

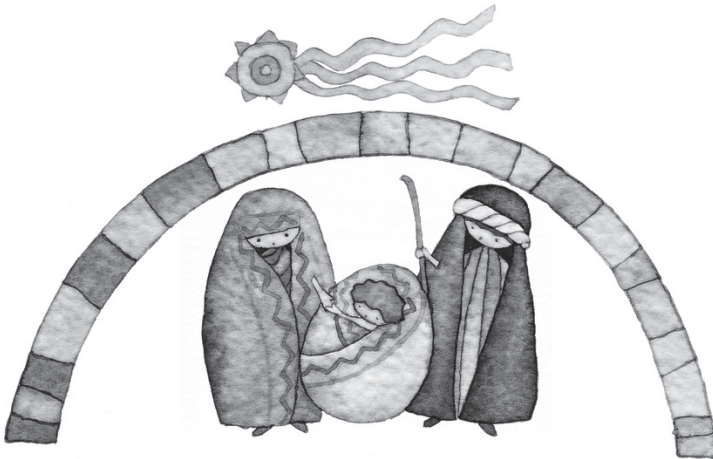
# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

December 2010  
Vol. 47, No. 12



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



## Incarnational Spirituality

Father Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

*We believe and confess that Jesus of Nazareth...is the eternal Son of God made man. He “came from God,” “descended from heaven,” and “came in the flesh.”*

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 423

In December we observe the great solemnity of Christmas, in which we celebrate the birth of Jesus with all the warm feelings of home and hearth that are part of that tradition. But we also celebrate the amazing theological assertion at the core of our Christian perception of reality: that in the person of Jesus, God became man or, to put it in another way, God became incarnate.

As Christians we celebrate the fleshy incarnation of Jesus and rejoice not only in his divinity but also in his humanity.

However, Christians have nevertheless wrestled with the “flesh,” not only of Jesus, but also of our own fleshy existence. From the very beginning of the Christian community, some preferred to emphasize the divinity and the spiritual component of who Jesus was and not fully embrace the entire theological understanding of incarnation. Some Christians were reluctant to celebrate the fullness of the humanity of Jesus, and there was a parallel effort to not fully celebrate and be thankful for our own incarnation.



*Our own incarnation?* Yes! Just as Jesus became a human being, as the first gift of grace each human being also came from heaven and became flesh. We, like Jesus, are incarnational people—people of the spirit and of the flesh. And just as Jesus integrated his flesh and his spirit in service of the kingdom of God, we are called to imitate him.

However, even today some Christians are more concerned about their spiritual selves and see their fleshy selves as an obstacle to a holy life.

Nothing could be further from the intended truth of being an incarnated human person. We're not called to be simply spiritual people who abandon our flesh and find fulfillment in some sort of ether world. We are called to be fully awake, alive, and engaged as people of body, mind, and spirit—incarnated by the created gift of God.

Some scrupulous people suffer tremendously trying to live incarnational lives. Some people struggle with the notion that even common and natural body functions are somehow potentially sinful.

I recall, for example, a person who was convinced that it was a mortal sin to laugh in church. The Bible doesn't mention Jesus laughing, so it mustn't have happened. I gently pointed out that the Bible doesn't mention countless normal bodily functions all human beings perform. Should we therefore presume Jesus never experienced those functions?



To laugh. To cry. To experience good days and bad. To have moments of anxiety and guilt. To be distracted, sometimes even during important

events. To doubt our own abilities or be disappointed in another person. To show anger and frustration. To have strong emotional, physical, and sexual feelings. The myriad expressions of human thoughts, feelings, and sensations are part of being an incarnational person. They are part of the experience of being human.

To be generous. To be forgiving. To patiently listen to others in moments of need. To pray. To believe. To discern what is good and what is holy. To choose this path or another. To respond to a call for help. To sit alone and in silence, prayerfully pondering the meaning of life. To suffer and to struggle. To understand personal strength and weaknesses. To call on God faithfully in prayer. These human thoughts, feelings, and sensations are also part of being an incarnational person. They are part of the experience of being human.

This year as we celebrate the incarnation, let's think about what it means to be human. Perhaps as we reflect on our personal life and actions we'll discover the wonderful power of grace. Perhaps we'll see and understand that the most profound expression of humanity as well as the most uncomplicated and automatic bodily functions we experience every day give glory and honor to God.

*O God of our beginnings. We discover in the birth of your Son, in his coming as one of us, a promise of hope and deliverance. Somehow we can sense this is important. We may not always believe. We may at times approach life with a certain casualness. We may not always understand why we do what we do, choose what we choose, or act how we act.*

*But somehow, in the birth of your Son, we are reassured. Our hope is reborn, and the promise of something better for all—peace for humankind—seems possible again. Bless us with our individual hopes and dreams, surrounded by family and friends, nourished by the bounty of your hands. Form us into your people once again, and grant each of us the promise we find in the Christ Child. Amen.*



# Mercy Over Severity

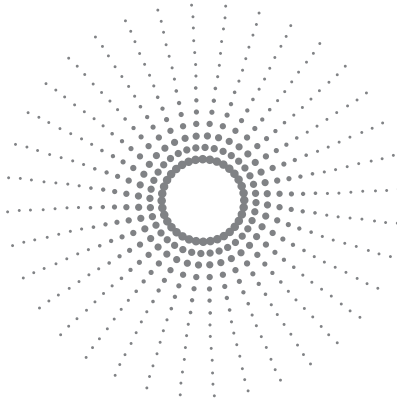
The following is adapted from *Holding God in My Hands: Encounters With the Divine* by Paul Wilkes (Liguori Publications, 2010).

People's lives are messy. Too often, people are unwilling to forgive themselves. Sins weigh heavily; fear and guilt haunt and paralyze. Some feel outside the Church and God's love.

In this messiness and misunderstanding, the Church—and extraordinary ministers of holy Communion—comes to them. And we who will have this profound opportunity in only a few fleeting moments must make pastoral judgments, trying as best we can to discern how best to deal with them in their weakened and vulnerable states.

I was given absolutist guidelines. If I had adhered strictly to those guidelines, many—perhaps even the majority—of the patients I visited in the hospital wouldn't have met those standards. There is a letter of the law and its spirit. There are printed guidelines and the human being lying in a bed. In those few moments with each patient, I constantly had to make decisions about what to do, what to say.

I also was guided by the words of Christ, who



put more stock in forgiveness than in justice or punishment, and the words of my beloved Pope John XXIII. In his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, he said the Church must “make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity” because the Church—through the council—wants to act as a loving parent toward everyone, including those

separated from the Church.

I took the words and intentions of all three into the rooms I visited. I needed to make provisions and allowances for whatever obstacles or life circumstances stood in the way of their relationship with God. For my job was not to reorient or rectify their lives, or demand that they immediately turn to what might be considered full Catholic practice. In the short time I would spend with them, my job was to unite or reunite them with the living God who, if my own life and experience are any measure, readily brushes aside our failings to take each of us in his loving arms, especially when we are in need.

## **FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH**

My heart is tuned to sorrow, and the strings  
Vibrate most readily to minor chords,  
Searching and sad; my mind is stuffed with words  
Which voice the passion and the ache of things:  
Illusions beating with their baffled wings  
Against the walls of circumstance, and hoards  
Of torn desires, broken joys; records  
Of all a bruised life's maimed imaginings.  
Now you are come! You tremble like a star

Poised where, behind earth's rim, the sun has set.  
Your voice has sung across my heart, but numb  
And mute, I have no tones to answer. Far  
Within I kneel before you, speechless yet,  
And life ablaze with beauty, I am dumb.

Amy Lowell

EXCERPTED FROM *HIDDEN GRACES: POEMS FOR CRISIS, STRUGGLE, AND RENEWAL*  
© LIGUORI PUBLICATIONS, 2010



# SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS MAILBOX

One Liguori Drive • Liguori, MO 63057-9999

**Q** *My pastor says it's sinful to sell blessed articles (such as rosaries, statues, holy pictures, etc.) to others. Is this same rule applicable to the sale of your own home or your automobile if it has been blessed by a priest? I am worried about this. Please help me.*

**A** No need to be concerned. Blessed articles intended for use in liturgical worship and prayer are distinct from objects such as your home or car which, even though they may have been blessed, are intended for more secular and practical use.

Although seeking a blessing for an object is an act of piety and devotion, disposing of the item when it's no longer used for its original purpose carries no penalty.

Feel free to dispose of your home and/or car when it seems appropriate to do so and be free of any anxiety. God bless you.

**Q** *With the coming of the holidays, the church becomes packed with people who are seemingly only "Christmas Catholics." Some members of my family who never practice their faith fall into this category. What is my responsibility toward them? Should I inform them that they cannot go to Communion without going to confession first?*

**A** I suggest you welcome, encourage, and thank them for attending church with you on Christmas. Perhaps this kind of welcoming spirit will be the spark they need to return to regular practice of their faith.

I sincerely doubt they are unaware of the rules and regulations required for proper reception of the holy Eucharist, so I wouldn't encourage any intervention on your part.

Trust the sanctity of their individual conscience and their relationship with God. God has a way of making things work out according to his plan and purpose. God bless you.

*Please help us continue Scrupulous Anonymous and other Liguori Publications ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is Redemptorist Fathers dba Liguori Publications, Federal ID 43-0653409. To make a donation, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, One Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.*