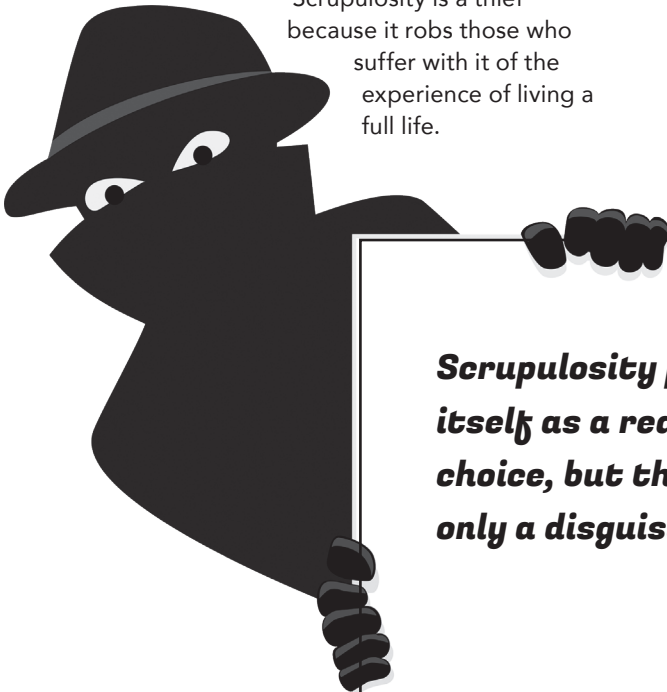


Scrupulosity Is a THIEF!

FR. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR

There are many descriptions that somewhat explain scrupulosity, some of which I've referred to in this newsletter over the years. I've identified it as a disorder, as representing diminished capacity in the application of free will, and, of course, as primarily a mental struggle, not truly a spiritual struggle. Now, I want to go one step further: Scrupulosity is a thief!

Scrupulosity is a thief because it robs those who suffer with it of the experience of living a full life.



Scrupulosity presents itself as a reasonable choice, but that is only a disguise.

Scrupulosity keeps you trapped in regret and shame about the past or fear of the future while stealing your ability to live fully in the present moment. This theft is slow and persistent, convincing you that it is a fair trade or even the safest choice. But that is a lie. Instead of embracing the present moment—the place where the Creator intends you to live, move, and have your being—you are drawn into an illusion that pretends to be true and life-giving.

Scrupulosity presents itself as a reasonable choice, but that is only a disguise. It appears convincing—not because of what it says, but because of how it makes you feel. That emotional force is what sets it apart from all

your other thoughts. So even when you encounter understanding that is genuine, pure, and true, it may seem less believable because it does not carry the same intensity of feeling.

Here's an example of how it works in practice: You have an erotic or sexual thought, and you immediately assume you have committed the sin of lust. Within seconds, you convince yourself it is a

serious sin because you believe you consented to it. You think, *I must have consented, because that is how it feels. If I had not consented, I would not feel this way.*

Immediately, you feel the obsessive need to fix it, control it, or suppress it, so you turn to some form of compulsion to reduce your guilt or shame. The feeling may settle down or even disappear, but the conclusion remains that you believe you have committed a serious sin. Add it to the list. Make sure you remember it, with every possible detail, and go to confession as soon as possible.

Now compare that with a greater truth: *I am loved and forgiven by God exactly as I am, not as I might one day be.* This is a profound and essential message of the gospel, yet it often does not create the feeling you have come to associate with what seems true. Instead, if you feel something, it might be something like, *That sounds good, but it does not apply to me. I have too many sins.* So instead of embracing the life-giving truth, you reject it—not because you are a bad person, but because it is not tied to a strong emotion. Scrupulosity has trained you to believe that something must feel true to be trusted and followed.

It also teaches you that the only valid feelings are those of guilt and shame. Again, scrupulosity robs you of enjoying your life, your friends, your family, and your experiences. You must always be watching for sin, and you must never relax your guard and risk everything.

Living life is a gift from God. Scrupulosity replaces the idea of a gift from God with an obstacle course, a report card, or some sort of reprimand from someone in authority. When it replaces joy and gratitude with shame and guilt, it steals your essential understanding and

experience of what it means to be a child of God. It robs you of feeling God's love for you and replaces that feeling with nonstop condemnation and judgment. You never measure up, no matter what you choose, no matter what you do.

Because scrupulosity is a thief, you need an effective strategy to combat it. You need to manage it not with obsession and compulsions, which are nothing more than the burglary tools of scrupulosity, but instead with something that cannot be stolen from you. Something that you will never run out of. Something that is in plentiful supply and that always comes to you as an unmerited gift from God. That something is *grace*—the abundant grace that is from God.

I am not talking here about “getting” grace or “earning” grace. Rather, I am referring to the grace you already possess, which you received at the time of your baptism. I am referring to the actual grace God gives you every moment of your day. I am inviting you to recognize what you already have, what cannot be taken away from you, and what is more than abundant for your needs. Your only response should

be gratitude and thanksgiving. Cultivating a daily habit of remembering that you are blessed, loved, forgiven, and safe in the arms of God is truly all you need. Do not let the tricks and the thievery of scrupulosity take this awareness away from you. Respond always—in each moment of each day—with a grateful heart. ✨

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.



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What does it cost us to say: "My God help me! Have mercy on me!" Is there anything easier than this? And this little will suffice to save us if we be diligent in doing it.

SAINT ALPHONSUS LIGUORI, BISHOP AND DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH,
FEAST DAY AUGUST 1

Fully Alive Through Our Senses

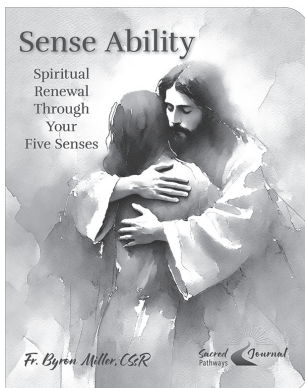
A question worth pondering: Why did God form us with the human senses? Could it be that God was so pleased with the handiwork of his creation that he had a burning desire for us to experience it fully as well? Simply put, the senses are incontrovertible proof of a living God who desires us to be fully human—fully alive! Think of our senses as sufficient evidence of a relational God who wants us to delight rapturously with him in relishing a taste of heaven on earth!

Through the senses, we feel at home in the natural surroundings God created, and we feel more alive in our spiritual home too. Instituted by Christ, the Catholic Church is where our senses are stimulated to express our faith in God. Through the senses, we convey our longing to be in loving union with God now and in the kingdom to come, where the desires of our heart will be fully satisfied. Saint Paul assures us, "What eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This true home God has prepared for those who love him awaits us. It's where our entire being will be joined to God "in an endless sharing of a divine life beyond all corruption. Christ won this victory when He rose to life, for by His death He freed man from death" (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World [*Gaudium et Spes*], 18). By his resurrection, our merciful Savior solved a paradoxical riddle about the transitory nature of our human existence: We're fully alive after we're faithfully dead!

Empowered by the senses, live fully as though everything is a miracle. Live your life sensuously as a beneficiary of the greatest miracle of all—the victorious resurrection of Jesus Christ! ⚙

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Mailbox

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Q. *I currently do not have a regular confessor, but I worry that when I find one, if I ask him a question similar to what I asked my previous confessor, he might give me a different answer. Then what will I do?*

A. Why do you have yourself tied up in knots about something that has not happened? This is the manifestation of scrupulosity—it's trying to derail your good efforts before you even have a chance to act on them. If you get two different answers, ask for clarification. It is not a problem.

Q. *I am immune-compromised because I started biologics for my psoriasis. I am thinking that it would be best to avoid crowded Masses on Sundays and holy days while I am in treatment. Is this a decision I can make? It seems wise, but I feel guilty.*

A. Yes, you may make this decision. It is a mature choice and one that reflects real discernment. You should not put yourself at risk when there is no need 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.)

For books, booklets, pamphlets and more, visit **Liguori.org**.



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