

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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Compassion

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

The men and women of Scrupulous Anonymous are blessed with many gifts and talents. I've personally experienced your generosity of spirit and heart, your patient perseverance, and your willingness to help each other.

I've also experienced your willingness to have a hearty laugh, especially when confronted with the often unintended result of an obsessive thought or compulsion. When a group of people with scrupulosity laughs, their laughter heals them as it declares, "Yes, I've been there, and the same thing happened to me." Their laughter doesn't judge

or perceive something missing. It is, rather, the laughter of people sharing an experience on the human journey.

But of the gifts routinely experienced by each of you, one is in short supply. That it's in short supply isn't deliberate, nor is it the result of sin.

I believe it's in short supply because to claim the experience of the gift, we must squarely confront fear and its consequences. This is something all people struggle with, but it's particularly difficult for people with scrupulosity because confronting fear brings us face to face with feelings that often spark distasteful behaviors and consequences.

The gift on the other side

When we avoid confronting fear, we miss out on the gift on the other side of fear, the gift that seems to be lacking in our group: compassion for self, for the person you are at this moment and time—not at some perfect moment in a faraway future.

For people with scrupulosity, compassion for self isn't impossible to engage, but it is difficult. To experience this kind of compassion, we must understand and accept that human beings—without exception—are fragile. Only when we accept our fragile condition can we experience real humility and then compassion.

Accepting fragility as a normal manifestation of what it means to be a human being is difficult for someone with scrupulosity and a highly developed and sensitive conscience. Difficult, but by no means impossible.

As individual men and women, we enjoy a certain independence, but we're also very dependent on other people for life and love. We depend on others to produce, collect, and supply the basic things we need.

We realize we're fragile. The list of what threatens us is exhausting: We suddenly get sick. Accidents

happen. Through no fault of our own, we're victimized by others' behavior and rash decisions.

Coming face to face with human fragility is frightening and can produce severe anxiety, so it's tempting to avoid situations, experiences, thoughts, or actions that produce it. In doing so, we distance ourselves from the experience of fragility. It's like childishly closing your eyes so another person can't see you. It's not at all effective and provides only the illusion of safety.

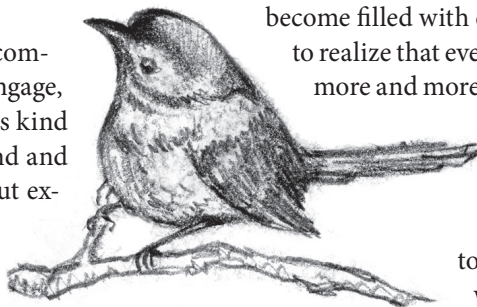
Seeing yourself as God sees you

Real compassion takes root only when you can humbly stand before God, aware of your faults and failings and everything else that makes up a human being, and accept God's love. It's not an experience of *closing* your eyes but of *opening* them to see yourself as God sees you.

Standing before God, knowing you're able to do so only because of his gift of grace, you slowly become filled with even more grace and begin to realize that everything is gift. You become more and more aware that all that you are, all that you will ever be, is the manifestation of God's grace. As you accept this reality you begin to experience humility, and with humility comes compassion, more often first for another person but eventually for yourself.

Once your eyes are wide open, you'll notice God is smiling, not frowning. God is immanently pleased and delighted with you. Scrupulosity doesn't exempt you from God's love, but it does sometimes make God's love seem very distant.

I think sometimes scrupulosity reorders perception. It's not that people with scrupulosity don't believe they're loved by God—rather, they believe God's love must be earned. They have a low tolerance for individual imperfection and weakness as well as an exaggerated sense of sin. Standing before



God in humility and permitting the grace of compassion to wash over you changes your perception and makes you aware of God's unconditional love.

Advent is a good time to reorder your individual perception with the help of God's grace. Try to see yourself as God sees you—not in a way clouded by scrupulosity, but with the clarity and vision of a child of God.

Practice receiving God's gift of compassion and

grace. Imagine God loving you and calling you closer to him each day, warts and all. Engage your fear and anxiety and pray for the grace to let it no longer be a barrier between you and God. Even if you can't break down the barrier, let God's grace wash over it, softening it and making it more pliable so you can experience the fullness of compassion and love God wants for you today.

Be at peace.



Seeing God Everywhere

The following excerpt is adapted from
The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit by
Mitch Finley (Liguori Publications, © 2001).

One of the greatest benefits of the gift of understanding is to fathom the presence of God in the most unlikely people and places. Just about anyone can see God in the face of a baby or a little child. But understanding helps us see God in the face of someone who is sick and dying, in the figure huddled in a doorway, in the person ravaged by cancer, in the angry, rebellious teenager...in the man dying a terrible death on a cross.

It's easy to see God in a beautiful sunset, but understanding helps us see God in an earthquake that wreaks destruction far and wide. It helps

us understand the divine mystery of God's complete transcendence. Instead of using God as an easy explanation for just about anything, understanding helps us take seriously the dictum of Saint Thomas Aquinas that the first thing we need to say about God is that we can't say anything about God.

At the same time, understanding helps us register God's immanence, the radical extent to which God is present, as Saint Augustine said, closer to us than we are to ourselves. In addition, understanding insists that we not limit God to either complete transcendence or complete immanence; rather, both remain completely true of God at all times. Understanding helps us live creatively in the tension of knowing God is both present and absent, near and far.

This benefit is no small thing. Countless people find it practically impossible to live with this tension, so they insist on thinking of God as either way out there or closer than close. A God who is distant is much easier to ignore. A God who is close to the point of being snuggly can be turned into a kind of lap-dog God, easy to take for granted. The trouble with both the distant God and the snuggly God is that sooner or later—usually sooner—they do not fit with our actual human experience of the real God.

A distant God can explain an earthquake: It means that God is uninvolved and couldn't care less. But a distant God makes no sense when it comes to the human experience of being loved unconditionally. A snuggly God can explain human love, but such a God no longer makes any sense when the one I love dies and, apparently, vanishes forever. Understanding helps keep us in touch with the real God, who is simultaneously both absolute mystery and absolute love.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

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Q *When is the next scrupulosity retreat? I haven't been able to attend the previous sessions, and I could really benefit from it.*

A I can't confirm the date, but I anticipate offering a retreat in 2012. I've received many requests for this weekend retreat, and I understand that the people who attend the scrupulosity retreat find it very helpful.

When the next retreat is scheduled, we'll announce the details in the SA newsletter as soon as possible.



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and past issues at mission.liguori.org/newsletters/scrupanon.htm.

Q *I keep remembering past sins, and with the remembering comes confusion: Did I confess the sin as completely and as fully as possible? I'm wearing myself out.*

A This is perhaps the single most focused manifestation of scrupulosity as well as the most fruitless. Remembering, cataloguing, and judging the effectiveness and completeness of previous confessions of sin are monumental wastes of time and energy.

God doesn't require this kind of exhaustive inventory for you to experience his forgiveness. Recall only the sins committed after your last confession—the sins committed before your last confession were and are forgiven by the grace of the sacrament.

Be at peace, and please stop engaging in this fruitless complexity and source of anxiety.

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