



Stubbornness

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

Stubbornness is the biggest obstacle to taking the long journey of learning how to manage and then managing the scrupulous condition. This impediment has no other rival. Until it is acknowledged and appropriate steps are taken to correct the situation, there is no effective way to begin to learn important management skills and healing.

Some refuse to consider that their beliefs about their own experience of scrupulosity might be inaccurate. That is the most concerning manifestation of stubbornness. Scrupulosity sufferers often stick to their incorrect perception because they have invested research into it.

However, the information they glean is erroneous and prevents them from managing the disorder. The result? Confusion and the maintenance of a roadblock to healthy choices. Unless the proper focus and remedies are applied, the suffering caused by the disorder remains unchecked.

The most common error that sufferers make is their inability to acknowledge the full context of an action they identify as potentially sinful. Context is important, but context is often discarded or improperly engaged. When the full context of an action is unknown, understood, or engaged as part of a decision-making process, perception and understanding get skewed.



To illustrate, a woman who recently corresponded with me insisted that certain actions were always mortal sins, regardless of the context of the actions. She insisted that no circumstance could change the designation. She was particularly insistent that “full freedom and consent of the will” was always engaged when a person committed such a sin. I stated otherwise, noting that freedom could be compromised in such a manner as to deprive a person of true freedom and responsibility. I presented the moral argument that religious obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) limits freedom, meaning no sin could result from the actions of a person with religious OCD.

She was having nothing of my argument and insisted that people with religious OCD could set aside their OCD (or it could go into remission) and have the necessary freedom to commit a sin. Her stubbornness caused her to dismiss all of Catholic moral teaching, argue for an imagined moment where religious OCD was not present, and effectively commit herself to maintaining her scrupulous condition. She would not see that her argument was coming from her disorder.

She could not perceive that she was committing herself to persistently doubt her decision-making process. Could a person with religious OCD set aside religious OCD to sin? No, that could not happen. Scrupulous people usually assume the worst and would consistently determine that they therefore freely choose serious sin. This line of thinking is self-sabotage and maintains the disorder. It prevents any chance for management of the disorder in a healthy manner.

In the orthodox Catholic moral tradition, some

disorders are so serious that they are understood as always limiting freedom. Such disorders are understood as perpetual and antecedent. Perpetual means the disorder cannot be cured and is always present. Antecedent means that if a person has the disorder, it is operative before, during, and after the decision-making process.

Religious OCD is an example of a disorder that is both perpetual and antecedent. It cannot be cured. It can only be managed. The presence of the disorder severely limits freedom. This means people with religious OCD are always concerned about their relationship with God. They are always anxious and unsettled that they may choose or permit an action that might displease God. And to them, the displeasing action is always serious. No exceptions. If religious OCD is not managed, that

is what they believe. Friends, how could people suffering with this disorder consciously choose to commit a sin that severs their relationship with God? They want to please God, not offend God. I find it impossible to believe that people with religious OCD might somehow, even for a few seconds, lay aside their OCD, choose to commit a serious sin, and then take up the OCD again. If that was even remotely possible, why would they not choose to lay their OCD aside on other occasions? The whole scenario is ludicrous.

I pray for the woman with whom I have been in correspondence about this issue. I pray she lets go of her stubbornness, considers the alternative, and chooses to take her healing journey. I know it is scary to confront scrupulosity, but it is necessary in order to be truly free and healthy. 🌀



***Religious OCD cannot be cured,
but eliminating stubbornness
can help sufferers manage it.***

MISSING LOVED ONES
DURING THE HOLIDAYS?

Whispers of God's Love

FOX'S GRAPHIC / SHUTTERSTOCK

Death is a transition from life in time and space to eternal life. Eternity is an entirely unique mode of being, one that we begin to experience even in time and space.

It's not as odd as it may sound, then, to suggest that those who have died may, on an unpredictable basis, manifest themselves to loved ones still plodding through history. Indeed, if love transcends time and space yet is present in time and space, there is no reason why deceased loved ones may not, on occasion, be present to and communicate in some loving way with those still living in historical time. Researchers, in fact, have turned up evidence that many people do experience contact, in various ways, with deceased loved ones.

In his book *Messages and Miracles: Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved*, Louis E. LaGrand, PhD, says:

The realization that apparitions of the deceased... have been consistently interacting with the living is one of the little publicized hallmarks of human history. However, the experience is not new to the bereaved, nor is it rare for a selected number of people who are not mourning the death of a loved one.

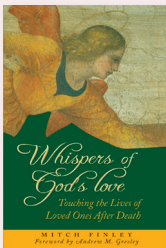
Based on his research, Professor LaGrand suggests six reasons that deceased loved ones "visit" following their death:

1. To provide comfort and reassurance.
2. To assist those who are themselves dying.
3. To finish unfinished business.
4. To suggest ways to solve problems.
5. To emphasize that love is eternal.
6. To protect by helping a bereaved person avoid a potentially harmful situation before it happens.

Thomas Merton, the well-known Trappist monk and author, wrote a decade or so after the fact about sensing, as an adolescent, the presence of his deceased father. In *The Seven Storey Mountain*, his autobiography, Merton writes:

I was in my room. It was night. The light was on. Suddenly it seemed to me that Father, who had now been dead more than a year, was there with me. The sense of his presence was as vivid and as real and as startling as if he had touched my arm or spoken to me. The whole thing passed in a flash....

Mind you, we're not talking about an experience like Ebenezer Scrooge's visit from the ghost of Jacob Marley in Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. The experiences of real people are never as wild and dramatic as that. Sometimes, however, what happens to real people has a similar effect. They become less fearful, more at peace with their lives. ☀



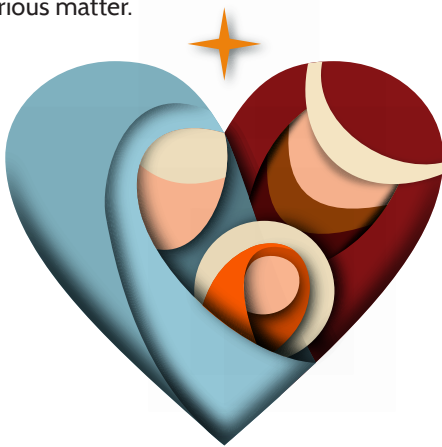
Excerpted from *Whispers of God's Love: Touching the Lives of Loved Ones After Death* by Mitch Finley, copyright © 2004 (Liguori Publications, 812101). To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.

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Q. *I know this sounds kind of farfetched, but I need to ask this question. Is there an accumulated number of venial sins committed that equal a mortal sin? It seems to me that if you keep committing the same kind of venial sins, eventually they will all add up to a mortal sin.*

A. Sin is not a question of math but rather of matter, either serious matter or less-serious matter (along with the exercise of full consent of the will). Repetitive venial sin, even numbering in the thousands, for example, does not add up to one mortal sin. Less-serious matter does not and cannot become serious matter.



Q. *Please name some saints who suffered with scrupulosity. It might help to see that people with scrupulosity can still be good people.*

A. People with scrupulosity are good people. That is my personal experience. They are among the kindest, most compassionate, most gentle people I know. Saints associated with scrupulosity include St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, and, St. Alphonsus Liguori. They may have had what is called a tender conscience, known today as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD): a spiritual struggle rather than a mental disorder. There is no way to know for certain.

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