

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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IMPORTANT NOTICE

We are updating our mail list, and we need your help. To continue receiving the Scrupulous Anonymous newsletter by mail, please use the enclosed return envelope to send us your name, street address, city, state, and zip code. If you can, please include \$1 to help defray the cost of maintaining our database. This is not required, but it will be most appreciated. If we do not receive your mailing information by December 15, 2015, we will assume you no longer wish to receive the newsletter and remove you from our list. Thank you!

Sensory Overload

by Fr. Thomas M. Santa

I am quite concerned about the overall state of humanity. With the exception of people living in desolate areas, and maybe undiscovered tribes living deep in the rainforest, most of us are connected by social and digital media. It seems as though every thought and experience is immediately shared with thousands of people. Even those we know only as friends of friends are part of our lives.

This is not a rant against social and digital media. I'm aware of the power of the media platforms and recognize what is good, what is imperfect, and what isn't fully understood. Most of my books, magazines, newspapers, and even my priestly breviary are digital. I read more than ever, so on balance my use of digital media has been a good experience.

My concern is that for most people, regular periods of silence and just "being" have given way to a never-ending stream of information, music, entertainment, and other distractions.

When do we reflect, when do we ponder, when do we have time to simply be present to the mystery, the wonder, and the awe of the universe? Are human beings created to be so digitally connected that we never have sustained, conscious moments of solitude? Are we doomed to a life of distraction?

Some of my favorite memories—none of which, by the way, are catalogued on social media—are of times spent fishing for bluegills, rocking on my mother's back porch, taking long walks on country roads,

sitting before the Blessed Sacrament in deep and sustained silence. Are such moments gone forever?

I don't think I'm overreacting. Recently I saw a woman playing solitaire on her phone as she waited for Mass to start. What a wasted opportunity for silence and prayer.

Spiritual directors, psychologists, and therapists know that it's unhealthy to experience any stimulus in a never-ending stream. People who are unwillingly subjected to unrelenting thoughts, anxieties, voices, and other distractions routinely report feeling exhausted and disconnected. They long for simple quiet and aloneness.

So why would anyone deliberately live with constant distraction? And what will happen to the human community when unrelenting noise and images are no longer the exception?

In my book *Christian Contemplative Living: Six Connecting Points* (Acta Publications, 2014), I observed, "Silence and solitude are food for the soul, the essential nutrient that fuels our spirits. Just as we cannot long survive without food and water, so also our soul cannot thrive and survive without silence and solitude."

Are we not starving ourselves spiritually when we deprive ourselves of quiet and stillness? Are we aware of the steep price we pay when we give in to distractions instead of staying connected in the silence to an experience that is beyond ourselves? Do we not see the harm in being so self-centered and absorbed that we never experience an unscripted moment?

One reason the spiritual suffering of scrupulosity is so intense is that it limits the opportunity to connect with God. Through no fault of their own—and certainly not as a result of sin—people with scrupulosity who are bombarded with unwanted thoughts, desires, and feelings are being deprived of the essential building blocks of spiritual relationship. Every moment of quiet connection or experience is rudely and painfully interrupted by the scrupulous disorder's demand, "Pay attention to me, pay attention to me!"

Many people with scrupulosity have a hard time believing that God does indeed love and care for them, not because they lack faith, but because scrupulosity cruelly denies them the silence needed to hear the Spirit of God.

We have an essential need for prolonged moments of silence; therefore, filling every moment of every day with unnecessary distraction is not a good idea. People who have no choice or for whom the gift of silence is elusive should adopt a spiritual practice that trains and focuses their attention on the experience of silence.

For people with scrupulosity, this isn't easy—but it isn't impossible, and it's well worth the effort.

Social and digital media are a blessing but, as with all blessings and good gifts, moderation is key. We risk spiritual starvation if we don't deliberately moderate our use of media and find a healthy balance that also includes silence.

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Reflection

Adapted from *Grateful Meditations for Every Day of Ordinary Time (Weeks 23–34)* by Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney (Liguori Publications, © 2013).

In Luke 18, Jesus genuinely wants to know what he can do for the blind man. Taking a moment in stillness to talk with the man. Jesus shows us that God has a personal interest in us, that God cares about and loves each of us.

Our challenge in this frantically busy world is to find the moment of stillness when we can hear God ask, “What do you want me to do for you?” We need to cultivate a way of being in the world that allows for moments of stillness, moments of listening, moments of dialogue with God, who loves us so completely. These

moments nurture us at every level—mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. They are as vital to our well-being as the food we eat.

Taking time to feel God’s stillness lets us deepen our trust in God’s attention and personal care. In our dialogues with God, we can be very clear about what we want and need from God. God loves us. God cares about what we want and need. We can tell God what is in our heart. In the stillness of God’s presence, we experience the flow of God’s love and compassion and know the healing of God’s presence.

Ponder: Why is it difficult for me to enjoy God’s stillness?

Prayer: Lord, I am grateful for your interest in me. Teach me to be in stillness with you.

Practice: With a grateful heart I will take a moment of stillness to be with God.



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MAILBOX

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NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

Q Can you give us a phone number or e-mail address so we can contact you directly and get an immediate answer?

A This would not be helpful for either of us. First, I already devote as much time to SA as I can. Second, the best person for you to talk with is your confessor, spiritual director, or therapist—better yet, all three working in a complementary and integrative manner. Your local resources are much more important. My scrupulosity ministry is intended to support their efforts and offer encouragement to our readers.

Q I sometimes receive Holy Communion in my hand after I've touched my hair or removed a scarf or hat. I don't wash my hair every day. Is it a mortal sin to touch the host with dirty hands? My anxiety about this often prevents me from receiving the sacrament.

A No, it is not a mortal sin. A phobia complicated by scrupulosity is robbing you of the spiritual grace you need. If you are at Mass and have prepared yourself to receive the sacrament, you should receive the sacrament.

Scrupulous Anonymous Retreat

Presented by Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR

Friday, Jan. 15 – Sunday, Jan. 17, 2016

Spiritual Life Center (Wichita, KS)

7100 East 45th Street North

Bel Aire, KS 67226

316-744-0167

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