



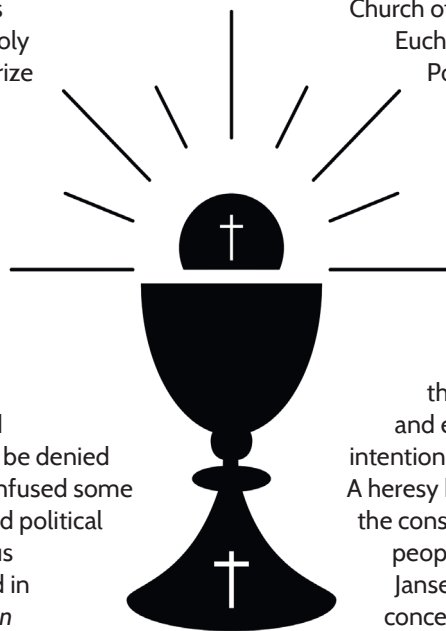
## Providing the Strength You Need

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**O**ur beloved Pope Francis reminds us often that holy Communion “is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” This reminder is important for all people but even more needed for those with scrupulosity. Unfortunately, the essential truth that the Pope teaches can get lost in the noise of conversation and debate.

The belief of well-intentioned people that the Eucharist should be denied to certain politicians has only confused some of the faithful. This highly charged political atmosphere can cause scrupulous people to feel pushed and pulled in many directions. *If a politician can be denied the Eucharist, or so the crooked thinking goes, persistent sinners should be denied, too.* And scrupulous people believe no one is more sinful than the scrupulous.

Powerful words that are casually tossed around in discussions about who should be banned from Communion can lead scrupulous people to believe they have committed: mortal sins, sacrilege, and blasphemy. These false beliefs are damaging. Of course, we are to avoid mortal sins, blasphemy, and sacrilege, but no responsible or conscientious



Church official favors withholding the Eucharist from those who sin. The Pope most certainly does not favor such an action.

It is essential to remember there is a difference between the reality of an event or experience and the fear fueled by the confusion and anxiety that scrupulosity spawns.

As a Church, for centuries we have been wrestling with the idea of purity, perfection, and everything related to the proper intention for the reception of Communion. A heresy known as Jansenism has infected the consciences of good and faithful people for a long time. Unfortunately, Jansenism again has become a concern plaguing today's Church. Pope Francis may be speaking so strongly and passionately about the Eucharist in order to help correct errors that seem to be running rampant.

Jansenism at first was intended to clarify sin. It holds that people tend to sin, and the individual usually is not strong enough to resist sin. Without grace, sin will very often defeat the soul.

While not technically incorrect, Jansenism leans more toward sin than grace. Its emphasis was on *fallen* humanity rather than on *redeemed* humanity. It was not long before this emphasis took on a life

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## ***Communion is for imperfect people who struggle, says Pope Francis.***

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of its own and effectively blurred the reality of the relationship between God and people.

Some Jansenists went so far as to insist that sin was so pervasive and grace so rare that only a few people could effectively be saved. Humanity was not redeemed, they said, it was condemned. The problem was, there was no reliable method to determine who was saved and who was condemned. The only response to this dilemma was to live as if you were steeped in sin, absent yourself from the sacraments—especially the Eucharist—so there was no possibility of sacrilege, and then hope for the best while assuming the worst.

Jansenism falsely drove some to live in fear to and in desperate resignation of a tyrannical God. They attended Mass but avoided the Eucharist for fear of offending God even more. Sadly, it was not unusual for the only communicant at Mass to be the priest, who was required to receive the sacrament.

The Church combatted the heresy of Jansenism with a consistent theological emphasis. For example, the Church insisted on the power of God's all-pervasive and dominant grace. The Church stressed the abundance of grace that was given generously to all God's people.

To combat the practice of infrequent and rare reception of holy Communion, the Church began requiring Catholics to receive the Eucharist at least once a year. This often occurred on Easter

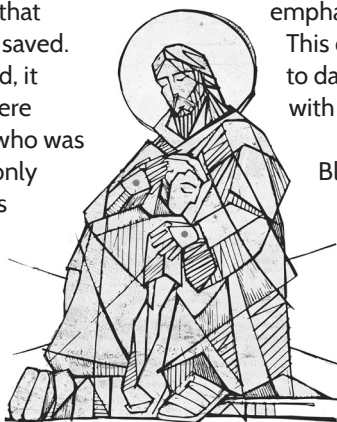
Sunday, hence the origin of the term, "Easter duty." Although Easter duty brought people to God's table, it warped into a misunderstanding that emphasized confession, not Communion.

This confusion and other efforts continued to damage the relationship people had with God.

Today, the Pope emphasizes that the Blessed Sacrament is for imperfect people who sometimes struggle with faithful living. He thus stands firmly in the orthodox teaching tradition of the Church. Some may wish to blur the truth of his teaching or deliberately confuse the clarity he seeks. I have never understood the appeal of a fierce God who demands that his people live in a

constant state of fear and anxiety. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ should have put that useless perception to rest long ago!

For scrupulous people, who because of the disorder that they endure may be prone to an idea that recognizes sin over grace, it is vitally important to change perspective. The inner struggle that often makes it difficult to believe in the power of grace and redemption is real. A powerful truth is that grace will triumph and God will ultimately provide all that is required for salvation and redemption. Holy Communion provides the necessary strength we need to accept this reality, despite the struggle that scrupulosity inflicts upon God's vulnerable people. ✞



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### *Announcement*

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Due to increased production and distribution costs, and the popularity of digital delivery options, the print edition of *Scrupulous Anonymous* will be mailed only to subscribers in the United States beginning January 2022.

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# Why Me?

In a world perpetually enveloped in crisis, plagued by violence, and haunted by sickness and pain of all kinds, people cry two common questions: “Where is God?” and “Why me?” Whether the hurt is trivial (a paper cut) or serious (a cancer diagnosis or damage from a flood or a wildfire) people want to know a reason for their suffering and—perhaps more importantly—to understand its meaning.

In his message for the Church’s first World Day of the Sick, St. John Paul II—himself intimately familiar with personal suffering—said: “Your sufferings, accepted and borne with unshakable faith, when joined to those of Christ take on extraordinary value for the life of the Church and the good of humanity.”

Additionally, the Bible provides several answers to the “why me?” query. Suffering may be justice for foolish or sinful behavior. Suffering may be a discipline, an experience from which we can learn and become better. Suffering may be for the benefit of others. Or suffering may be mysterious at best or meaningless at worst.

Suffering is a universal human experience. Yet when we suffer, we often feel isolated and alienated. The Old Testament lament psalms can help suffering persons break free of their loneliness.

Psalms 3, a good example of a lament, begins with a complaint: “How many are my foes, LORD! / How many rise against me!” In later verses, we read a confession of faith in God: “But you, LORD, are a shield around me,” and a profession of trust: “I lie down and I fall asleep, / [and] I will wake up, for the LORD sustains me.” Next is a petition: “Arise, LORD! Save me, my God!” Finally, there is a kind of thanksgiving: “Salvation is from the LORD! May your blessing be upon your people!” (Psalm 3:2–9).

According to Mark 15:34 and Matthew 27:46, the last words of Jesus were from a lament: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” (Psalm 22:2). To absorb the full meaning of our Lord’s words, it is necessary to read the entire psalm, which ends on a note of vindication and celebration.

The biblical laments can help sufferers recognize they are not alone but stand in a long tradition of suffering people. These psalms allow sufferers to address God directly, to shake off their personal and religious inhibitions, and to express their feelings of pain, fear, and confusion. Also, the laments can help sufferers articulate the questions that their pain raises: *Why am I suffering? Does it have any meaning? Where is God?*

The laments may be the Bible’s most important contribution to questions surrounding the issue of suffering and meaning. May we also accept the admonition Pope Francis related to the youth of Poland in his Way of the Cross address to the Young People in Krakow in 2016: “In the face of evil, suffering and sin, the only response possible for a disciple of Jesus is the gift of self, even of one’s own life, in imitation of Christ; it is the attitude of service.” ✨



Adapted from “Why Me? Scriptural Answers to Suffering and Its Meaning,” Daniel J. Harrington, SJ (*Catholic Update*, September 2021). *Catholic Update*, a full-color, four-page newsletter, presents contemporary topics using everyday language to help connect Church teaching and current topics to your everyday faith life ([Subscriptions.Liguori.org](http://Subscriptions.Liguori.org)).

# Mailbox

ONE LIGUORI DRIVE, LIGUORI, MO 63057 • NEWSLETTER@LIGUORI.ORG

**Q.** *I am beginning the process of making my last will and testament. I intend to leave some of my estate to a variety of charities. May I leave a bequest to charities that take care of animals or must I give my bequest only to charities that assist people?*

**A.** It is your bequest, so you determine which charities and causes to support. You are not required to choose charities that serve people. You may be generous in any manner you deem appropriate.



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**Q.** *I regularly receive religious pictures, articles, and an ever-growing assortment of things in the mail. I wish to dispose of them, but I am not sure what is required? Any direction would be helpful.*

**A.** You may dispose of them in a normal fashion. You may need to break larger items into pieces before throwing them away or recycling them. You are not being disrespectful by getting rid of them. It is perfectly acceptable to do so.



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