

An Audience of One

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

An audience of one. This is the unvarnished truth. It is not easy to share and is even more difficult to hear. Once spoken and heard, it will undoubtedly provoke a response. This truth contains an essential message that is necessary to understand for the scrupulous individual.

Your scrupulosity is very focused, determined, and committed. There is only one person for whom it generates the anxiety, doubt, unending questions, and the rest of the emotional stew. There is only one person for whom the impulsive thoughts are created, masquerading as meaningful. In response to this, there is only one person who interprets, reacts, and consequently performs some ritual of compulsion or repetition. Only one person: an audience of one. There are no other seats for this drama. No balcony, no orchestra, no general admission.

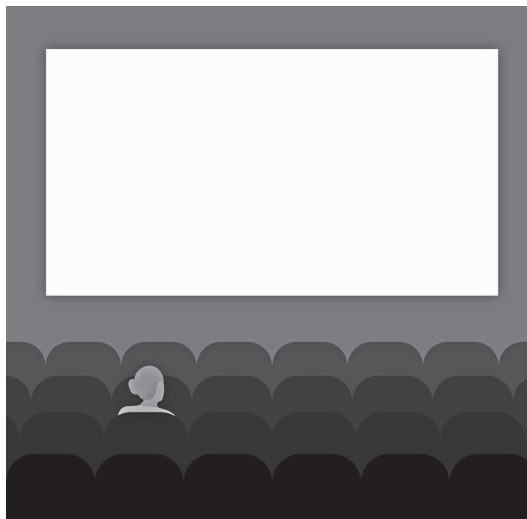
You are that person. No one else listens to or hears these thoughts, anxieties, or doubts, not even God. It is not that God cannot hear or pay attention, but rather, that

God does not do so. He is the God of the living, the creative, the authentic. He is not the God of distraction, unfocused and random content, unfiltered gibberish. You are the only one who hears these things in your mind. Like the title of a novel by late Catholic novelist, Taylor Caldwell, *The Man Who Listens*, you are the person who does not listen to what you hope for, but listen to what you fear.

I understand that your perception of the things going on in your head seems authentic. I do not discount your feelings; they are very real. However, what you feel is not generating a meaningful interpretation of reality; rather, it is inauthentic. It

is not the truth, no matter how much it might feel like it is. You have been duped; what you believe is behind door number one is only going to disappoint you. There is nothing of value there, no matter how loud or persistent it may be.

Your scrupulosity is delighted at this. You are the only audience the disorder ever wanted—you are hooked. You act on every impulse that seems to be required.



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You dissect every possible response, looking for minute details or something you may have missed. Unfortunately, you have acquired a resistance to accepting any suggestion that something is not in order, that it is a disorder. You are convinced you are the only one who can respond, the only one who truly understands, and that everything and everyone is counting on your response. Therefore, you can't risk not responding, for too much depends on you—all those whom you love, care for, and are responsible for. They all expect your vigilance and care, and you will not disappoint.

Except, of course, you are an audience of one. No one depends on you "getting it right." No one, no matter what you might imagine or feel.

You are correct when you feel very much alone and isolated. This is not a false awareness. You are rightly perplexed by those who don't seem to "get it"—friend, spouse, confessor, spiritual director, therapist—and who challenge the reality of what they do not experience. For them, your scrupulosity is just one more thing to endure before returning to the real focus of life. Unfortunately, that means nothing to you. To you, it appears that no one else can manage the intensity and dedication of always being on guard and aware of what is demanded of you.

For anyone who has never experienced or fully encountered scrupulosity, this line of thought sounds crazy. The flip side is also true. For those who have experienced and live with the scrupulous condition, it seems crazy to not respond to the intensity scrupulosity demands by making those necessary decisions. Therein lies the challenge,

but also the invitation to something more, which I dare to identify as grace. The sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit of God never tires of inviting us to a more abundant life. It never tires of inviting us to move out of the darkness into the light, from being blind to seeing clearly. Active grace is in perpetual conflict with any experience that is not life-giving.

When your only believable reality is disordered, clothed in the false promise of security, why would you change? Why would you respond to the invitation to God's grace when your current path is supposedly understood? What could possibly create a different path for you? No matter how difficult it seems or how anxious it makes you feel, there is only one answer: widen the picture.

Invite others to the show and disconnect yourself from the experience of isolation. Reject

content providers on social media, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Code of Canon Law, all things you consult in isolation. Searching in isolation for reassurance is a deadly and unhealthy use of your time. The healthy and holy choice is to have a conversation with a loved one. Talk to your spouse, a close friend, your therapist, confessor, or spiritual director.

Add one additional chair to the audience and expand the conversation. Begin to see, hear, and live in a different way. Once you add a chair to the audience, continue growing the attendance. Expand your audience so you can break away from the crippling isolation your scrupulosity demands. It is not a good thing to be an audience of one. It does not fulfill you or give you life. It only drains you from becoming the person God created you to be. ✨



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Openness

Openness is a precious talent and virtue. It contains and implies transparency. It has many significant dimensions: openness to the future, readiness to learn and to be transformed. It keeps seeing new perspectives on life, new concerns, and new opportunities. Not least of all, openness means a *heart* open to others. Openness is the radiance of inner truthfulness....

Openness, is, above all, a fundamental attitude toward God, his truth, and his grace. Open people continuously let themselves be showered with both gifts and challenges by the first source of truth and love. Openness makes us inventive and creative. Openness often shows us new horizons and beautiful vistas in the realm of the Good and the True. Those gifted with openness let themselves be surprised, and, in turn, provide others with refreshing surprises, new insights and opportunities....

Openness flourishes in the fruitful soil of gratitude toward God and toward our fellow human beings. Gratitude is, as it were, the open channel for the reception of new graces, new insights, and new possibilities. At the same time, openness is the fruit of a pure heart, which at all times and in all things is tuned to the wavelength of God's salvific will. We request and cultivate this openness through the prayer, "Thy will be done."

Openness is also inseparable from the spirit of community. The virtue of openness is *not* a petty concern for one's own self, but a caring for the common good. This cause is advanced by a constant readiness to listen to one another, to prize the insights and the creative activity of others. ✨

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The author of more than 80 books and some 1,000 articles on theology, spirituality, and related subjects, Bernard Häring, CSSR, was easily one of the most renowned and highly regarded theologians of the twentieth century.



Feast of Saint Alphonsus Liguori, August 1

Alphonsus Liguori was born in Naples, Italy, in 1696. A renowned doctor of canon and civil law, he left the legal profession to enter the priesthood. Ordained in 1726, he spent several years attending to the poor before founding the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer (the Redemptorists) in 1732. During his lifetime, St. Alphonsus dedicated himself to preaching and writing. With 111 published works, he is the official patron of moralists and confessors. Saint Alphonsus died in 1787 and was canonized in 1839. He was declared a doctor of the Church in 1871, and patron of confessors and moral theologians in 1950.

