

Spirituality for the Scrupulous

FR. PAUL J. COURY, CSSR

Dear Readers: For the next few issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous*, Fr. Paul J. Coury, CSSR, one of our spiritual directors on ManagingScrupulosity.com, will be a guest commentator. Fr. Paul's voice is one of compassion, generosity, and gratefulness, reminding us of basic spiritual lessons that enable us to grow in peace and confidence. I will respond to the questions on page 4. *Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSSR*

Sometime ago, I was talking about spirituality with a person struggling with how to experience the goodness and lovingness of God. He showed me a notebook of the various prayers he said throughout the day. "Wow," I thought, "those are more prayers than I ever say in a day."

But as we kept talking, it was evident that all those prayers did not make him feel any closer to God or experience God's presence in any immediate or powerful way. In fact, this man, who was scrupulous, saw these prayers as an obligation, not a joy. When he felt highly anxious, the prayers were a way of calming his anxiety. If the prayers were not recited, he felt something bad was sure to happen; God would be mad.

As time went on, he added more prayers, which caused more anxiety. There

didn't seem to be an end to the vicious cycle. I asked him: "Where in your life have you had an experience of a God who loves you and cares for you?"

This simple question is the foundation of all spirituality. Where is it that we experience Jesus or God in the same way we experience a loving friendship? Can you create a daily situation that might allow a chance for such an experience to happen?

The task of the spiritual person is one of faith, a belief that God loves you no matter what. God's main job is to love you. Jesus is God's "right-hand man" in this endeavor. Over and over in the Gospels, Jesus speaks of his love for others, his absolute want and need to heal everyone who is sick, and his ambition to bring everyone into the banquet of heaven. As St. Alphonsus once observed, "For God, heaven is the human heart!"



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1. The first task of the spiritual person is to be grateful for the past. Do not go into the past to dig up old graves, living in regret that you have done something wrong that was never forgiven. Leave those regrets buried, leave them with God. They have all been forgiven. God's overflowing and abundant mercy is not stopped or hindered by your regrets. God has forgiven you repeatedly, despite your regrets and worries. Before you go to sleep, pick out one thing you are most grateful for from the day, and then say, "Thank you, Lord!"

2. The second task of the spiritual person is to leave the future to God. This is an act of trust. Trust that God is the one in charge. You can let go of the need to control the future. God will unravel the future for you as he sees fit. Jesus tells his disciples how God takes care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, no matter what. "Are not you more important than they?" (Matthew 6:26). YES, you are! When you wake up in the morning, say, "Lord, I give you this day. Do with me as you will!" Let go and let God handle the day!

If you find yourself anxious and worried about a future event, give it to God. Say, "This is just too much for me. You handle it, Lord!" and give it to God. Do not cling to the anxiety. Let it go! Let God thaw out the holiness that is within you. Hopefully the ocean of God's love will drown out the dark voice of anxiety and compulsions that might sneak in and cripple you.

3. The third task of the spiritual person is to be present to the day at hand. A good spiritual practice is to stop for one minute during the day and pray St. Patrick's prayer: "Christ be on my left, Christ be on my right, Christ be before me, Christ be behind me, Christ be above me, Christ be below me! Christ surround me!"

If you sense anxiousness starting to build during the day, quiet yourself, offer a short prayer, listen to music, take a walk, call someone, or visit a person in need. Instead of succumbing to the inner world of anxiousness, push love outside of yourself. As the day unfolds, recommit to love and do something for another person that is loving!

Please visit Br. David Steindl-Rast's website, grateful.org, a beautiful dedication to gratitude. Listen to his five-minute video *A Good Day*. In it, Br. David invites us to develop a personal ecology of being grateful. To awaken and thank God for our eyesight, our ability to hear and smell. To thank him for the fresh water flowing out of our faucet, the incredible colors and changing shapes in the sky, and for the magnificent uniqueness of every person you will meet today.

This video will help you enter the day being fully present to all the treasures God will unfold for you throughout it.

This is the spiritual task for each of us who struggle with scrupulosity. Be grateful for the past. Trust that God will take care of the future. Live in the

present fully and lovingly. This is not an easy task, because the disorder of scrupulosity will sneak in and try to ruin the day! It will try to fill you with anxiousness, insisting you are a sinner, only half-forgiven, and that God is keeping score.

But you have the tools of faith to understand that this thinking is false and a lie. This faulty logic is a scarcity, a lacking, an illusion, a poverty within us. It fights against the truth that we are always God's "beloved." God's relationship to us never changes. God is always with us, loving us at every moment. This is our spiritual essence, to be witnessed and recognized in our past, in our future, and in every present moment. ✨

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***Be grateful for the past. Trust that God will take care of the future.
Live in the present fully and lovingly.***

Freeing Us from Self-hatred

FR. DANIEL L. LOWERY, CSSR

On many occasions, as we have seen, Jesus firmly repeated the twofold commandment of the Old Testament concerning love of God and love of neighbor... “‘You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments the whole law is based, and the prophets as well” (Matthew 22:36–40).

How many commandments do we have in this saying of Jesus? This may seem like a strange question, since Jesus himself said that there are two commandments. Yet it is possible to say that there are actually three commandments. One of them is a “hidden” commandment, in the sense that Jesus did not spell it out. Yet he seemed to assume that it will be observed. It is almost as if he took it for granted. What I am referring to is the “as yourself” in Jesus’ statement “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

What does this “as yourself” mean? In my

opinion, it means that the norm or measure for loving our neighbor is taken from the way in which we love ourselves. Or, to put it negatively: If we do not love ourselves, we will not be able to love our neighbor, and so we will not be able to fulfill the second commandment of Jesus.

From the viewpoint of faith, there are certain starting points that can help us. It seems most important for us to make our own the most basic faith conviction of all: namely, that God loves me, has always loved me, and will always love me! God’s love for us is free and unconditional. If we can believe that, we will begin to love ourselves, not for false reasons but for the best of all reasons!

The Gospels show Jesus freeing countless people from demons of every type and description. The demon of self-hatred is one that prowls our world today. In my mind’s eye, I see Jesus moving among us by his power and grace and freeing us from the demons that keep us from loving ourselves and that keep us, therefore, from loving others. ✨



FROM “FOLLOWING CHRIST: HOW TO LIVE A MORAL LIFE”
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Q. What do you mean when you say, “Scrupulosity always defaults to the worse possible interpretation”? I think I know what you mean, but I am not sure.

A. “Diminished capacity” means you see serious sin, or you see sin when there is no sin. You do not overeat, but you *feel* you are gluttonous. You have no erotic thoughts, but you *feel* you are lustful. You never engage in polite conversation about friends and coworkers, but you *feel* that you gossip and engage in calumny. The list is endless. Scrupulosity always defaults to the worst possible interpretation of a situation. That is why it is called a disorder. It impedes the exercise of free will.

Q. When a person breaks a civil law, does that also mean he has committed a sin? I think this is very confusing, and I struggle to understand the distinction.

A. Usually, but not in all cases, when a person breaks a civil law, he or she incurs a civil penalty or risks incurring a penalty. You only sin when your action is a sin. When we had monarchies and believed the monarch was a divinely chosen representative of God, we assumed that to violate the monarch’s directive (law) was to violate God. We no longer believe in the divine right of kings. We understand that laws, government, and related issues emerge from those who are governed.



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