

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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



## *Cooperating With God's Grace*

*Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR*

Recently one of my parishioners received very difficult and challenging news. Despite the best efforts of his physicians, despite the advances of modern medicine, despite every effort that could possibly be expended on his behalf, his illness is resisting treatment. The doctors have said, "There is nothing more we can do."

Yet my friend is very much at peace. The time for struggle is over and, as he puts it, "everything is in God's hands, and after all, that's where it has been all along, hasn't it?"

I can only marvel at his reaction. Until this point, he was a valiant participant in his aggressive medical treatment. His personal resources enabled him to have experimental treatments that went far beyond normal and routine, and he was able to devote substantial time and resources to seeking a remedy.

But that was not to be, and his reaction to this news was edifying. He could have been angry and defiant, demanding to try something else; instead, his reaction was peaceful, humble, and right on target.

My friend and his struggle remind me of an important lesson I sometimes forget: Just because everything is in God's hands doesn't mean we needn't put forth our best effort. God wants us to use the gifts, talents, and resources we've been blessed with for our own good and the good of others.

But we must understand that the ultimate power resides not in us, but in God. To know and to understand this basic truth is essential for our own well-being and happiness.

### **THREE OBSTACLES TO RELIEF**

As I listened to my friend and witnessed his medical and spiritual process, I couldn't help but think of the members of the Scrupulous Anonymous family, specifically about the individual attitudes people have about their struggles and difficulties.

Psychologists report that the clinical treatment of scrupulosity is routinely problematic for three reasons.

The first reason is that it's notoriously difficult to reproduce the necessary manifestation of the condition in a manner both therapist and patient can understand. If, for example, the manifestation of a compulsion is a fear of germs, it is quite possible to duplicate situations that mirror the fear.

However, how does one adequately and effectively duplicate the necessary components of an issue that is primarily spiritually or theologically experienced?

A second stumbling block is that patients are routinely able to describe the fear and anxiety they may feel but often have difficulty describing the actual content of the thought that triggers the response. In his book *The Doubting Disease: Help for Scrupulosity and Religious Compulsions* (Paulist Press, 1995), Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, PhD, discusses this situation in some detail. His insights are particularly helpful.

A third potential stumbling block—perhaps the most serious—is that often people with scrupulosity resist psychological or medical advice and/or treatment. In this type of twisted thinking the patient mistakenly believes, “God has given me the cross of scrupulosity to bear. If I do anything to relieve myself of it, I’ll displease God.” With this kind of belief in place, how can change possibly be achieved?

## **OUR EFFORTS ARE BLESSED**

Imagine if my friend believed God had inflicted his illness upon him and therefore he shouldn’t pursue a cure. It’s true that my friend’s outcome would be the same, but that’s an entirely different scenario. He made the effort to achieve relief by availing himself of the resources he’s been blessed with and the talents of his many doctors. Only after his effort did he arrive at a point of resignation and acceptance, not as a defeat, but as a confirmation that his disease was indeed God’s will for him. How-

ever, he would never have received confirmation of God’s will for him if he hadn’t expended the effort to pursue a different outcome.

In difficult moments, people often recall a quote of Saint Augustine (354–371): “Pray as though everything depended on God and act as though everything depended on you.”

***Pray as though everything depended on God and act as though everything depended on you.***

SAINT AUGUSTINE

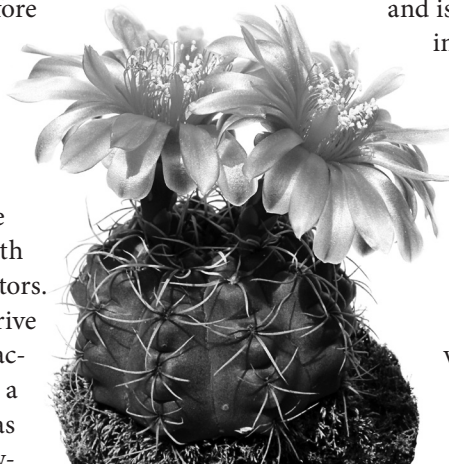
This greatly admired saint is saying that when we work with the gifts and talents the Lord has blessed us with, we are cooperating with the actual gift of God’s grace to us.

Or, as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us, “Grace is *favor*, the *free and undeserved help* God gives us to respond to his call” (1996).

It’s difficult and often discouraging to control or at least manage scrupulosity so it doesn’t rob us of the peace and serenity the Lord intends for us. Sometimes it seems that for every step forward, we take two steps back. It can be exhausting, but we pray it never gets to the point where we give up entirely. Some of us will get relief from the symptoms we experience every day, while others will continue to long for relief that seems never to come. That is the burden and the cross of scrupulosity.

But even if our efforts don’t produce the results we hope for, *the effort itself* is blessed, is graced, and is life-giving in ways we might not imagine.

My friend awaits the final outcome of his illness. He remains firm in his acceptance of whatever the outcome will be. He is grateful for the time he has been given and grateful that he used all his talents and resources to look for a cure. He is very much at peace, resting confidently in the conviction of God’s love and care for him, despite his struggles and suffering.





# Being Alive

The following is adapted from *With Hearts Full of Joy: Following Christ the Redeemer* by Mathew J. Kessler, CSsR, and Antonio Medina, STD (Liguori, 2010).

**F**eeling alive is more than feeling good about life. Let's briefly talk about an important point: Before we can *feel* alive, we must first *be* alive.

That seems obvious, but let's look at the experience of being alive. To be a living human person means to breathe, eat, talk, move, rest, sleep, think, decide, and feel all kinds of emotions. And yet we feel in our gut that there is more. We say, "You never know what's around the corner," or "Let's see what tomorrow brings." Our lives are more than the bundle of thoughts and feelings we have at any moment. And whatever feelings we have about our personal successes and failures, we know that tomorrow these feelings can change because circumstances will change, but life will go on.

The distinction between being alive and the feelings we have *about* life is important. When we reduce life to our feelings, it's easy to fall into periods of despair or disillusionment. Setbacks and illnesses can reduce our feelings about life

to Erma Bombeck's popular line, "If life is a bowl of cherries, what am I doing in the pits?"

Being alive is broader and bigger than the job we have, the family we belong to, or the education and wealth we've accumulated. The human person has the potential to step into a bigger dream because each human is oriented to the future, the place from where possibility and invitation beckon us. Sometimes we can't accept the invitation due to poverty, racism, and other barriers, but in general we want more from life because there is more to be discovered.

This future-oriented aspect of human existence—the openness to a new life, a new future, a new way of living—is common to every person. And this is exactly what our Christian faith tells us God wants for each of us. It's true for you and for all who share the same baptism. By extension, our openness to the future exists for communities as well. Consisting of people with dreams, a community looks for life in the future—not in the past.





# SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

One Liguori Drive • Liguori, MO 63057-9999

**Q** *I've received a jury summons and am terrified I'll be picked for a jury. I can't make decisions about my own life—how am I supposed to make decisions about someone else's?*

**A** I understand your dilemma. If you're seeing a doctor about your scrupulosity, have your doctor write a letter to the court clerk asking that you be excused from jury duty for health reasons. Also, if you're asked to fill out a questionnaire, this will give you the opportunity to make your condition known.

If you don't have a doctor who can write a letter for you and there is no other opportunity to make your condition known, I suggest you answer the summons and participate in the process. If you are selected, be as honest as you can.

Be at peace about this matter. God bless you.

**Q** *I love my dog very much, and she is quite old. Although she is in reasonably good health, I understand that the life span of a dog is relatively short. Do you believe dogs can go to heaven? It would be a great relief for me to know we won't be separated forever.*

**A** God, the creator of all life, continues to treasure his creations even in death, when life seems to have passed away. Although a

human life is unique and precious, it isn't a stretch of the imagination to believe that even a dog's life gives glory and honor to God.

I believe that, somehow in the wisdom of God, God has provided a place for your dog.

Be at peace about this matter. God bless you.



***Even a dog's life gives  
glory and honor to God.***

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