A perplexing yet understandable problem comprises two unhealthy choices that those with scrupulosity often face. The problem can be summarized in this way: “I can be happy, without worry and anxiety, ignoring my thoughts of sin and take the risk of damnation.” The second choice: “I can be safe, follow each rule diligently without wavering, and be assured of salvation.” The second choice falsely leads one to conclude that disregarding anxiety and living with the rigidity of certitude might make real joy impossible, but it may be worth it in exchange for everlasting life.

Neither choice is helpful. They understandably present themselves because they stem from the crooked reasoning common in scrupulosity sufferers. The choices incorrectly assume that salvation is somehow merited. Salvation is a gift of God that cannot be earned. It can be lived. It can be celebrated. But it is impossible to earn a divine gift. The crooked thinking of scrupulosity transforms an unrestrained, generous gift of God into a reward for the virtuous.

Even more fundamentally, these unhealthy choices are founded on a deeply flawed image of God in which our Creator is understood as a strict father. Author George Lahkoff and others explain that people who hold the strict-father image of God believe “Father” expects them to follow his commandments, which, in their minds, they are unable to do. This viewpoint gives God a punitive role in which he punishes those who fail to follow his commandments and rewards those who do. Following God’s laws takes discipline. The scrupulous believe they have little to no discipline.

The strict-father image of God stands in stark contrast to the image Jesus proclaimed of God as “Abba,” which is anything but strict. It is impossible to read any of the parables of Jesus and not be challenged by the overwhelming and unexpected generosity of Abba. The love and gifts of Abba are abundant and overflowing, exceeding all expectations. The Abba of Jesus’ depiction is neither strict nor punitive.

The only way to conclude a strict-father image is appropriate for Abba God is to assume that the cultural ideology of those who benefit from a system of reward and punishment somehow persists. As unfortunately true as that
may be, the Gospel evidence does not support a punitive image of God. The Gospels reveal a loving God who enraged the Pharisees and scribes while filling the poor and the little ones with joy.

It is beyond the scope of this newsletter to reflect on how the strict-father image has any traction in the Christian tradition. It is perplexing how any image of God other than Abba persists in the hearts of minds of the followers of Jesus. Certainly, an examination of the many different layers of culture and human experience that today overlays the Gospel story is applicable. Undoubtedly there were and are groups who would profit from a strict-father understanding of God and who would reject the Abba Father of Jesus out of hand. Regardless, it is enough for now to acknowledge the distortion and to continue to reflect on the perplexing problem.

Does Jesus demand only the safe choice or does he accept a choice that leads to the experience of real joy and celebration? The answer is obvious, and we need to go no further than the Gospels in support of the assertion.

For Christians to give up everything for one thing is a fair deal when we are speaking about the reign of God. On the other hand, to give up everything (joy) for one thing (safety) makes no sense at all. To do that would be a fundamental distortion of what it means to be a human being made in the image and the likeness of God. It is certainly not kingdom living or representative of an authentic and orthodox Christian tradition.

When a person chooses to reject a distorted perspective on life, anxiety can result. For a scrupulous person to let go of his or her image of God as the strict father and to replace it with the Abba of Jesus, anxiety and even fear can be expected. However, it need not be a paralyzing fear that freezes a person in his or her tracks and makes change impossible. My hope is that those who opt for the healthy choice will experience the exhilarating anxiety that one feels upon understanding that “things will be different when I make this change. I can assert this with confidence because I am a firm believer in the actual and sanctifying grace of the Spirit of God.” God does not invite us to growth and health and leave us on our own, fumbling in the darkness. Rather, as we make this change, we can expect with confidence the light of truth that will show the way.

This is not an “either-or” invitation. In the Christian mindset, it is “both-and,” the already and the not yet. Even when we see with less clarity and definition than we might desire, the truth is still brighter and clearer than the illusion of what is hurtful, false, and fails to lead to life.

June 27 Is the Feast Day of Our Mother of Perpetual Help

Of Mary, St. Alphonsus Liguori writes in Visits to the Most Blessed Sacrament: “Those who make her known and loved by others are well on their way to heaven.”

Since 1866, the Redemptorists have been making our Blessed Mother known, singing her praises under the title of Our Mother of Perpetual Help.

Please feel free to offer your prayer intentions to Our Mother of Perpetual Help and return them in the envelope provided.

Perpetual Help Triduum
June 21-23, 2022 / 7 PM CT
Icon Specialist and Guest Speaker
Brother Dan Korn, CSsR
Mass
June 26, 2022 / 10:00 AM CT
Guest Presider and Preacher
Bishop Bruce Lewandowski, CSsR
Auxiliary Bishop, Archdiocese of Baltimore
Livestreamed on YouTube.
For more details, go to stalphonsusliguorirockcatholicchurch
The saints are wonderful intercessors. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is the patron saint of missionaries; St. Joseph, of fathers and workers; St. Lucy, of eye disorders; and St. Gerard, of expectant mothers. As each of us has areas of concern and interest, so do the saints. These interests encourage their efforts in interceding for us. The saints themselves have little power. God alone has the authority and ability to answer prayer. As we might ask a friend to pray for us, so we can request the prayers of the saints who are already in God’s presence and find special favor with him.

So many people in the world have no one to pray for them: people with cancer, the grieving, the poor, the hungry, the lonely, and more. I include them in my prayers by extending my request. I might pray for a relative battling cancer: “Dear God, I pray for Cathy and all those who struggle with cancer. Please ease their pain.” Or, “God, please bless Paul—and all the unemployed—with a good job and a fair wage.” And just like that, millions of people are prayed for. Isn’t that amazing?

The power we have with God to be a blessing to the world is incredible and never-ending. It is important to remember that we do not have the power. God does. When we intercede, we ask God to use his power. Our desire to pray for another is an expression of love. It is that love that God responds to. Our participation in that love makes God’s blessings, goodness, and healing go around.

Spiritual bouquets (see Simplecatholicliving.com) are wonderful ways to let others know you are praying for them. A spiritual bouquet is a list of prayers or sacrifices the giver offers on behalf of the recipient. To be prayed for is wonderful. To know you are being prayed for is even better. It gives encouragement and love to the receiver. You can make a special card, use a preprinted one, or any piece of paper to list your offering. One example would be to offer a rosary, a novena, or a fast for that person’s needs. The fast doesn’t have to be extensive. I have fasted one spoon of sugar in my tea for a friend until she received work. These activities, in addition to being beneficial on their own, are expressions of love. The time you put into your bouquet is a precious witness of your love for him or her.

Have you ever become speechless when given a gift from a loved one or friend? Yet, this is only an earthly gift. Have you ever been speechless before God for his abundant gifts to you? What gifts might make you speechless? 🌷
Q. Is it permissible to have a tattoo? A friend told me the Bible prohibits it, but I am not sure that would be the case.

A. Although Leviticus 19:28 refers to tattooing, most biblical scholars agree that the Bible does not prohibit getting a tattoo. It is a personal choice, but as in all personal choices, an informed and well-balanced judgment would seem prudent. While tattoos are not permanent, they are difficult and painful to remove.

Q. My brother is getting married and has decided not to be married in church. His bride is not Catholic, and they determined it would be better to select a neutral location. I disagree with his choice, but my main concern is whether I can attend the wedding.

A. You may go to this important event. Your attendance does not “give permission” or encourage your brother’s choice. It supports him at an important time in his life and in the life of your family. You may find priests who will offer a contrary opinion, but they are in the minority among their peers.

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