



## Checking the Mail

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It's time again to take letters from the mail bag and select questions that are important and require only short answers. The questions reflect a variety of concerns on the minds of our readers. One letter is on the back page.

### ***Am I Scrupulous?***

***Q. I am trying to understand what scrupulosity is. I do not necessarily identify with the behaviors that you write about in the newsletter, but I do feel "a bit different." I experience continuous guilt. I feel like I never do enough, that I enjoy a life that is above average, and the list is endless. I think it all goes back to the idea that I do not feel I am good enough to get into heaven. Can you help me?***

**A.** You cannot earn your way into heaven. You cannot merit what is a gift from God. You can, however, be grateful for what you have been blessed with. Try to live a life in moderation. Share your bounty with those who are less fortunate. Try and maintain a prayer life and religious practice that helps you remain aware of God's presence. From your description, I think that is probably what you are trying to do.

Your actions are on target, but they are seemingly not supported by how you feel. The spiritual masters often remark, as did St. Augustine, "that our hearts are

restless until they rest in thee." Perhaps what you are experiencing is not so much guilt but a restlessness of the spirit. Try to imagine your feeling as a gift from God that keeps you focused on what is necessary. Perhaps it is not a feeling of what is lacking but rather a strong awareness of how you have been blessed.



## **Sunday Exercise**

***Q. Is it permissible to exercise on Sunday? Exercise is good for health, but it is not restful. I am concerned that it is a violation of the prohibition against unnecessary work.***

**A.** Yes, you may exercise on Sunday. Exercise might seem like work, and in a sense it can be real work trying to complete some of the exercises in a regimen. However, exercise also benefits your body, mind, and spirit. It is a good use of your time and not prohibited on the Lord's day by any stretch of the imagination.

## **A Bad Confession?**

***Q. I feel like I am making a bad confession when I say, "I firmly resolve, with the help of thy grace, to sin no more and to avoid the near occasion of sin."***

**A.** This is a prayer of petition for God's grace and help. It is not a promise. It is best understood as a grace-filled request to try and develop the intention that is helpful for faithful living. It does not speak of bad will or a lack of desire. The opposite is intended and desired.

## **Taking the Lord's Name in Vain**

***Q. Is taking to Lord's name in vain a mortal sin and also the sin of blasphemy?***

**A.** No, not in the manner in which you understand and fear. The kind of thoughts that you fear are potentially blasphemous are not freely generated by you but are a symptom of your disorder. They are not a free act, willfully chosen, in order to offend God. The last thing you would freely choose is an act that would offend God. That is why you are so concerned that these disturbing thoughts might be assigning to you a result that you do not seek or desire. If you were not concerned about offending God, you would give these thoughts no attention. These thoughts are uncomfortable and make

you feel bad. You wish they could be controlled somehow. You long for the day when you will be free from the experience. All of this is factual. What is not true is that you bear any responsibility for them. Therefore, you cannot be sinning.

## **Going with the Flow**

***Q. When I drive, I routinely follow the flow of the traffic. At times the traffic flows in excess of the speed limit, and I maintain the speed of the other cars. This is breaking the law, but is it a sin? If it is a sin what kind of sin is it?***

**A.** No, it is not a sin. Speeders are violating a civil law that has the potential for civil penalties. Speeding also is a safety issue. If the flow of the traffic is unsafe, that is a concern; exiting would be a good choice. On the other hand, to slow up and block traffic is not good and is often dangerous. A mature driver tries to arrive at a balance that reflects good choices and responsible driving.

Breaking the civil law has civil penalties, but breaking the civil law is not necessarily sinful. Sin is rooted in relationship, and although in the history of the Church there have been instances in which a "sin" has been assigned as a penalty for breaking the law, that is no longer necessarily our experience. In the past, breaking the law was understood as sinful. In history, people believed in the divine right of kings. To disobey the king was also an act of disobedience to God, in whose name the king served. We no longer understand authority in this way. If you break the law, you do not necessarily offend God, but you put your pocketbook and your freedom of movement at risk. ⚙️



# The Christian Advantage

**S**acrifice, taking up one's cross, and self-denial all are characteristic of the pursuit of Christian perfection. We are following Christ, after all, and the road is not an easy one. Into every life a little rain must fall. Years ago, there was a cartoon character who always seemed to have a cloud following him. Christians are positive people because Christ is positive. Nevertheless, life is not a bowl of cherries. There are hardships. There is no better way to face difficulties than with faith in Jesus Christ. If believers accept Christ and his teachings, if they embrace his philosophy of living, they can cope.

***We do not walk alone.***

Calamities are devastating. Earthquakes and hurricanes destroy homes and livelihoods. Sickness and disease steal loved ones from their families. Poverty deprives folks of basic necessities. How can God be the author of all these difficulties?

God does not wish misery on anyone. These negatives are inevitable for all people in all ages. How to cope with them is another matter. How to sail the ship of life through stormy seas is everyone's dilemma and everyone's lot in life.

Christians learn to meet the ordinary, daily challenges with faith. Rich and poor manage because they have faith. They do not walk alone. There is a real dependency on God. They acknowledge this dependency. This is the proper perspective. God is the only independent being. Humans are dependent on God for everything. Christians turn to God

in prayer. They are in dialogue with God. They build a relationship.

**Q.** *How often should people pray?*

**A.** As often as they like. The habit of prayer is a blessing and a grace. Generally speaking, Christians should pray morning and evening. Some folks tell us they talk to God all day long—which certainly follows Jesus' admonition to "pray always and not to lose heart."

**Q.** *Do you feel that people of faith are better able to weather the storms of life than those who have no faith?*

**A.** There is no doubt about it. Jesus teaches us how to pray. He prayed. Prayer is conversation with the heavenly Father. He loves us. Through prayer, our rapport with God is established and we are bonded to him.

To repeat: we do not walk alone. We may lose what is considered important, even precious. But God is with us. Emmanuel! The heavenly Father has sent his Son. We go to the Father through Jesus Christ. ✨



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***Q. I returned to the Church after an absence a few years ago. During my time away, I lived a life of sin, and I am pretty sure I committed heresy, schism, and apostate-like behaviors. I am not sure if I was aware that these sins carried the penalty of excommunication. Should I confess all of my sins again in order to return to a state of grace?***

**A.** I am not going to directly respond to your fear about excommunication and try to explain the conditions of this penalty. It sounds like you did all the necessary research, or at least enough to convince yourself that you incurred the penalty. Despite what you may have read and understood, I assure you that you have not been excommunicated.

What you have accomplished with all of your research is to confirm your worst fear and anxiety, and have chosen to describe it with the harshest penalty. Sadly, you are acting out of the “crooked thinking” of the disorder and have confirmed that you are suffering from it. This kind of thinking is a trap and will only make you feel even more anxious, more unworthy, and more despicable.

Spend your time reading about compassion, generosity, thankfulness, mercy, and forgiveness. Those are the experiences that you both crave and need. Resist the temptation to automatically label yourself as guilty of the worst possible sin or the assignment of the strictest penalty.



***Spend your time reading about compassion, generosity, mercy, thankfulness, and forgiveness***



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