

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Pray As You Grow *Fr. Preston Westly, C.Ss.R.*

The axiom that tells us to live one day at a time has been a lifesaver for many throughout the years. But how do we do that? How do we keep little problems from becoming big problems?

The answers to both questions involve maintaining spiritual health in daily living: remaining aware of ourselves and others, praying and trusting in God and the people he places in our lives, and doing the work necessary to build strong relationships with those who can help us stay on the right path to happiness.

We are never alone



All types of prayer are there to assure us of the one essential truth we need to receive and maintain good spiritual health: *We are never alone.* Prayer counteracts our feeling that no one knows or cares about the suffering we endure.

This is one of the primary messages given to us in the

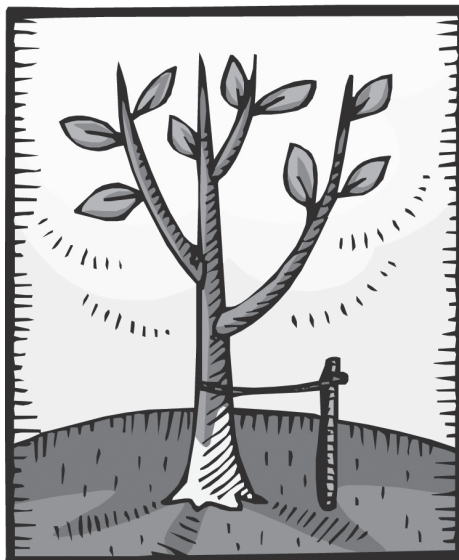
prayer called the Liturgy of the Hours (formerly called the Divine Office), the stabilizing prayer of many people. Celebrated daily by clergy and laypeople, it reminds us that our trust in God is not in vain and speaks of those throughout salvation history who suffered and looked to the Lord for relief and a life of peace.

Another type of prayer involves asking the help of those who are with God. Many people ask Saint Anthony to help them find lost articles. Others pray to Saint Gerard, the Mother's Saint,

asking to become parents of a healthy child.

Those with migraine headaches often ask Blessed Francis Seelos for relief. Many seek the help of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, Saint Ignatius Loyola, Saint Thomas More, Saint Teresa of Avila, or another saint to help them overcome terrible bouts of scrupulosity. *We are never alone.*

Successful people turn to



prayer because in prayer they begin to experience inner freedom, peace, and a sense of God's loving and caring presence. Old feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, and fear are relieved.

Through prayer, we begin to break free from the limiting influences of scrupulosity. We wipe the slate clean and find new levels of peace and growth developing within us. We free ourselves from what enslaves too many people who go through life not quite awake and not quite asleep—people who Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) said “lead lives of quiet desperation,” which is the antithesis of healthy spiritual living.

Prayer is there for us to use. It's good for us to search out the type of prayer most meaningful for us at this time in our lives. We can reach out and experience the best way for us to pray—the type of prayer that suits us best. It can be a difficult practice, but it brings to us the healthiest of attitudes and keeps us from slipping back into allowing painful scrupulosity to dominate our lives.

Calisthenics for the soul



One member of our *Scrupulous Anonymous* family tries to set aside fifteen to twenty minutes at the end of each day for prayer. He begins by reviewing the day's events and his reactions to those events. Often he combines this spiritual exercise with physical exercise, usually a walk.

He begins by asking God to help him see himself as he truly was during the day. The idea is not to see what he did wrong, but to honestly acknowledge and affirm the healthy things, to admit the unhealthy things and ask God's forgiveness, and to totally trust in that forgiveness and

give himself over to the positive warmth of a loving God instead of negative worries. He says he never forgets to spend some of this sacred time acknowledging the beauty of the world God has created for all to enjoy.

He ends his daily prayer by thanking God for the good things in his life and asking him for the grace to maintain this awareness tonight and tomorrow.

Our friend says that to gain and keep health requires a commitment of time, practice, and prayer.

Words to grow by



The great insight that escapes many people is that they don't want to change or grow—they only want to stop hurting. But the hurting won't stop unless we grow in grace, knowledge, and awareness while living life to the fullest. Saint Teresa of Avila stated many times that our spiritual journey requires a courageous response.

As we begin the new year, let's ask ourselves how committed we are to growth. Are we willing to go to any length to overcome our scrupulosity? Are we willing to leave complacency behind? Are we willing to replace our prideful selves with the obedient model given to us by Jesus and his saints? Are we willing to come out of hiding and share our struggles with those who can help us?

We have many axioms to help us along the way: “Easy does it.” “Live one day at a time, accepting God's will joyfully.” “Let go and let God.” We must figure out what each of them means to us, then put them into practice in our daily life. Are we willing to say to God in prayer, “Your will, not mine, be done”?

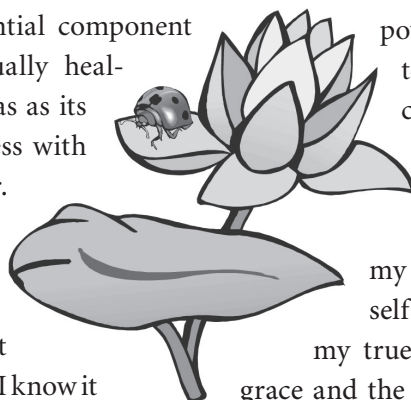
★ THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS I CAN ★

The following is adapted from Body Mind Spirit: Tapping the Healing Power Within You—A 30-Day Program by Richard P. Johnson (Liguori Publications, © 1996).

Prayer, the spiritual action you take to connect with God, is an essential component of healing. All prayer is actually healing prayer because all prayer has as its central purpose greater closeness with God, our true source and center.

★ *Decision Prayer*

Living Presence, today let me truly know and understand that the power of decision is my own. I know it is your will that I accept fully what you created me to be. Let me devote today to my search so I may join with you to make my decisions your decisions. I am incomplete without you; I am made whole and holy when I am with you. You have given me so many gifts; let me honor your gift of free will so I can make decisions about my sickness with conscious intent. Let me take your hand, Lord, and walk with you today. Allow me to make *my* will *your* will. Let me practice daily, for faith develops from practice, and truth comes from understanding the meaning you give to my life. Let me share your will and your purpose for me. Amen.



★ *Action Prayer*

Lord, let me grow beyond anxiety, depression, and guilt. Let me accept the world, releasing it from my false expectations. Help me let go of the future; I know it is in your hands. I have no control over it except to express my powerlessness. Help me find my way to peace in the present, certain of care the world cannot provide. Let me hear the voice of Christ as I release the world.

Help me, loving God, release my defensiveness and align my true self with your defenselessness, where my true strength resides. Give me your grace and the gifts of truth—inspiration, kindness, steadfastness, and perseverance. Finally, give me the courage and strength to act as you would have me act, in love and peace, with your Son as my model and your Spirit as my guide. I give you my life, Lord, forever. Amen.

★ *Resources*

You may find the following books helpful in enriching your prayer life:

- *Daily Strength for Daily Needs: One Year of Biblical Inspiration* by Victor M. Parachin
- *Healing in the Spirit: Wholeness of Body, Strength of Soul* by Jim McManus
- *Praying Throughout the Day: A Book of Hours for Those With Addictions* by Harriet Roberts
- *Loved for Who I Am* by Carlo Mario Martini

All from Liguori Publications

Dilemma DEPARTMENT

Q *How do I find a priest who understands scrupulosity?*

A Each priest you meet has been educated about the scrupulous person and the scrupulous conscience as part of his seminary training, so all priests have at least some understanding and knowledge of the problem. However, I believe some priests seem to have a special grace that helps them in this ministry.

A good place to start is in the sacrament of reconciliation, where you can ask your parish priest for guidance. He may be able to recommend a priest with these particular talents. If not, perhaps the diocesan offices can recommend a priest for a scrupulous person.

The central point here is to not be afraid to ask. The priest will be happy to recommend someone else to you if you need more help than he can provide.



Q *At one time in my life I experienced some extremely stressful episodes and didn't know if or how I was going to get through the suffering and pain, so I made some promises to God. Today I find that I can't fulfill these promises. What should I do?*

A You are not bound in conscience to keep any promises you made while you were under great stress. It's best not to make these types of promises or vows in the first place, because they seem only to add another burden of guilt, shame, and anxiety, but you are not committing any sin by not keeping those promises.

Scrupulosity is enough of a burden—you needn't add to it. Just say a prayer or two. Tell God you know of his love for you and that you will try to respond to that love in the future.

Know
that I am
with you.

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Genesis 28:15

Send your letters and inquiries to sa@liguori.org.
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