

# Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

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## *Be Gone, Hustle and Bustle!*

A MEDITATION FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

**T**ime slips by, the seasons change, babies are born, children grow, adults find gray hairs on their heads, elders reminisce, and here we are, another Advent, and another calendar year almost at an end.

During Advent, we look forward to Christmas, to the inspiring story of a little family making a hard journey, a baby born in a place for animals using their feed box for a bed, the humble beginnings of our Lord's life on this earth. Advent is also a time for looking to next year, to our future and the future of the world, and to the end of time and how we will live our lives until our personal end comes.

How do we want to live? How can we avoid regret as we look back on our lives? Advent provides time to think about these tough questions. Advent calls us aside, away from those false gods hustle and bustle,

those petty idols that demand so much of our time. Advent calls us aside for a moment each day to be quiet.

In these weeks when the world pummels us with messages about the gifts we want and the gifts we want to give, Advent quietly suggests we already have the gifts that matter, the ones that last and can't be taken away from us.

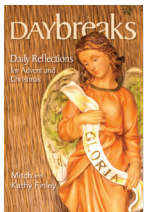
Advent invites us to count our blessings, to notice the wonders that surround us, to give thanks for the many gifts God has given us,

to share those gifts with the people on our path. During this time of year, it is tempting to notice what is missing—a person we wish could be with us, more money to buy better gifts, a perfectly decorated house. Maybe we wish someone special would be nicer to us or that a loved one would stop self-destructive behavior. Most of



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us want something to be different, and we get frustrated when we can't change what is. Advent invites us to be calm and quietly focus on our blessings, not our burdens. Then we can work on living the life we want to remember as we approach our last days: living the life of the person God created us to be. ✨



Excerpted from *Daybreaks: Daily Reflections for Advent and Christmas* by Mitch and Kathy Finley, copyright 2022 (Liguori Publications, 828607). To order, visit Liguori.org or call 800-325-9521.



## **Prayer to Begin Advent**

*Lord and Brother Jesus,*

*You came to reveal our loving God,  
you came to show us the way to life with God,  
you came to teach us how to love each other.*

*Bless us this Advent with  
a little quiet,*

*a little peace,*

*a little time to reflect on how we might be  
the loving people you call us to be.*

*We pray, be born in us, be born in our world.  
Amen.*

# **Big Words, Scary Problems**

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**S**ome of the best advice I can give the readers of this newsletter is quite simple: Stop using big, scary words to describe normal human activity. Such words are counterproductive and do not help you. Let the people who are engaged in the theological battles of the internet hurl big words at each other in order to make their point. But you need to walk away from them. You do not need the anxiety and confusion they cause.

What are some of the big, scary words? Here is a short list, in no order of importance:

**Revert. Novus Ordo. Restitution.  
Eternal. Mortal. Heaven. Hell.**

I could easily add more, but for our purposes, seven examples are more than enough.

As you read this list, did you ask yourself some questions? For example, how often do you use these words? How often are you preoccupied with the behavior supposedly associated with them? Do these words and others like them cause you anxiety? Are you even aware of what any of these words mean?

You might think you do, but do you really understand the full context and ramifications of each of these words? Let us dive into each one.

**Revert** means to return to a previous state.

I have heard many people use this word to describe their spiritual journey. Often they are talking about something as simple as “growing in the practice of their faith.” They say they were born and raised Catholic, went through a period of rebellion and experimentation in their youth, and eventually, after deliberation, determined to engage the spiritual practices of Catholicism. Not because of birth. Not because their parents wanted them to practice the faith. Rather, they saw for themselves that Catholicism offered the spirituality they needed and desired for their own spiritual development. This is development, growing in maturity, choosing your own way, responding to the truth as you recognize it. It is not reversion. You are not reverting (going back) to anything. This development might best be understood as a natural maturing process.

**Novus Ordo** is Latin for “the new order.”

This historical reference is best understood in the context of the time period following the

Second Vatican Council of 1963–65 and the promulgation of the liturgical order of the Mass by St. Paul VI in 1969. It replaced the order of the Mass that was promulgated in 1570. In 2022, it can no longer be accurately called the “new order of the Mass.” Rather, it is the “ordinary order of the Mass” that has been in place for fifty-three years. Throwing around the term *novus ordo* as if we have a new order ignores and calls into serious doubt the lived experience of the people of God since Vatican II. When used in theological discussions, this term unfortunately seems to be intended to do exactly that, causing confusion and anxiety among many, including some who are coping with scrupulosity.

**Restitution** means “restoration of something lost or stolen to its proper owner” in civil law and often in the Bible. In a theological sense, it suggests the outcome of the redemptive passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But restitution never has the meaning that scrupulous people often assign to it: an effort to clean the slate, merit the gift of grace and forgiveness, or measure out and return the smallest portion of something because of the fear of somehow coming up short.

**Eternal** means “forever,” and it need not be a worrisome concept. Can eternity be measured?

Cosmologists and scientists generally agree that the “big bang” that created the universe took place around 13.8 billion years ago, but that is not eternity. To humanity, is there much difference between one million years and one trillion years? Is measuring eternity numerically a theological conundrum?

**Mortal** means “someone or something that is subject to death.” People sometimes use forms of the word to describe a difference between people and God. When used in conjunction

with the word *sin*, mortality (death) is the result when people choose to permanently destroy their relationship with God. Serious indeed. The Church prefers that we are mature and aware as we participate in the mystery of God and his salvific plan for us. Dutiful, obedient fulfillment of a law is less important (although it is not difficult to find priests and other religious leaders who believe in such obedient fulfillment of laws).

**Heaven/Hell.** There is a cosmological understanding of heaven and hell, a biblical understanding, and a popular understanding, usually summarized as “heaven is good and hell is bad.” There is also an understanding that was common to our ancestors in which heaven and hell are perceived as places “above and below.” Perhaps most important, there is a theological understanding that is rooted in symbolism, metaphor, liturgy, and religious imagination. Most people blend the meanings of heaven and hell together into one general understanding. Regardless of how we combine meaning and symbolism, the fact remains that we do not know whether heaven or hell exists. We can only imagine.

When we use big words that are heavy with symbolism and meaning to describe ordinary human activity or imagining, we do ourselves a disservice.

We can get all bent out of shape, filled with anxiety, and imagine the consequences of the effect of these words. A much better, more positive, and more mature and discerning faith choice is to live in the mystery and in hope, remembering the life-giving passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord. He demonstrated his love for us, not worst-case scenarios. We have hard evidence for this. Now *that* is something to think about and get excited about. ✨



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**Q.** In addition to this newsletter, are there other useful resources that you recommend for people who suffer with scrupulosity? Any help you provide would be appreciated.

**A.** Two no-cost internet resources are a link leading to the IOCD Foundation (IOCDF.org), which has important information, and my YouTube site of useful videos and information, "Managing Scrupulosity." Avoid social-media resources that lack a relationship with a trusted source. They often harm more than help.

**Q.** Our neighbors belong to a Christian denomination that does not celebrate Christmas. This caused all sorts of questions last year from my children, and I want to be prepared this year for the questions that I know will come. Any suggestions?

**A.** This is a perfect opportunity to remind your children that there are many traditions and customs in this world. What is important is to try and understand these differences and respect them. This also is an opportunity to discover and appreciate something in your neighbors' traditions that will enhance your own celebration.



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