

## ***Does Everything Have to Be a Sin?***

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**N**ot a day goes by that I do not answer at least a handful of questions about sin. More often than not, the questions are something like, “Father, I did this (fill in the blank). Was that a mortal sin?”

And in all the days that people have asked me about sin in whatever form, the answer has always been the same: “No. That is not a mortal sin. It is not even a sin.” In thirty-five years, I have never answered any of these questions with, “Yes, that is a mortal sin.”

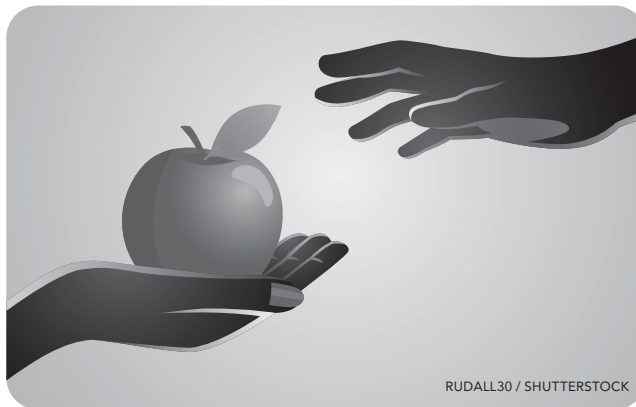
There are a variety of reasons why I have never answered “yes” to these questions. The primary reason is that mortal sin is very serious and very grave, and it kills our relationship with God deliberately. It is not possible to commit a mortal sin unless there is serious and grave material—what the sacrament refers to as “matter”—and unless that matter fulfills the conditions required for mortal sin.

Mortal sin is never an accident. To hold the position that mortal sin is an accident speaks

volumes about your understanding of God and effectively contradicts the traditional and the scriptural understanding of who God is—not to mention that such a position does serious damage to the “Abba, Father” whom Jesus shared with us.

Another reason that informs my answers to scrupulous people about sin includes the concept of “diminished capacity,” which the

orthodox moral understanding teaches about sin. You cannot choose to commit a mortal sin when you are suffering with a disorder (such as scrupulosity, addiction, or mental illness) that diminishes your capacity to freely choose. This does not mean that you



have a “golden ticket” or a “built-in exemption” to serious sin; rather, it is a positive statement about the human condition and how the Church understands the human person. It effectively removes a heavy burden when such a burden is unnecessary and, in fact, inaccurate.

A third reason, and one that requires some real effort on the part of scrupulous people to

understand and accept, is that not every action is a sin. Not every feeling experienced by a person is a signal that the person has committed a sin. Many human actions—in fact, most human actions—are not sinful. To put it another way, being a human being is not a sin. I understand that some so-called “moral influencers” creeping around on social media may have other opinions, and are in fact peddling a harmful version of Catholicism and moral theology to make a theological point, but that does not mean they are correct.

For example, eating too much at Thanksgiving dinner is not an indication of gluttony. It is not a sin; it is an unhealthy choice that should be avoided. Running a stop sign is not a sin, but someone who is caught running a stop sign will face a legal penalty. It is also not safe and, as such, is indicative of an unhealthy and/or risky misuse of one’s driving privilege, but it is not a sin. Workplace or family conversations should not automatically be assumed to be the sin of gossip. There is a difference between ordinary gossip and gossip that is intended to cause harm and offense. It is well worth the effort to learn the difference and not to automatically spiral into anxiety and the fear of serious sin.

It seems simple enough, but that is not the experience for all people. There are exceptions to what I’ve just explained—instances that can be sinful in addition to being unwise and unhealthy. This can create confusion and doubt, which means scrupulosity can thrive. Here’s an example: As a citizen of your country, you have agreed to follow its laws. If you do not pay your taxes, you are breaking the law. You are also taking something that is not yours; namely, money that legally belongs to the government. This is considered theft, which is a sin. In this example, you may be able to avoid legal action by paying back the money, but you are still responsible for your moral choice and the consequences of that moral choice.

I believe—and I do not think this is a reckless belief—that scrupulous people should not presume sin, and certainly not mortal or serious sin. Instead, they should regularly assume human

error, weakness, or similar reasons for their chosen actions. Labeling an action as a sin should not be their first choice; instead, it should be discerned and deliberate. At the end of the day, in the lives of ordinary people, there should be many human choices and actions but very few, if any, sins—and most certainly not mortal sins. Again, I’m not being reckless, but this is the usual experience of most people, particularly people who are trying to live holy and healthy lives.

Scrupulosity feeds us a constant false narrative. It assumes a position of judge, and it always renders a guilty verdict. It never presumes innocence. It does not believe in generosity, compassion, and forgiveness. It always assigns the harshest penalty and then pronounces that penalty as inadequate or incomplete. It cannot tolerate normal human behavior and always determines that even the most ordinary mistake is worthy of condemnation. Scrupulosity is a cruel master; it pretends and convinces the person who suffers from the disorder that it is somehow real, necessary, and the only path to salvation. It is most assuredly not the path to salvation; it is the path to untold doubt, anxiety, and suffering. It does not give life, but it drains the scrupulous person of the life that God has gifted him or her with, all the while pretending that it is something other than what it seems.

Human life is a celebration, not a test. I understand there was a strain of Christian spirituality that proposed life as a big test, given to us only to determine if we are worthy of another life that is to come. Except in the rarest of circumstances and the smallest universe of spiritual practice is this true, and, even then, there is little or any support for this point of view. No—this life is where we experience the core and root of our promised eternity. This is the present moment of God’s grace and life. It is a celebration, not a burden. It is a promise, not a test. And everything that we experience is God’s grace and life, including the entirety of the human experience. It is not sin. It is abundant grace and abundant life. ✨

## ***We Need Your Support for Scrupulous Anonymous***

Dear *Scrupulous Anonymous* Reader,

We're reaching out to ask for your support in keeping alive our free newsletter for people who suffer from scrupulosity.

Since 1964, the Redemptorists and the staff who publish *Scrupulous Anonymous* have been providing valuable resources, coping strategies, and a sense of community for those affected by scrupulosity, but we rely on donations to continue offering it at no cost.

Your generous gift will help pay for the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter as well as the cost of [ScrupulousAnonymous.org](http://ScrupulousAnonymous.org), where the archive of newsletters is available for everyone.

Your contribution, no matter the amount, will help us keep this resource accessible to those who need it most. Please consider donating and making a difference in the lives of people who suffer from scrupulosity.

Thank you for your kindness and support.

Yours in Christ,  
Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR

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### PRAYER BY SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI

**"For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be." —Luke 12:34**

Jesus Christ says that a person gives his affection to what he considers as his treasure, wherever it may be. For this reason, the saints, who consider Jesus Christ to be their only treasure, reserve all the love of their hearts for the Blessed Sacrament.

My most beloved Jesus, hidden under the sacramental veil, it is because of your love for me that you remain present night and day in this tabernacle. Draw, I ask you, my whole heart to yourself, that I may think of no one else but you. May I love and confide in you alone. By the merits of your passion, I ask you for this favor, and through them I hope to obtain it...

May I live only to love you. May the simple memory of your love make my heart tender with that love. May the very words crib and cross and sacrament set it on fire with the wish to do great things for you, my Jesus, who have indeed done so much and suffered so greatly for me. Amen. ✨

*From Visits to the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady, a new translation from the original Italian, by St. Alphonsus Liguori, 828706. To order, visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org) or call 800-325-9521.*

**Q.** We left for mass at a reasonable time but arrived at the Gloria because of unexpected delays and traffic. Is our obligation fulfilled for Sunday, or do we need to go to another Mass?

**A.** Your obligation is fulfilled, and there is no need to do anything else. You tried to be on time, and, due to circumstances beyond your control, you arrived late. There is no need to do anything more. You were faithful, and you fulfilled what was expected of you. Be at peace.

**Q.** My sister is planning on being married on a beach by a justice of the peace. Although she is a baptized Catholic, she does not practice her faith and has no intention of doing so. Our family is torn. May we attend her wedding without committing sin? Not attending seems to be too much.

**A.** I know you can find many opinions about this. I offer the best pastoral advice that I can offer. Your sister is not inviting you to a religious event. It is a social event and nothing more. She is not asking your opinion. Your attendance is not providing her with "permission." It is purely social, by her choice, and your attendance is purely social. Attend the wedding and be at peace with your decision.

### Additional Resources Online for Those Seeking Help

Liguori Publications offers resources online that people with scrupulosity have found very helpful:

For helpful videos, please visit [YouTube/Catholic OCD](#).

For pastoral care and spiritual direction opportunities, please visit [managingscrupulosity.com](#).

For direct support and to access new helpful videos, please visit [Patreon.com/CatholicOCD](#). (Patreon offers a direct mail feature that can be used to answer your personal questions and concerns.)

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