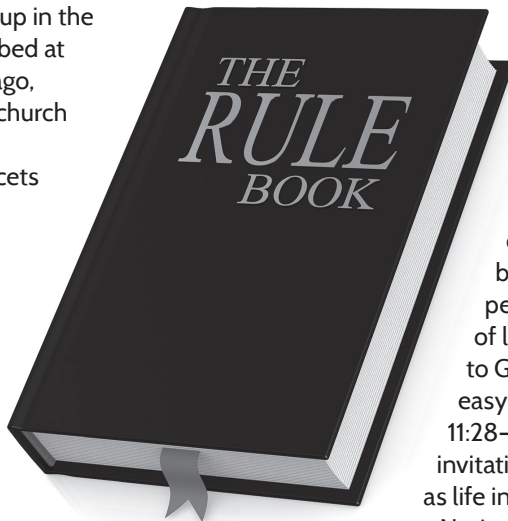
Under the Pharisees in Jesus' time, more than 600 specific commandments needed to be obeyed in order for a person to live a life that was understood as pleasing to God. Some

commandments were undoubtedly useful and seem to have been known to Jesus. More often than not, he left such commandments unchallenged. Others seemed to become a focus of his teaching, occasional frustration, and sometimes anger.

A picture that emerges from the Gospels is that the Pharisees and other teachers of the law had placed too many burdens and expectations on the people. Jesus offered a new way of living that gives praise and glory to God. "Come to me, for my yoke is easy and my burden light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus' gospel presents an invitation to what we now understand as life in God's kingdom.

Notice in the invitation, however, there is an expectation, a first step that seems essential. The expectation is a familiarity with what has once been required and then an awareness of what's now possible. It isn't an invitation to ignorance or to a life with no expectations, rules, or requirements. Rather, it's an invitation to more, not less.

The person who accepts the yoke of Jesus accepts a way of living, a perception and



understanding of life that can lead ultimately to freedom and the fullness of life, what we today might understand as everlasting life. This “gospel living” also has challenges. The burden and the yoke are easy and light, and both are part of the invitation and the way of life.

Saint Alphonsus Liguori, the founder of the Redemptorists, said if a person “loves God, he can do what he pleases.” That might sound like freedom to do what we want, but it isn’t. Alphonsus understood that for us to enter into a relationship with the Lord and become aware of God’s presence at work in our lives, we must make a fundamental change within.

***It’s important for us to see that the yoke and burden Jesus offers us are easy and light.***



A relationship with God must fill us, change us, and captivate us so our life experiences and living make it impossible to choose, do, or hope for anything that ultimately fails to give glory and honor to God. This doesn’t eliminate the possibility of weakness, failure caused by lack of effort, and sin. It places each of these realities of the human existence within a larger context as part of the process of human living that ultimately pleases God. In Alphonsus’ day, this was a profound and revolutionary spiritual insight. Today, perhaps it remains so.

It has always been easy for all people at all times to get swept up in the energy that goes with life. It’s tempting to take refuge in learning and obeying the rules and regulations, down to the most minute point, and be somehow assured that this is what God requires. We might even be tempted to insist that rule-following is the only way to live,

perceive reality, and give glory to God. The temptation to live within the strictest bonds of the law, real law and imagined law, is certainly one of the struggles of scrupulosity.

The gospel invites all people—including, of course, those who suffer with scrupulosity—to something more. It calls us to a way of perceiving life that celebrates the universal presence of God in the people, events, and circumstances that are part of God’s creation.

If we learn to see as Jesus sees, if we learn to perceive life in the kingdom of God, then we’ll understand what it means to experience the yoke and the burden of the Lord. And we’ll be free. Our hearts, our spirits will soar. We’ll be able to believe and participate confidently in all that God has given us on this and every day. ✨

Please help us continue *Scrupulous Anonymous* and other Liguori Publications ministries.  
See back page for details.

# Augustine's Tears

Saint Augustine was born in North Africa in 354. His famous baptism in Christ occurred in 387, for which he gives much credit to the prayers of his mother, Monica. The year after his conversion, Monica died. In his *Confessions*, Augustine describes the circumstances of her death, and he writes movingly about his grief.

Monica tells Augustine: *"My son, for my part I find no further pleasure in this life....There was one reason, and one alone, why I wished to remain a little longer in this life, and that was to see you a Catholic Christian before I died. God has granted my wish and more besides, for I now see you as his servant....What is left for me to do in this world?"*

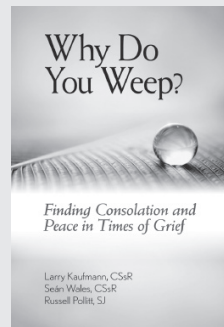


Five days later, Monica fell ill with a fever, at times losing consciousness. Augustine and his brother, Navigius, sat at her bedside. At one point she awoke and said to them, who were speechless with grief, "You will bury your mother here." Augustine describes how he could not respond, so choked up was he with grief. But his brother urged her to "hang on" until they got home to their own country. In response to this, Monica uttered her most famous words: *"It does not matter where you bury my body. Do not let that worry you! All I ask is that, wherever you may be, you should remember me at the altar of the Lord."*

Monica was not only asking that they should continue to pray for her after she died. She was not merely concerned for prayers for the salvation of her soul. She was also, in effect, telling them that in the memento for the dead at Mass, she was coming into the closest possible relationship that characterizes the communion of saints. An item of the Creed, this communion refers to the bond that continues between the living and the "living dead." It is a bond that is most

powerfully strengthened in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Grief is a necessary aspect of continuity in a relationship in the communion of saints. It deepens our appreciation of the person who has died, it helps us understand things we had not realized before, and it takes us onto a new and more mature level of personal growth. Offering Masses for the dead—and being present when that intention is offered—is no idle exercise. It's truly an act of faith in the continuity of a relationship in Christ (who is the same yesterday, today, and forever) between ourselves and our deceased loved ones. This is something that "money can't buy," as the saying goes—not the best coffins nor the most elaborate tombstones. ⚙



Excerpt from *Why Do You Weep? Finding Consolation and Peace in Times of Grief* by Larry Kaufmann, CSsR; Sean Wales, CSsR; and Russell Pollitt, SJ (Liguori product code 820779).

To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521.

# Mailbox

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

**Q.** *Father, I don't like your newsletters that encourage us, or when they seem to be more fluff than substance. Give it to us straight, include the details, and leave the encouraging words to someone else. I want direction, not encouragement!*

**A.** Sorry to disappoint you, but my experience informs me that encouragement is also very important and necessary. Scrupulous people seldom, if ever, exhaust the questions and the details of life, but they do often feel discouraged and isolated. When I share a topic that's encouraging, I do so in order to offer support and hope.

**Q.** *When I was a graduate student, I submitted research that was incomplete. It fulfilled the professor's requirements, but there was so much more that could and should have been included. Did I sin by leaving the paper incomplete?*

**A.** No, not by any means. Even if you would have included everything possible in your paper, it still would have been incomplete the minute you finished it. That's the nature of research. It's constantly changing and is never fully complete. There's always another fact, a different point of view, another footnote that could be included. You fulfilled your professor's requirements, and that's more than enough.



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 donate by credit card, please go to [ScrupulousAnonymous.org](http://ScrupulousAnonymous.org) and click on Support the Ministry. To donate by check, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

© 2018 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).