

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Scrupulous Anonymous  
One Liguori Drive  
Liguori, MO 63057-9999  
[www.liguori.org](http://www.liguori.org)

One of my favorite books—no longer in print, unfortunately—was written by Jesuit priest Peter van Breeman. *As Bread That Is Broken* (Dimension Books, 1960) was primarily a meditation on the Eucharist. Father van Breeman said that just as the eucharistic bread is broken and then shared, so is each person who receives it. We too are broken, and we too are called into relationship with others despite our brokenness.

This theme was later captured brilliantly in *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Image, 1979; still in print), by well-known spirituality author Henri J. M. Nouwen. He singles out men and women called to Church ministry who wrestle with their own weaknesses and strengths. He said that even though all people are wounded and broken, the grace of God allows us to offer healing to others. In other words, you needn't have your own act together to channel God's grace to others.

These books influenced many priests, nuns, and brothers in the late 1970s and early 1980s by helping define what it means to answer the vocational call.

# BREAD That Is Broken

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Each person, aware of his or her own brokenness, through the grace of God accepted a call to witness to the power and love of our heavenly Father.

## **IN SPITE OF OUR IMPERFECTION, WE CAN HELP**

Over the past few months, I've been reflecting on these two books, remembering how important it is to recognize that I'm called into life and loved by God on this day exactly as I am—not as I might one day be. This is important because I will never, at least in this life, be perfect. I have too many shortcomings, too many blind spots, too many preferred ways of acting and thinking, and other constant reminders of my imperfection. It's very comforting to know—and accept—that God loves me despite my flaws.

It's also very comforting and reassuring to know that despite my limitations, I can help others. If that weren't the case, the SA newsletter wouldn't exist. We priest editors have many talents and abilities, but we also struggle with challenges and difficulties.

For example, even though I'm not scrupulous, I do understand obsessive and compulsive behavior because I've experienced it, and I've been able to share what I've learned in this newsletter.

One well-loved man who served as SA director for many years did have a scrupulous conscience. He would pore over letters, wrestling with his response, trying to find the word of comfort or direction that was “just right.” Even when he was seriously ill, he kept trying to help the countless men and women who contacted him. He went to his grave troubled by his demons, but he gave much comfort and reassurance to others fighting their own.

Still another SA priest director was a very large

man with an even larger heart of gold. His height and girth could seem threatening, but the minute he began to speak you sensed his gentleness, care, and concern. When I see his name in the SA archives, I feel his gentle and loving presence.

## **BECAUSE OF OUR IMPERFECTION, WE CAN HELP**

Just as the priest directors of SA have different personalities, strengths, and weaknesses, so do SA members. None of us is perfect. We each have peculiar habits we'd prefer to control. We worry too much. We can be impulsive, testing our patience and that of the people who love us.

But we're also gentle, kind, caring, and willing to listen patiently—and we're filled with belief in the loving presence of God. We may struggle with believing God loves *us*, but we're convinced he loves others. We struggle to see that the reality of God's love for our brothers and sisters is also the reality of God's love for us.

A good meditation for scrupulous people celebrating the Eucharist might be to focus on the moment immediately before Communion when the bread is broken, which is called the rite of fracturing. The congregation prays, “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.”

As the community prays this prayer, we should be aware of our own brokenness, even our sinfulness, and ask for the grace to accept it. In this small way we may well become what we eat: “Bread that is blessed and broken.”

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the  
sins of the world...**

# When We Don't Have Words

The following is adapted from *Symbols That Surround Us: Faithful Reflections* by Johan Van Parys (Liguori Publications, © 2012).

**E**VER SINCE I WAS A YOUNG BOY, I've been enamored of my 95-year-old great-aunt, who now lives in a Belgian retirement community. She has always been beautiful and extremely captivating. She enjoyed a successful career and has lived most of her adult life in a beautiful home in Brussels.

After her husband died, she moved back to our small hometown to live in a retirement community. I visited her not long after I learned she had dementia. I knocked somewhat hesitantly, and she nodded to invite me in. She seemed physically well, and she talked about her life in a very animated way.

I quickly realized, though, that she didn't know who I was, which saddened me a great deal. As I got ready to leave, I asked if I could kiss her farewell. She agreed, and when I leaned in, tears streamed down her face. She said, "Johan, how sad that I did not recognize you. When will you come to see me again?" I cried with her, but by the time I left she had already forgotten who I was.

Although this may sound like a fairy tale, it was as if my kiss had awakened her. In spite of our conversation and all the information I had provided to prove I was her grandnephew, she recognized me only in what seemed like a small gesture of my love. Yet for her, it had a profound impact.

My experience with my aunt is exactly how symbols work. That which appears simple or ordinary can hold great meaning. Symbols enable us to communicate on a deeper level when we don't have the words to do so. In a religious context, symbols enable us to express our faith in ways that wouldn't be possible if we relied exclusively on words. Simple and unassuming water and bread in the right context have a great impact on those who encounter them. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a symbol is surely worth a million.

Although we may not always be aware of them, symbols surround us, connect us to sacred images in our churches, remind us of our faith, and support us in our private and public prayer as we celebrate the sacraments and engage in private devotions.



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# MAILBOX

One Liguori Drive • Liguori, MO 63057-9999  
newsletter@liguori.org

**Q** *Over the years I've profited from others' lost and misplaced items. I never tried to find the owners, nor did I confess what I did. How can I make restitution?*

**A** For a scrupulous person, the question of restitution is always tricky. Throughout the years the priest confessors of SA have consistently suggested that people in your situation make a donation to your parish or a charity.

Choose a reasonable amount—not the highest possible, but some value most people would find reasonable, and make that your restitution.



## **2012 Scrupulous Anonymous Retreats Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR**

**Friday, Oct. 26 – Sunday, Oct. 28**

Redemptorist Renewal Center, Tucson, AZ  
For information, call 520-744-3400 or visit  
desertrenewal.org and click on RRC Calendar

**Q** *I was playful and flirtatious with a girl at a party, probably a little freer than usual because I'd been drinking. Her dad was there. Am I guilty of an even graver mortal sin because her father witnessed my actions?*

**A** I don't see the presence of *any* sin, let alone mortal or grave sin, in the actions you described, with or without the presence of her father. If something was going on that was inappropriate enough to be truly sinful, I doubt that her father or the other party guests would have allowed it.

I think you're describing playful flirtation, which is not a sin. It might be something you regret, and you might be embarrassed the next day upon reflection, but that's an entirely different situation.

**Friday, Dec. 7 – Sunday, Dec. 9**

Perpetual Help Retreat Center, Oconomowoc, WI  
For information, call 262-567-6900

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