



## ***Self-Awareness***

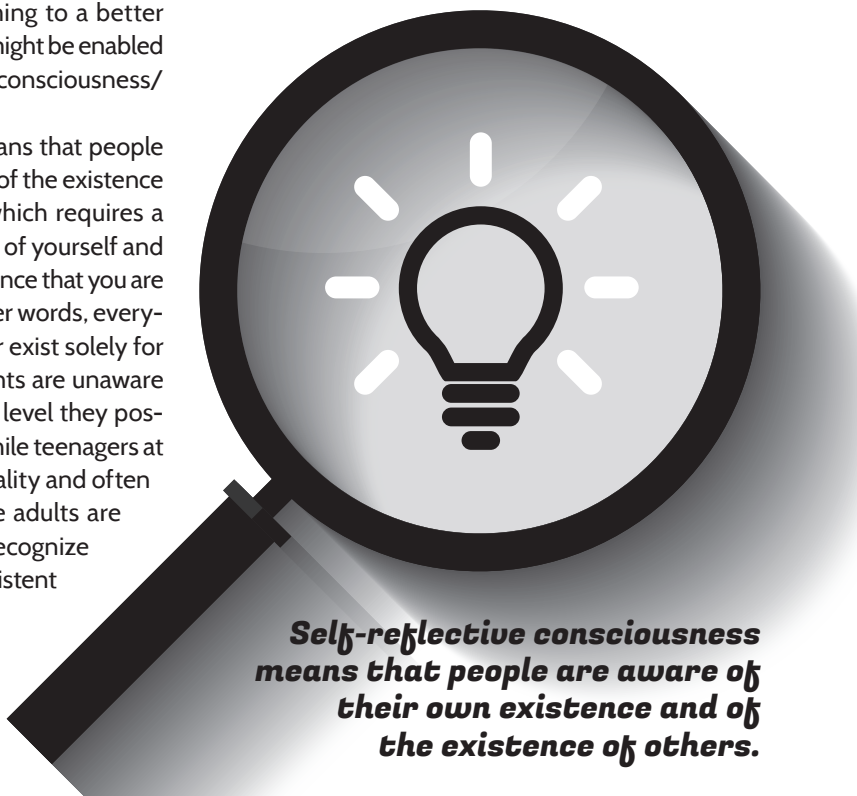
THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

One of the qualities that distinguishes us as humans might best be described as self-reflective awareness. The ability to self-reflect, a manifestation of consciousness, is what makes us human. All other beings with consciousness, at least to the best of our understanding, do not have the ability to self-reflect. Coming to a better understanding of OCD/scrupulosity might be enabled by deepening our understanding of consciousness/awareness.

Self-reflective consciousness means that people are aware of their own existence and of the existence of others. Mature self-awareness, which requires a lifetime of learning, is the knowledge of yourself and others and the realization and acceptance that you are not the center of the universe. In other words, everything does not revolve around you or exist solely for your amusement and pleasure. Infants are unaware of this reality, even though on some level they possess self-reflective consciousness, while teenagers at times are awkwardly aware of this reality and often struggle with what it means. Mature adults are presumed to possess the ability to recognize and act on this awareness with a consistent moral ethic.

A second component of self-awareness includes the ability to both recognize and differentiate between the past, the present, and

the future. The awareness of the measurement of experience, what we identify as time, is essential to being human. The more we learn to navigate through time, the more we grow in maturity and become open to the potential for the full development of our humanity as integrated wholeness.



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When self-reflective consciousness, the awareness of and respect for others, and the mature management of our experience of past, present, and future are in sync, we enjoy some level of peace and contentment. When any part of the dynamic of consciousness and awareness is out of sync, we experience the opposite result. Instead of peace and contentment, we often experience general and sometimes focused anxiety, fear, and many other behaviors.



**Scrupulosity, as the religious manifestation of OCD,** is a disorder that wreaks havoc on a person's self-awareness and experience of time. The disorder skews an individual's understanding of who he is in relation to others, in particular his relationship with God. It scrambles the experience of past, present, and future, placing an inordinate amount of focus and concern on a disordered present that is filled with darkness, a sense of alienation, and incompleteness. When the disorder is fully engaged, not by any free choice or moral decision process, the only reality that seems to be experienced is the pain of the moment, without any reference to the past or the future. In addition to this experience of isolation, the disorder also focuses a person's attention on the "other" (and in the case of the religiously scrupulous, the "other" is often seen as God). This "other" is seen as an unmoving and judgmental oracle that pronounces one condemnation after another.

When the OCD/scrupulosity is fully engaged, a mature and healthy self-reflective consciousness becomes disordered. What is reflected back to the person is unappealing. Also, the disorder denies a person the ability to manage his experience by engaging past or present thoughts. He becomes focused only on a present that is dark, unsatisfying, and with no sense of hope.

There are many different experiences of this

dynamic. Some are dramatic and painful. Others are irritating. What complicates the disorder for the religiously scrupulous is the assumption that each act, thought, or experience displeases God and is therefore a sin. This incorrect interpretation causes the religiously scrupulous person to conclude that all his emotions are sinful and, more often than not, seriously sinful.

Such an interpretation harms a person's ability to enjoy life. This point of view demands that he become persistently vigilant, acting against any impulse that might produce an unwelcome feeling or emotion. Thus it's no wonder that many scrupulous people often appear dour and restrained. Their strength is devoted to the impossible task of denying their emotional life and suppressing feelings in order to escape the condemnation of God, whom they fear. Such a life is tragic.

Further complicating matters is that each person has his own form of scrupulosity that manifests itself in unique ways. That means the scrupulous person is the only one who understands his own rules. Thus, he seldom or never achieves support to overcome

his struggle because no one understands his struggle but him. The result is more isolation and more despair.

I began this reflection with an attempt to provide some insight and understanding

into the human gift of self-reflective consciousness/awareness. OCD challenges each component of consciousness routinely experienced by humans. I hope these words have helped you gain a perspective of the disorder.

If you suffer from OCD/scrupulosity or know someone who does, you likely want to know what can be done, and if healing is possible. The answer includes understanding what is possible and what is not. Short of a miraculous, divine healing, the healthiest option is learning to manage the disorder. Many have learned such skills. I will discuss them in next month's newsletter. ✨

# Why Bother?

**Why bother with liturgy at all?** Why should we take the time to gather with other believers to worship God?

A basic response is simply that it is good for human beings to acknowledge the existence of God and their relationship to God. Doing so helps us to remember who we really are and where we fit in the grand scheme of the universe. That might keep us from the kind of arrogance that has led humans to rape the earth and oppress the poor. It can also keep us aware of how gifted we are and how gratefully we should live.

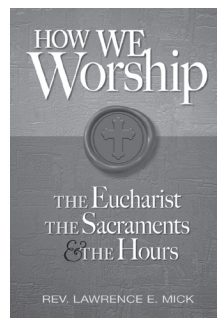
For believers in Christ, the liturgy offers needed support for living the gospel way of life. Christianity is fundamentally a communal religion. We are not called by God as separate individuals but are called into a community of faith. We need to gather with one another on a regular basis to both offer and find support as we carry on the mission Christ entrusted to us. Gathering at least weekly to celebrate the Eucharist offers us regular contact with the word of God to nourish and challenge our embrace of the Gospel values Jesus taught. It also feeds us with the Bread of Life and the Cup of



Salvation, the meal that unites us intensely both with Christ and with one another. Nourished from both the Table of the Word and the Table of the Bread, we are strengthened to go out into the world to live the gospel for another week.

Many people today seem hungry for a deeper spirituality, for meaning in their lives. They seek it in all kinds of spiritual practices from various religions and philosophical traditions. Many openly say that they are interested in spirituality but not religion. Yet the purpose of religion is to foster our spiritual lives, to bring us into union with God.

The liturgy is a powerful tool to bring about that growth. If we understand what we are doing and enter into it wholeheartedly, we will certainly find that it draws us deeper into ourselves and closer to God. We join with other believers to enact the rituals, and in doing so we act as the body of Christ assembled in union with our head. We worship the Father in and through Christ and thus are drawn into the mysterious workings of God in our world, as God gradually draws the whole universe toward unity with God, who is the source and center of all that is. ✨



Adapted from *How We Worship: The Eucharist, the Sacraments, and the Hours*, Rev. Lawrence E. Mick (Liguori Publications, 2009, 819360). To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521.

HOLY VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE...PRAY FOR US, LOVING MOTHER, AND GAIN FOR OUR NATION AND WORLD, AND FOR ALL OUR FAMILIES AND LOVED ONES, THE PROTECTION OF YOUR HOLY ANGELS, THAT WE MAY BE SPARED THE WORST OF THIS ILLNESS....AMEN. (USCCB PRAYER)

# Mailbox

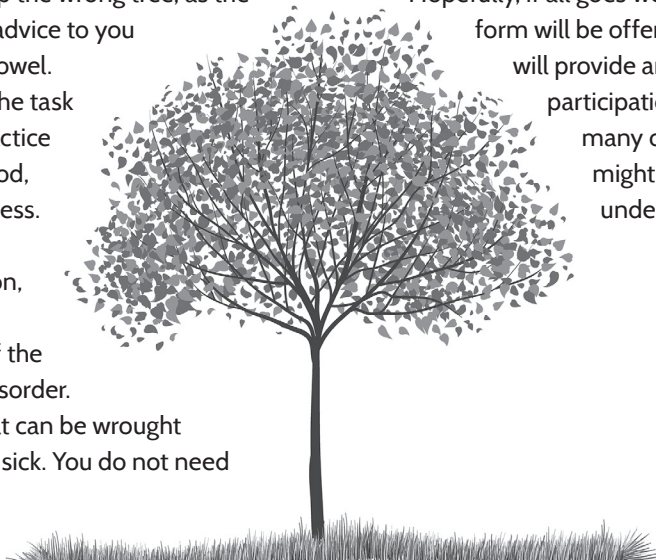
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**Q.** *When I go to confession, I always include past sins. I generally exaggerate the conditions of the sin in order to cover all of the bases. Despite all of this effort—and I devote a lot of effort to this—I have no peace. The minute I leave the confessional, I think of something else.*

**A.** You will never “out-detail” your scrupulosity. You will never answer all of the questions. Frankly, you are barking up the wrong tree, as the old saying goes. My best advice to you is to STOP. Throw in the towel. Admit you cannot do it. The task is impossible. Instead, practice accepting the mercy of God, even in your incompleteness. Instead of celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation, ask a priest to help you celebrate the anointing of the sick. You have a serious disorder. You need the comfort that can be wrought from the anointing of the sick. You do not need sacramental forgiveness.

**Q.** *Are you going to offer a retreat for the scrupulous in the near future? I have noticed that it has been a few years since you last offered a retreat, and I am looking forward to coming to one.*

**A.** The time and the expense in scheduling a retreat is prohibitive to many of our readers, so other options are being explored that might be more effective and reach a great number of people. Hopefully, if all goes well, a retreat in some form will be offered later this year that will provide an opportunity for greater participation. Technology offers many options. The format that might be the most helpful is under consideration.



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