

## *Love One Another*

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

**T**he early Christian community, the community of Paul, Barnabas, Peter, James, and John, was an extremely fragile community. Although we know about the great and marvelous things that happened after the resurrection of Jesus, the community was not easily established and had to face many different challenges. It was not all smooth sailing; there was quite a bit of turbulence.

The first challenge faced by the early Christian community was that posed by the established Jewish community. Although some Jewish people were open to the message that the apostles were preaching, many were not. They saw the apostles and the apostles' message as divisive, even heretical. Whenever the apostles appeared in a synagogue and started preaching, it was extremely disruptive to the faith life of that synagogue. To understand what it might have been like, imagine if some new preachers showed up at your parish during Sunday Mass and started telling everyone about a new way—a better way—to worship God. How would you react to such an interruption?

A second challenge the early Christian community faced was conflict with the Roman authorities. The Roman imperial government of the

time was extremely tolerant of different religions and different gods, but they insisted that what they considered proper and due reverence be given to the gods of the state. This insistence was rooted in the strongly held conviction that the Romans had become powerful and influential due to the favor of the gods. Not surprisingly, the Romans wanted to keep it that way. Christians were not inclined to participate in any ritual or worship that was contrary to their beliefs and way of thinking, and this put them constantly at odds with the Roman government.

A third challenge faced by the early Christians was the popularity of the Christian message with Gentiles: non-Jewish audiences who found in the person of Jesus something that attracted them and something they wanted to be part of. It might sound strange to say this was a challenge, but it was a problem because the apostles were Jewish. They and other members of the Christian community were accustomed to the Jewish culture and customs of the time, and they were unfamiliar with the rest of society. They were not quite sure what they should do with Gentiles who wanted to be Christians. Did it mean, as the Apostles Peter and James initially believed, that any convert would have to first become



Jewish, and then Christian? Or was it as the Apostle Paul was preaching: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female...in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). All were equal in the sight of God, and all people could come to God exactly as they were. This situation was the source of some tension and debate in the early Christian community.

With the challenges and difficulties that faced the early Christians, there was ripe and fertile opportunity for disagreement and division, and this was on display to people outside the Christian community as well. Experience teaches us that such struggles cannot be hidden and will be noticed by those not associated with the community—not only noticed but also commented on and used to form opinions and judgments.

With this in mind, we can reasonably ask, "How did non-Christians judge the early Christian community?" Historical sources reveal that the single most important observation, the single most important judgment, was this: "See how they love one another."

Amazing, isn't it? Not "See how they disagree," or "They say all of these nice things about the kingdom of God, but look how they live." No. "See how they love one another."

Despite the difficulties and challenges, Christians tried, as best they could, to love one another. To demonstrate real love and concern for each other. And how was this manifested in a concrete way? Scripture tells us that Christians were concerned not only with the spiritual life of the community but also with the everyday circumstances of life. They wanted each member of the Christian community to be cared for, to be treasured, to be welcomed, to know that they were important and accepted. In short, every Christian, from those viewed as the most important to the poorest of slaves, was welcomed as a brother or a sister at the table of the Lord. Each member of the community knew that he or



she was loved, and this love became obvious to all.

A story is often told about the Christians who were brought to the Colosseum in Rome to be fed to the lions for the entertainment of the crowds. As it often turned out, Christians were not the best entertainment. Instead of running around, clawing at each other, and trying to get away, as anyone else would have done, the Christians would join hands, sing, and shout encouragement to each other, all the while giving praise to God. This had to make an impression on even the most hardened hearts in the audience. "See how they love one another."

It is no secret that there are many challenges and conflicts in the Christian community today. There are many disagreements. Competing theologies. Clashes between the right and the left. Middle ground seems hard to find. As a result,

so many people—particularly people who suffer from scrupulosity, for whom any deviation from the norm is unacceptable—find themselves struggling even more. I cannot begin to share with you how many times in a single day I hear from members of our community, "Why do I get different answers to my questions from every person I ask?"

I do not have an answer to satisfy that question, but I do have a question of my own that I think is appropriate: "Why would anyone choose a response to an honest inquiry other than a response that is rooted in love, compassion, and generosity?" Should that not be our default position without compromise? "See how they love one another." ✨

**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.



# ***The Honest Voice and the Receptive Ear***

**"P**reach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary." This maxim, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, applies to homilists and to all Christians who want to model their faith in action. Practice what we preach. "I won't take my religion from any man who never works except with his mouth," wrote Carl Sandburg in his poem "To a Contemporary Bunkshooter." During his missionary work in Peru, Pope Leo XIV learned how to repair used cars for service in ministry. Undoubtedly, his preaching benefited from the experience. In the same way, listeners must practice what they profess. Most members of a congregation would find it difficult to speak for ten minutes before a crowd. Listeners should pray for the preacher, pray that God's voice is heard at this time and in this place, and pray that a needed message is spoken. Such listeners will hear what they need to hear.

## ***From "Prayer for the Preacher" by Fr. Karl Rahner, SJ***

**G**od has told him to proclaim God's word.  
Perhaps he has not entirely understood it himself.  
Perhaps he adulterates it.  
But he believes, and despite his fear he knows he must communicate God's word to you.  
For must not some of us say something about God,  
about eternal life;  
about the majesty of grace in our sanctified being?  
Must not some one of us speak of sin,  
the judgment and mercy of God?  
So, my dear friends, pray for him, carry him,  
so that he might be able to sustain others by bringing to them  
the mystery of God's love revealed  
in Christ Jesus.  
Amen.

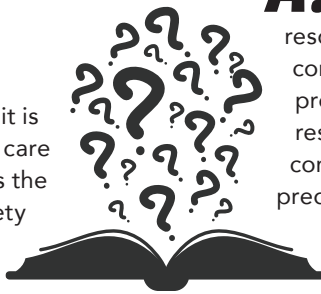
Excerpted from *Catholic Update*, "Preaching as Sacramental Encounter," by Fr. Byron Miller, CSsR (C2601A).  
Available from Liguori Publications. To order, call 800-325-9521 or visit [Liguori.org](http://Liguori.org).

**Q.** I love gaming, but I am concerned with some of the images that are portrayed. There are times when I recognize an image that seems to have spiritual significance but is misrepresented. I wonder if it is blasphemous to play games with these kinds of images.

**A.** Without seeing the images that you are asking about, my general response is that I think you are probably being hypersensitive. The vigilance that scrupulosity demands is unrealistic, and it is also misleading. Your scrupulosity could care less about the image; all it cares about is the anxiety that it produces. Resist the anxiety

**Q.** I asked a priest about a sexual concern. I then looked up my concern in *Theology of the Body*. I also consulted the Catholic Answers website for direction. On the one hand, the answer seems to be obvious, but on the other hand, it also seems confusing.

**A.** And now you are asking me. You have consulted at least four different resources, so it's no wonder that you are confused. Even if all these resources provided you with the same answer, their responses were still unique. That is how communication works. Your confusion was predictable and guaranteed.



ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SHUTTERSTOCK

### 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.)

To manage your *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter subscription, please call 800-325-9521 or email [Liguori@liguori.org](mailto:Liguori@liguori.org).



Please help us continue *Scrupulous Anonymous* and other Liguori Publications ministries by making a tax-deductible donation or remembering us in your will. Our legal title is

Redemptorist Fathers dba Liguori Publications, Federal ID 43-0653409. To donate by credit card, please go to [ScrupulousAnonymous.org](#) and click on "Support the Ministry." To donate by check, please use the enclosed envelope or mail to Liguori Publications, 200 Liguori Drive, Liguori, MO 63057.

© 2026 Liguori Publications. All rights reserved. **Policy on copying or distributing:** **Individuals** may download, print, copy, and/or share issues of *Scrupulous Anonymous* provided 1) you don't remove this copying/distributing policy and 2) you don't seek or accept payment for the copies. **Nonprofit organizations** may quote SA in publications offered at no cost as long as you identify *Scrupulous Anonymous* as the source and include the issue number or date and the publisher (Liguori Publications, [ScrupulousAnonymous.org](#)). **For commercial or other purposes**, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior written permission of Liguori Publications. Liguori Publications, a nonprofit corporation, is a ministry of the Redemptorists ([Redemptorists.com](#)).