



Finding a Better Way

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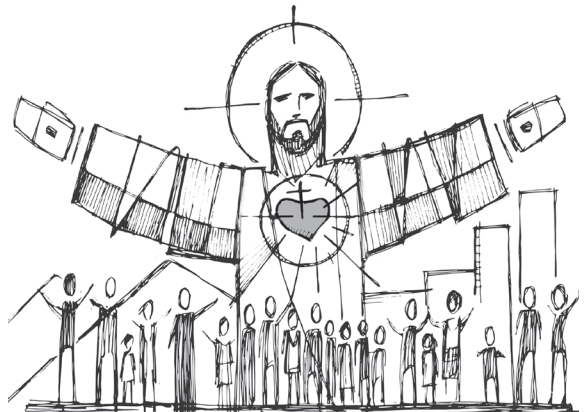
It came as a genuine surprise to me when I realized that, despite my good intentions, most of what I have written over the years in this newsletter has not helped our readers very much. My writings apparently have been useful to those who want to maintain their scrupulosity because my advice makes the disorder a bit more comfortable, takes the edge off, perhaps even puts it into perspective. But if you have wanted to manage your scrupulosity so you have some control over the obsession and the compulsion, some control over the repeating rituals, then this newsletter has been of limited use.

Recently I have made my columns more direct because I realized my mistake and have taken steps to correct it. Why? I do not want you to maintain your scrupulosity. I want you to manage it to the point where it is mostly just background noise and not the full orchestra.

My turning point and the change in my perspective happened when I recently confronted my understanding of sin. In that process, I was invited to come face to face with sin. I had to study its definitions and seriously consider the human actions that I so casually labeled as sin because of the training I have received and the nonstop drumbeat about the ravages of sin and its destructive power in the Christian story. A strong sense of sin was required in order to fully appreciate the selfless saving action of the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. I had to more fully

understand the pervasiveness of sin in order to appreciate the meaning of what it means to be redeemed and saved.

A desire to understand sin generally, dig into it, and record many manifestations of sin preoccupied the great theologians of the past. The entire systematic theological system, which took a single human thought or action and pursued that thought or action down a path to the place where every possible meaning of the action had been categorized, was a work that occupied theologians for centuries. They were intent on identifying sin, rooting it out, cataloging it, and



***Neither God nor the Catholic Church
require “perfection.”***

uncovering many nuances that could be identified with human sinful actions. Nothing escaped their categorization, and everything was weighed to determine the gravity and scope of what has been categorized. Venial, mortal, grave, serious and everything in between became their points of measurement.

Because of their untiring efforts, it became obvious to reasonable people that the human race was steeped in sin. Thankfully, there was a remedy. This remedy could not change the fact that sin was omnipresent in the human condition from birth, but it was a remedy nonetheless that instructed everyone about the existence of sin and its all-pervasive presence. An awareness of sin invited people to seek a sacramental remedy of reconciliation to correct the obvious imbalance.

For the sacramental remedy to be effective, sinners must pursue and root out the sin within them with the same diligence and perseverance with which the systematic theologians categorized it. Nothing is to be left to chance and nothing that is recognized as sin should remain secret. Every sin, including even thoughts about sin, should be brought to light in order to be confirmed, judged, and forgiven, with a small price of penance to be paid.

While this system has worked well for some, it has not worked well for non-Christians and non-Catholics. Steeped in sin, they have had no realistic way out of their predicament. A second group comprises baptized Catholics who refuse to accept and confess their sins. They are hardened sinners and downright nasty. A third group is made up of men and women engaged in an activity and experience that God finds unacceptable. Through the years, some of these people have been effectively barred from seeking a sacramental remedy for their sin until they have repudiated their actions in advance and documenting when possible. There have been others for whom the

process had not worked. There have always been more people for whom the system has not worked than for those it has helped. But that fact has never been part of the story of confession and Catholics.

One group the system has completely failed are the people who are scrupulous. They are not hardened sinners at all. They truly love God and are concerned about their relationship with God. But they also experience internal struggles, the biggest being with anxiety, which has many causes and manifestations. This anxiety is often attached to trauma over intrusive thoughts and the juxtaposition of such thoughts with God or something else sacred. Plus, details do not help them; they make the anxiety deeper and darker. Participating in a system where devotion to detail is required or you have somehow failed means the scrupulous are in a constant state of perceived failure. If they are unable to take part in confession, they perceive they have failed to perform a sacred duty and think they have failed God, a bad result in their minds.

Previously I have tried to help people sort out their sins. I have tried to help them categorize them correctly and do the math. That has not helped because I effectively have ignored the fact that no effort would be useful and helpful if I did not first deal with the anxiety.

Second, I have concluded that I need to confront the obvious fact that not all spiritual practices and disciplines always help all people.

Third, I must introduce the scrupulous to a God and a Church who does not demand the kind of perfection from them that has seemed to be the minimum requirement. They will still hear from others with different perspectives who will seek some sort of perfection that will not help. But in this newsletter, the scrupulous will read my best efforts to try to truly help.

I have just started to change and be more aware and focused on what is required. Much more needs to be done. ✨

Not all spiritual practices and disciplines always help all people.

The Worrier Warrior Pledge

My battle with anxiety is well-documented. I've written about it in books and mention it frequently in my talks and radio appearances. I am someone who tends to worry...a lot! If I let myself, I have the ability to dream up some wild and far-fetched scenarios that may occur in my life. My mind can conjure up an endless supply of negative outcomes that could easily allow me to worry constantly. I am someone who lived in fear for most of my life.

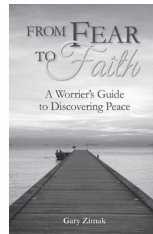
After years of worrying about what might go wrong, I am finally learning to trust in God's providence—and it feels great! I want you to know that if I can successfully make the journey from fear to faith, so can you.

In order to be successful, a commitment is needed. You have to make a firm decision that you want to move from fear to faith. By agreeing to the following, you pledge to try to turn control of your life over to the Lord. In return, he will grant you his peace.



Dear Jesus, on this day I hereby pledge to try my best to trust you with my life. I am tired of living in fear and desire to have greater faith in you. Please help me to live one day at a time and to turn to you when I am afraid. Whenever I begin to worry, I will try my best to turn to you instead. Even though you have told me that worry is useless and that prayer is always effective, I am weak and often forget your words. If I fail to live out my promise and begin to live in fear, I won't give up. Instead, I will turn to you, ask for the grace to succeed, and try again. Together, I know we can do this, and I look forward to moving from fear to faith.

Remember, you will be tempted to give up and return to your old way of life every day. There will be days when you don't feel like praying, and occasions when it seems easier to worry than to pray. You will encounter people who will try to drag you down, either intentionally or unintentionally. Don't be surprised if Satan himself tempts you with the idea that lasting peace is not possible. Expect these attacks, but don't fall for them. You can experience peace in this life, but you have to keep your eye on Jesus. In Luke 9:57-62, the Lord reminds us that once we commit to following him (which will lead to peace), there should be no turning back. The reward will definitely be worth it. ⚙️



*From Fear to Faith:
A Worrier's Guide to
Discovering Peace*
by Gary Zimak, © 2014
(Liguori Publications, 824920).
To order, visit Liguori.org or
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Q. *I promised God that I would say a certain prayer every day for the conversion of sinners. I have not remained faithful to that vow. Is breaking a promise to God a mortal sin?*

A. There was no sin, and you made no formal promise. You expressed a desire to implement a spiritual practice. People make these kinds of promises all the time. They are not binding. They are just a way of expressing some sort of pious desire.

Q. *I ask one priest a question and get an answer. I ask another priest the same question and get a different answer. Why can I not get the same answer from both priests?*

A. Although I appreciate your question and sense your frustration, I think this is the wrong question for a scrupulous person. I think the more helpful question might be to ask yourself why you are asking questions of multiple priests. This is not beneficial for you.

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