



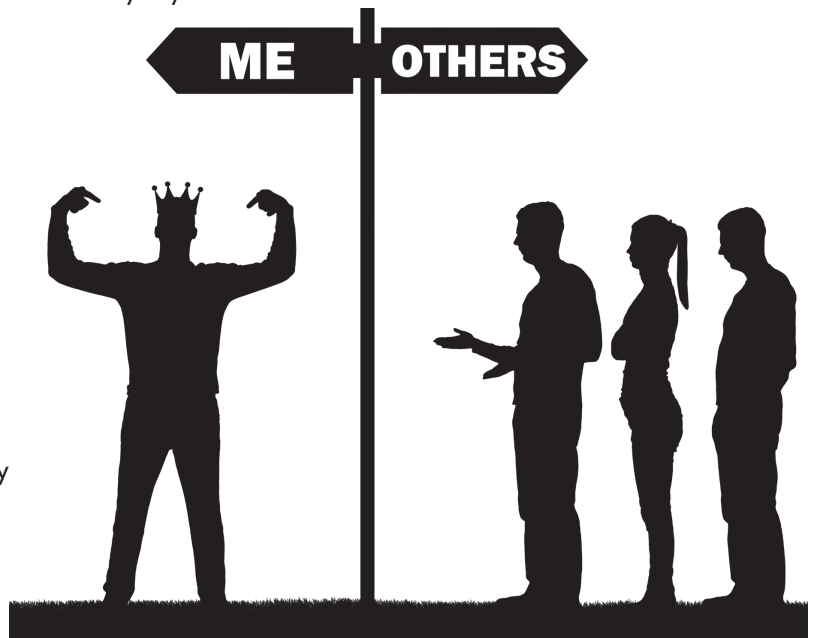
## ***Living Like Jesus: HARD FOR ALL***

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**L**iving a Christian life is difficult—for everybody. People with scrupulosity know very well that living like Jesus is not easy. But they may *think* that Christians who don't deal with scrupulosity somehow have an easier time being Christian. They don't. All Christians are in the same boat. While scrupulosity adds challenges to the lives of the people who cope with it, all Christians face challenges in living lives like Christ every day.

One of the many problems we face in Western society is self-centeredness. This characteristic, which has grown worse over the years, is a barrier to our being and acting like Jesus. He, in fact, would look askance at me-first attitudes, which formerly were primarily relegated to the rich and powerful. "Special people" like royalty and those with wealth and influence could easily feel a sense of self-focused entitlement, while the seemingly less fortunate were more apt to form communities, tribes, and other unifying groups where strength in numbers helped people make it.

In the preindustrial age, for instance, surnames were uncommon and typically restricted to those at the top rungs of the economic and power ladders. For the vast majority of people, it was enough if a person was simply known by his or her vocation: Tom the baker or Sue the seamstress. As time marched on, individuals wanted more, and the focus on the person became more pronounced.



We've paid a price for this emphasis on self. In the last 300 years or so, some cultures—including ours in America—have shifted from the tribal, community eras. We have shaped our laws and customs to stress the individual's freedom and needs. Of course we hope that what is good for one is good for all, but it hasn't always worked out that way, to say the least.

Our focus on individuality has resulted in big disparities that have caused serious problems. For instance, the gap between the very wealthy and the vast majority of people is widening, and nothing is on the horizon to narrow that chasm. To compound this insult, the wealthy are protected and admired, while the poor and downtrodden are generally vulnerable and ostracized. The result is that large groups of God's creatures are labeled as undesirable. To those who wish to exclude, this result is acceptable. To those left behind, it is not.

This seemingly unstoppable individualistic movement is of grave concern, for the problem is more than economic and worldly. It has infected our spirits. A society whose main objective is to look out for Number One is a society that leaves the so-called undesirables behind and neglects the spiritual values taught to us perfectly by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If we examine the teachings of Jesus, it's clear that they fall on the side of people helping people, not on the self-focused side. Most of Jesus' teachings were lessons for communities knit tightly by God's grace and life. Jesus taught that people are in this life together. God created us to be each other's brothers and sisters. Thus it makes little sense to brag about "making it" if we've left our fellow people in the dust. To Jesus, all of us are one community. Pope Francis has stated that bosses who treat themselves better than their employees aren't Christians at all.

We Christians are required to go against the self-focused grain and look out for one another. Manifesting this concept is hard, and deciding to make such an effort causes tension and anxiety. But tension and anxiety over doing the right things go with the territory of being Christian. If you don't

feel that angst, that tension, something is amiss. If you do, it's OK. The Christian life is not supposed to be easy. It's supposed to be difficult to follow Christ and embrace his truth. But when we do, we live fully the good life that results.

And for those with scrupulosity, remember that you're not the only ones among the world's community of Christians who get tense and anxious while living your faith. Those feelings are as natural as the sun rising to nurture the earth. Continue living like Jesus as best you can. No one's perfect. But we can make the conscious effort to join together and love our neighbors as ourselves. When we give of ourselves to our neighbors in whatever ways we can, we're following the commands of our Lord and we feel good about ourselves. The rewards are great. In our souls, we feel rich. ✨

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# How Can I Find God?

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin wrote this essay a few months before it was discovered that his cancer had recurred. He died in 1996 at age sixty-eight.

**L**ike you, I have sometimes wondered, “Is this all there is to life?” [My years as a priest and bishop] have been marked by a search for the Lord, by a sincere concern to live life in accordance with his gospel.

One day I realized I was constantly exhorting others to pray—frequently, daily. But I was not investing adequate time for prayer in my own life!

[With the advice of some priest friends,] I resolved to devote an hour each day to prayer—the first hour each morning before the pressures of my ministry could get at me. Besides reciting the rosary and praying the Liturgy of the Hours, I have recourse to Scripture as a point of departure for meditative prayer.

During the early days of this new habit of prayer, I began to realize how often I had looked elsewhere for God rather than right in the midst of each day’s journey! I became aware that often I sought escape from the difficulties and the suffering that I encountered daily in my ministry. I tended to think that my ministry was mine alone, rather than the Lord’s.

In short, I came to realize that I do not walk alone! God is with me. Through his word he helps to keep me on the right path. Through the breaking of bread each day, the risen Lord feeds the deepest hungers of my heart and spirit. And the Holy Spirit gives me what I need to carry out my pastoral ministry effectively.

Daily prayer has sustained me through two very different experiences.

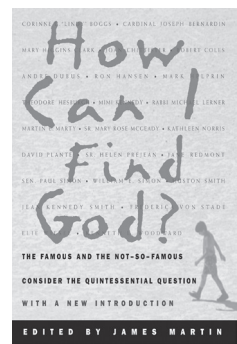
The first was an accusation that, several years earlier, I had sexually abused a college seminarian by the name of Steven Cook. While I knew the accusation was false, within hours it became a cause celebre in the U.S. and around the world. Despite my innocence, I was totally humiliated and embarrassed. More important, the false accusation put my ministry in jeopardy, at least until the allegation was dropped. Before he died, Steven and I experienced a powerful, prayerful reconciliation.

The second event occurred when I learned that I had a malignant pancreatic tumor, which meant that I had to face directly the prospect of an early death.

As I faced these traumas, I literally felt God’s presence. It was as if God was saying to me: “I will not abandon you. I will walk with you and help you through all of this.” This has made an enormous difference in my life. ✨

**“One day I realized I was constantly exhorting others to pray—frequently, daily. But I was not investing adequate time for prayer in my own life!”**

—Joseph Cardinal Bernardin



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# Mailbox

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**Q.** *As part of our preparation for our departure at the end of our cruise vacation, my husband and I were required to place our luggage outside of our room the night before we were scheduled to leave. I was so concerned about this that I rejected my husband's request for intimacy on our last night of vacation. Now I'm concerned that I sinned by worrying and by rejecting him.*

**A.** The requirement for your luggage is a normal part of the cruise routine. Worrying about the procedure or wondering if you kept all the things that you need for the next day isn't an unusual preoccupation. It's too bad that your worry and anxiety in the moment interfered with an opportunity for intimacy with your husband, but it's not a sin. Sometimes worry and anxiety interfere with what we might prefer to experience.

Is it unfortunate? Yes, but it's not sinful.

**Q.** *I recently tried to confess past sins in confession, and the priest interrupted me and told me that as a scrupulous person I should avoid this practice. I feel I'm getting some kind of privilege or getting away with something because of my scrupulosity. I'm worried that if I don't try and confess my past sins I will make bad confessions.*

**A.** Be thankful that you have a good confessor who seems to actually understand what scrupulosity is doing to you and will not enable the process. You're not being given a privilege and you're not getting away with anything. What you are experiencing is exceptional pastoral care. Please be grateful that you have been blessed in this way. I encourage you to follow the directions of this caring priest.

Gratitude  
turns  
what  
we have  
into  
enough



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