

The Best Resolution

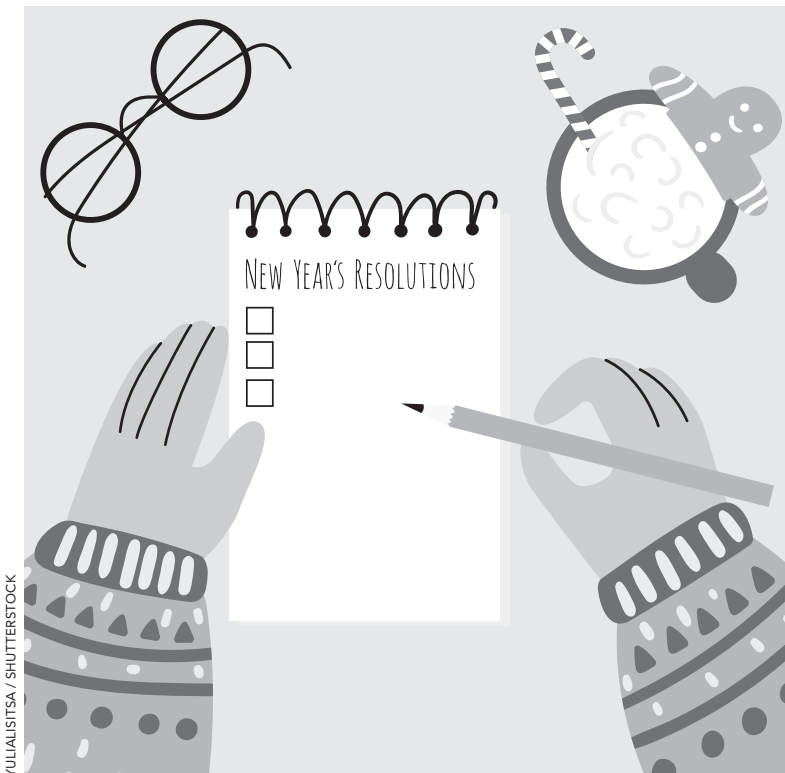
FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

With the New Year festivities, there is a time-honored tradition, a common practice, that is routinely engaged: most people choose some sort of “resolution.” This is usually an action that will result in personal improvement. There are no rules or regulations

about setting a New Year’s resolution; it is more or less a private decision. Everyone seems to have their own process. Once their resolution is chosen, some people feel comfortable sharing it with others, while others prefer to keep it to themselves.

Once an individual has chosen a resolution, it is time for the hard work to begin: keeping the resolution. The person must make necessary choices and decisions to enable the resolution to become part of everyday life. That is the hard part. It is often the experience of living the resolution that makes it challenging, or even impossible, to implement. What might sound like a good idea, and is perhaps even a necessary change, becomes very difficult to live. After a while, the resolution often fades into the background. A nice idea, but not reality.

To people with the scrupulous condition, I suggest a resolution that will be very helpful in your spiritual life and development: you must



Scrupulous people believe that mortal sin is constantly present, lurking around, looking for any opportunity to strike.

choose to stop using the designation “mortal sin.” Remove any reference to mortal sin from your vocabulary.

The fear, the concern, and the assumption that you might have sinned is the single biggest trigger for your scrupulosity. As soon as you pay attention to the prompt that triggers you, you can guarantee that you will quickly descend into the moral anxiety and uncertainty that is the core of the scrupulous disorder. The descent is instantaneous. It is always serious. It moves with lightning speed from the starting point to the ending point. Here is the thought process:

I did it (I chose it, I thought it, I imagined it, I entertained it, etc.).

I know I did it.

I am sure that I did it freely.

It must be serious.

I know it is serious because I feel bad.

Because I feel bad, it confirms that it is serious.

Because it is serious, it is a mortal sin.

I am guilty of mortal sin.

I must confess my guilt as soon as possible.

God is so displeased with me.

I am going to suffer eternal damnation.

If you recognize anything of your own thought process in this litany, then you are the perfect candidate for this resolution. However, as much as you need to embrace this resolution and it might sound like a good idea, it will be difficult to implement (just like any resolution). The possibility of being unable to stay firm in your resolution is a real consequence of your decision to proceed—not because you lack the willpower or the resolve to succeed, but because resolutions are difficult. You might start and stop multiple times, which is often the lived reality of putting a resolution into practice. Nonetheless, this resolution is worth it. You need to implement it.

You need to implement this resolution because the scrupulous disorder is robbing you of any sense of peace. It is robbing you of any perception of life as something that can be lived and celebrated rather than something to constantly examine and fear.

Scrupulous people experience life and, by extension, mortal sin in a completely different way than people without the disorder. Scrupulous people believe that mortal sin is constantly present, lurking around, looking for any opportunity to strike. They understand mortal sin as an ever-present obstacle that God puts in our way to deny us any possibility of eternal life and happiness. As a result of this conviction, the scrupulous believe they must be constantly vigilant and always examine every thought, word, or action in case—because they are weak—mortal sin somehow found a way into their choices.

Once a scrupulous person has discerned mortal sin, whether real or imagined, it needs to be rooted out, every detail scrutinized and confessed completely, with 100 percent accuracy and nothing omitted. The person must even examine the confession itself, as it could also be an occasion for mortal sin, or sacrilegious confession, or an invalid sacrament.

If this description sounds exhausting, that is because it is. If you are exhausted and tired of being exhausted, then accept the resolution of eliminating “mortal sin” from your vocabulary as a good starting point toward healing and wholeness.

When you choose to eliminate the term “mortal sin,” you are not being reckless. You are not choosing the easy way. You are not being spiritually irresponsible. In fact, it is a mature decision. It is not the decision of a person who lacks faith, but rather the decision of a person who is living his or her faith. You are recognizing the fact that you have a disorder, not because

of anything you did or chose. You simply have it. Your spiritual task is to manage it. This resolution is one step in the right direction, as it eliminates the trigger (the words “mortal sin”) that sets the whole destructive process in motion.

This resolution also shows maturing faith. It is an acknowledgment of what the Church teaches about sin and about scrupulous people’s “diminished capacity” for effectively and freely discerning their choices and their compulsion

to assume the worst possible outcomes and catastrophic consequences when there is no need to do so. It is a profound statement of faith: I am a beloved child of God because of his great love and mercy. ✨

Fr. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR, is the president and publisher of Liguori Publications, his second assignment as the company’s leader. Professed as a Redemptorist in 1973, his ministries have included retreat work and writing reflections for the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter.

Contemplating My Baptism: A New Vision

As a person who was an adult through Vatican II, my life is split in two! In the first half of my life, I was a person of “law and order.” I tried to be good; I tried to obey the law. I was oblivious of my baptism and its consequences. To be a Catholic meant Mass, confession, and no meat on Fridays and during Lent. I didn’t really know who I was.

In the second half of my life, I have tried to take to heart the message and vision of Vatican II. Our understanding of morality and Christian living must be renewed. This demands a return to

Scripture. There, we will discover the nobility of our baptismal vocation in Christ and our obligation to live in love for the life of the world. (See Decree on Priestly Formation [*Optatam Totias*], 16.)

We as Catholics have a wholly renewed sense of who we are as people and how we should live as Catholics. It’s a breath of fresh air, but it’s also quite a challenge! Jesus is the heart of life. Jesus is at the heart of every person, every thing. Jesus is at the heart of every relationship, every experience of community. Jesus is at the heart of every event, every experience.

Only through the “eyes of faith,” as St. Thomas Aquinas said, are we able to see this, to experience Jesus in every human experience. He is ever there, loving and calling us into deeper union and greater love of neighbor. The way we choose to respond to the call of every situation is the way we respond

to Jesus. Paul says we must “live in a manner worthy of the call you have received” (Ephesians 4:1). To live “in Christ Jesus” every day through the grace of our baptism is, in every way, to be a Catholic. ✨

Excerpted from *Catholic Update*, “Baptism: Our Lifelong Call” by Fr. Nicholas Lohkamp, OFM (C0607A).

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Mailbox

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Q. *When I was younger, I made a vow to God that I would become a religious. Now, I am older, and I really do not want to become a priest or a nun, but I feel trapped by the vow. Would it be a mortal sin to choose a different vocation?*

A. No. Do not let piety interfere with the reality of your life. You did not make a vow that binds you to a promise. For a vow to be binding, it must be public, and it must be received and confirmed by a person with the necessary authority to receive a vow. If these conditions are not in place—and, from your description, it sounds like they are not—then it is piety, not obligation.

Q. *I am really confused by the requirement of “restitution” for the forgiveness of sins. Trying to figure this out is very confusing. I do not know what is expected of me.*

A. Let me help you with your confusion. Restitution is a requirement of the sacrament of reconciliation only when it is imposed as a condition by the confessor. If it is not imposed, there is no requirement. You cannot self-impose a penalty; in fact, it would be foolhardy to do so.



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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