

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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What Separates Us From Christ's Love?

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The apostle Paul, in his expansive and stirring letter to the Christian community in Rome (8:38–39), exclaims in a familiar passage,

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This proclamation sums up the Christian foundation of faith that is also captured in the words of the Gospel of Saint John, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (3:16). Or, as clearly stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “The Word became flesh so that *thus we might know God’s love*” (458).

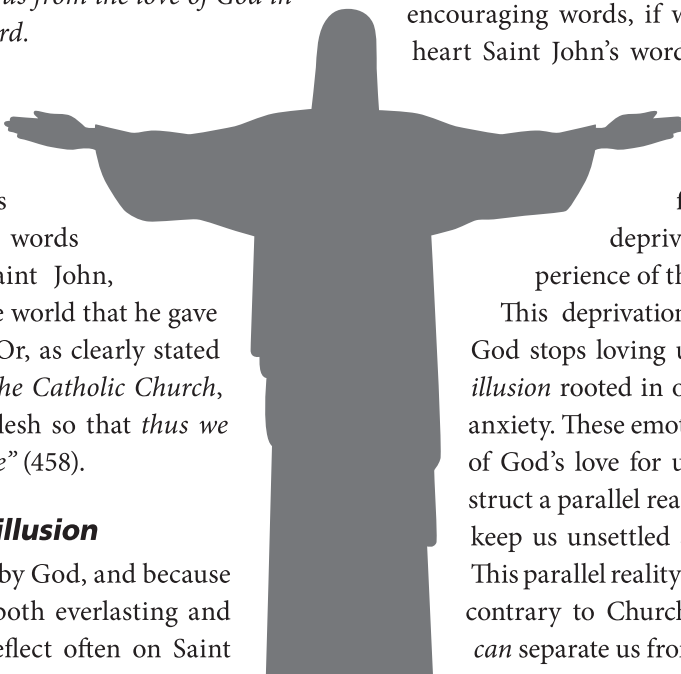
Separation is an illusion

Because we are loved by God, and because God’s love for us is both everlasting and eternal, we should reflect often on Saint

Paul’s hopeful words, especially when we feel isolated, alone, and alienated. It is particularly reassuring to know and understand that God loves us at *every* moment, at *every* time, exactly as we are—not as we one day might be. Or, as I have stated on many occasions, “We are already the person God loves, exactly as we are.”

If we’re unable to believe and embrace Paul’s encouraging words, if we’re unable to take to heart Saint John’s words and the *Catechism’s* teaching, if we suffer from the *illusion* of separation from God—we will be deprived of this essential experience of the love of God.

This deprivation won’t occur because God stops loving us; rather, it will be an *illusion* rooted in our own fear, guilt, and anxiety. These emotions rob us of the truth of God’s love for us. Such emotions construct a parallel reality and perception that keep us unsettled and make life difficult. This parallel reality makes us believe that—contrary to Church teaching—something *can* separate us from the love of Christ.



For people with scrupulosity, this parallel reality is not only alienating and isolating—it robs the sufferer of any real possibility of the peace of Christ. The pain and suffering that results is the familiar pain and suffering of scrupulosity known well to the readers of this newsletter.

Shatter the illusion

Unfortunately, there is no simple way to release people from the illusion and place them on the path to the serenity of knowing they are loved.

I have understood in my own life—primarily through trial and error—that if I imagine a solution to a problem, even when the solution seems far off or impossible to attain, there is nevertheless power and comfort in the imagination.

This is not fanciful thinking, in which we imagine the impossible. No matter how fertile my imagination, I will never grow wings and fly myself around the world.

I'm talking about using the imagination God gave me to imagine the *possible*: I can imagine myself more trustworthy, more fit and trim, or more relaxed and happy.

When these positive outcomes are the intended result of my imagination and I put into action a plan that enables slow and patient movement toward the imagined result, I usually experience real growth. There seems to be a real enabling power in the ability to imagine myself actually attaining what I hope for or what I understand I need.

If I can't imagine what I hope for and see the application and experience in my own life, I'll be discouraged from even trying. Again, it's from my own experience that I know this to be not only true—it's also essential.

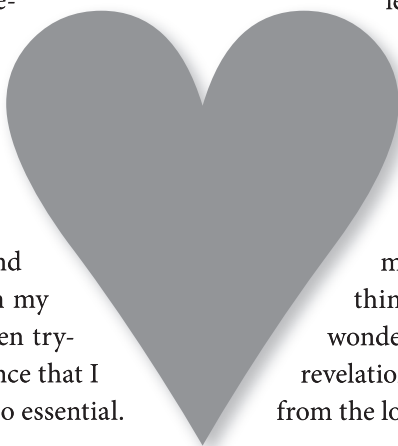
Imagine the possibility

Many times over the years when I have been involved in discernment with men and women who believe they have a vocation to the priesthood or religious life, I've learned to value and appreciate the role of imagination in the discernment process. When a person is unable to imagine serving as a priest, sister, or brother or how they might actually live as an ordained or professed person, this usually ends the discussion. It's not much different than asking someone to imagine becoming a lawyer, a fireman, or a doctor. The imagination fuels the dream's becoming reality.

It's important for Scrupulous Anonymous members to imagine what life will feel like when we're convinced that we can't be separated from the love of God. After all, we already spend countless hours imagining what it's like to be separated from God, dwelling on the dire consequences of this reality. Why not use that time to imagine not the worst possible scenario, but the best?

How energizing and freeing might it be to see yourself living day to day convinced of the power of your relationship with God and confident of God's love for you? Will that reality not put a bounce in your step and make even the most difficult challenge a little easier to carry? I know it will.

Return to the words of the apostle Paul and read them daily. Cut out or duplicate the words from this newsletter and paste them to your bathroom mirror so you can read them first thing in the morning. Won't it be wonderful to anchor your day in the revelation that *nothing* can separate us from the love of Christ?



Defining Our Humanity

The following is adapted from *Treasures Holy and Mystical*
by Fr. Philip Neri Powell, OP (©2010 Liguori Publications).

The most profound question for the Christian is this: do I care enough about my humanity—the divine gift of life as a person loved by God—to suffer for others?

Why should we define our humanity in terms of suffering for others? When we understand that suffering is not simply the experience of pain, but the gift of being able to give meaning to pain, we can see that we imitate the love of Christ on the cross when we lead others away from the mere feeling of hurt into a closer relationship with their created end.

How do we do this? Nothing is more despairing to someone in pain than to be abandoned, left to suffer alone. As our Holy Father makes clear, it is precisely because Christ suffered for us that we are able to suffer in kind for others.

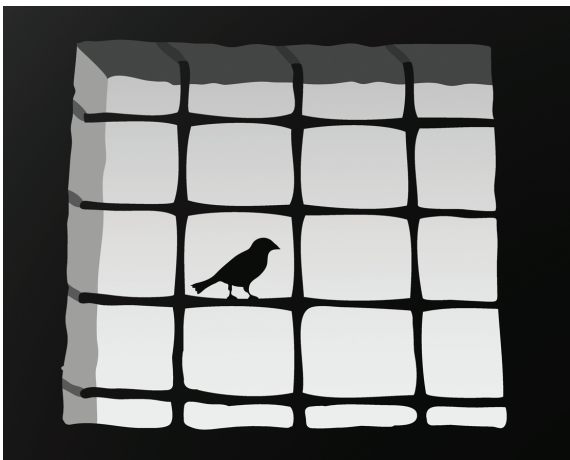
Having been spared the final pain of endless

death, we are freed by Christ to take on the work of loving those in pain so that they too might be able to find love and give their hurt meaning beyond crushing despair. Our Christian hope in the fulfillment of God's promises for eternal life is the engine that drives us to compassion. Looking faithfully at our end in Christ, we cannot be but moved to stand with those in pain to show them what we so clearly see.

Do I care enough about my humanity to suffer with others as Christ suffered for us?

Closing Prayer

God of Consolation, you are with us in our rejoicing and in our mourning. When we shout your praise, you hear us. When we cry for help, you hear us. In this time of great suffering among your people, hear us and help us. Give us the courage to look to the cross of your Christ, to learn to suffer well for the benefit of others. Our pain, our sorrow, our desolation will find their final meaning when we suffer as Christ suffered for us. And despite our sorrow, we live in your eternal hope, always breathing and speaking your Word. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.





SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

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Q *I have issues with personal hygiene. Quite often when I'm grooming myself, I feel very good about what I am doing and have a "warm feeling" about myself, if you know what I mean. Is this a mortal sin or a venial sin? I want to be well-groomed and presentable, but I do not want to offend God.*

A God, the Creator, intends that the human person experience a variety of feelings. Feelings are essential for us to function not only emotionally but also physically. For example, how terrible it would be if you were unable to feel hot or cold (a terrible side effect of some horrific illnesses) or if you were unable to feel sudden changes in atmosphere or weather conditions. It would make life very difficult.

Feelings in and of themselves do not fall into either the mortal or the venial sin category. Certainly experiencing a warm feeling as you engage in personal hygiene is not sinful, and I am well aware of what you intend to communicate when you describe the sensation in this manner.

Be at peace about this.

Q *I have difficulties with a member of my family and have often wished this person harm. Now this person has cancer, and treatment options are very limited. Will God forgive me for my sin?*

A Let me see if I understand this question. You have occasionally engaged in wishful thinking, perhaps provoked by an argument or some idea of injustice caused by a member of your family, and you wished that person harm. Now this person has a life-threatening illness, and you feel responsible for the diagnosis.

How can this be? How could your thoughts alone produce such catastrophic results?

I believe you know the answer to these questions. You are not in any way responsible for this person's cancer. You do not have this kind of power.

Thoughts are thoughts—nothing more. It's pure coincidence that a person you thought about in a less-than-positive manner now has a probably fatal illness.

Be at peace about this.

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