

July 23, 2024

This week I am continuing the theme of Scrupulosity with much help from an article written by Father Michael Rennier.

A few thoughts:

A person who suffers from scrupulosity wants to be spiritually perfect but is always haunted by past sins. Here are some ways to start accepting God's grace.

Sometimes scrupulosity can create an inability to leave sin in the past. Past transgressions continue to haunt scrupulous people and they doubt they are forgiven. It can create an inability to identify what sin is in the present moment. Innocent mistakes or random temptations are turned into sins and small sins are turned into larger sins.

It's not uncommon that a scrupulous person will continue to add more sins they've thought of even while the priest is in the act of absolving them. Because they're never sure if their confession was complete, they later worry the absolution wasn't valid. Further, they worry if their apology was sincere enough, or, in the language of Catholic theology, if their contrition was "perfect.

That said, I really have witnessed people put scrupulosity behind them, so if you struggle with the idea that everything you do is a sin against God or the people around you, keep reading. Here are some things they've told me they find helpful.

First, I want it burned brightly and permanently into the minds of scrupulous people that God loves you! God forgives you. He desires a relationship with you. He knows you in the confessional with all your imperfections and he still loves you. This is the bedrock teaching of our faith and we don't have a right to doubt God when he tells us that we are loved and forgiven. When in the grip of scrupulosity, always return to positive, rational reminders that God Loves You!

Second, St. Alphonsus Liguori, who struggled with scrupulosity himself, advises that anyone troubled by it follow their confessor's opinion without question when he tells you if your sin is mortal or not, and if you should receive Holy Communion or not. God will help you find the right frequency for "you" in going to Confession (weekly, monthly, etc.).

Third, pray about it. God knows you better than you know yourself, so ask him for accurate self-knowledge and a trustworthy, sensitive conscience that is neither too scrupulous nor lax. Don't fixate on the sins themselves but, rather, on God's love and goodness. Give thanks to him for his mercy and forgiveness. Then make a quick, simple inventory of your sins but don't dwell on them.

For a scrupulous person, spend time during spiritual reflection on God's love, mercy, and forgiveness when examining your sins. And when you do examine your sins, you might ask God to hear his voice identifying the sins. Once you're made your examination, take the results with you into the confessional and resist the urge to add to it.

In the end, I think it's probably true that we all suffer from at least some scrupulous fears. Was I sorry enough? Does God still love me? Did he hear me? Did the priest do Mass right? Was my participation good enough? The answer to all these questions hinges on one, simple question – Did I do my best? If the answer is yes, then be assured that Christ makes up the difference. He has promised this. Examinations of conscience, no matter how thorough, are

always imperfect. Contrition is always imperfect. But Christ, by his grace, makes them perfect.

Ultimately, we are made perfect not by any effort of our own, but by the love of God. It's time to take that pebble out of your shoe and walk.

Vivat Jesus,
Father Vic Gournas