



A
GUIDE
— *for the* —
Scrupulous

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES
CRITICAL BELIEFS
HELPFUL PRAYERS

Rev. Thomas M. Santa, CSsR



Catholic. Pastoral. Trusted.

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Introduction

I have looked forward to sharing this book with you for a very long time. Despite my anticipation, it was not until recently that I believed the right time had come. It is my hope that what I have collected here will fulfill some of the real spiritual needs of those who suffer with the affliction of scrupulosity.

I wrote this book with the encouragement of numerous men and women with whom I have enjoyed the privilege of spending time during retreats, in conversations, and often through correspondence via the *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter and website (scrupulousanonymous.org). Their heartfelt concerns and desire to feel more connected to the experience of the sacred has encouraged me. I am very grateful for their participation and suggestions. The dialogue and shared learn-

ing experienced on the *Managing Scrupulosity* website (managingscrupulosity.com) has also contributed to the wisdom collected here.

You will undoubtedly recognize that many of the reflections included here were originally topics in the monthly *Scrupulous Anonymous* newsletter. I have expanded the previous presentations and included additional thoughts and reflections. In a book, I have freedom to elaborate further on ideas when I feel it will serve the topic well.

I do not pretend that this book will meet all the special needs and requirements of each one of you. Some will discover just enough inspiration and encouragement in these pages. Others may be disappointed because I do not provide satisfactory answers to the questions that are a part of the suffering of scrupulosity. Attempting to answer persistent and unrelenting questions about scrupulosity is not my primary intention with this work. My previous book, *Understanding Scrupulosity*, serves this function and may be helpful. In this book, I offer reflections intended to support your prayer experience and anchor it more firmly in the experience of God's grace and blessing.

Any book intended to help another person pray is,

in some sense, presumptuous. After all, how can anyone truly know another's stirrings and yearnings of the heart at prayer with the Lord? Nonetheless, there are some shared experiences and feelings that are part of scrupulosity and, in some instances, present a significant obstacle to prayer. It is my hope that identifying some of these shared obstacles to prayer and offering a new perspective might provide just enough encouragement when it is most needed. I have gathered these reflections in the section titled "Critical Beliefs."

Traditional and orthodox spirituality is not an experience that takes place in a vacuum. All spiritual practice, regardless of the tradition it reflects, flows from the experience of the men and women who have prayed and asked for spiritual help and blessing. In addition to those who repeat historical practices today, we anticipate a future in which these spiritual practices will also be engaged. Spiritual practice is part of a process that includes the individual's capacity for prayer and ability to engage in the required discipline. People with the scrupulous affliction require some specific support and encouragement to increase their capacity to engage in spiritual practice.

In our Catholic tradition, asking for the help and

guidance of our Blessed Mother is most appropriate. The Blessed Mother, specifically called upon in prayer as “Mary, Hope of Sinners,” has provided comfort and support for many people. This particular emphasis and devotion are also rooted in Redemptorist tradition and the spirituality of St. Alphonsus Liguori, who is the patron of Scrupulous Anonymous. In his *Glories of Mary*, we read this heartfelt prayer:

Most holy, immaculate Virgin and my Mother Mary! To thee who art the Mother of my Lord, the Queen of the world, the Advocate, the Hope, and the Refuge of sinners.

In addition to the guidance provided by St. Alphonsus and the patronage of our Blessed Mother, this book specifically offers guidance for those men and women who, when called to prayer, do not know what to say or do. On these occasions, it is often helpful to have some trusted prayer starters, meditations, and reflections close at hand. Often, a single thought, word, or experience is all it takes for everything to fall into place. Certain traditional prayers and helpful mentors for prayer seem to be particularly appropriate for people with scrupulosity.

Some readers may be disappointed that specific

Introduction

prayers useful for celebrating the sacrament of reconciliation are not included here. I deliberately omitted them, as there are numerous other books that provide such reflection. I made the pastoral decision that additional commentary on the sacrament of reconciliation is not necessary in this book, as its focus is on expanding the prayer experience and its specific applications to scrupulosity.

First, it is my hope that this book will be pastorally sensitive to your experience and useful for your prayer. What I have written includes both my experience and yours, for a good pastor not only teaches but also listens and learns from the people of God. Second, I pray this book is useful and will become a prayer companion for you both daily and when you need it most. I would be pleased to find this book bent and torn from frequent use, dotted with the occasional stain and filled with holy cards and clippings, because I would know that you used the book for prayer instead of simply finding a home for it on your bookshelf.

As always, let us remember to pray for each other. No one fully understands the power of prayer. Nevertheless, we know that without prayer, there would be something essential missing from our lives. To pray not

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just for ourselves but for others as well, especially those who suffer with the same affliction, is an invitation of grace and a manifestation of the Word of God, active and alive in our world and in our lives.

REV. THOMAS M. SANTA, CSSR
DIRECTOR, SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS



Part 1

**SPIRITUAL
PRACTICES**

Within Roman Catholicism, there are many spiritual practices that have been used throughout the centuries. Each spiritual practice has undoubtedly been a source of hope, inspiration, and grace for the person who engages in it. However, for many people who suffer with scrupulosity, the same spiritual practices are often a burden and not necessarily helpful or joyful. This is one of the deepest sufferings experienced by people with scrupulosity—not only are they seemingly cut off from a positive experience with God, but they also seem to be excluded from their own spiritual tradition!

Yes, there are spiritual traditions that people who do not have scrupulosity participate in, and which are not necessarily helpful for the scrupulous. Specifically, the examination of conscience is often an experience of great suffering, is not helpful, and should probably be abandoned by the scrupulous. At the same time, many spiritual traditions are still frequently practiced and are quite useful. However, a specific scrupulous perspective needs to be applied to them. The reflections that follow are my attempt at providing such a perspective, which I hope will be useful and pastorally sensitive.

When appropriate, each of the reflections and spiritual practices that follow are introduced by a traditional

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prayer to our Blessed Mother. When such a prayer is not provided, another traditional prayer is suggested that helps focus the readers' thoughts on the reflection that follows. It would be helpful to begin your meditative reading by first praying the prayer and then waiting for a moment in anticipation of the reception of the particular grace you have asked for. After a few moments of prayer, your engagement with the following reflection will be appropriate and useful.

Gratefulness of the Heart at Prayer

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia. The Son whom it was your privilege to bear, alleluia, has risen as he promised, alleluia. Pray for us to God, alleluia. Rejoice and be glad, Virgin Mary, alleluia. For the Lord has truly risen, alleluia.

REFLECTION: A close friend of mine shared with me one of his spiritual practices, and it's something each person can easily incorporate into his or her everyday routine. After an initial effort, it becomes easier and quite sustainable. His spiritual practice is this: before going to bed each night, he takes a few moments and identifies three people, events, or experiences from the day for which he is most grateful. As he makes each identification, he simply says, "Thank you, God, for this blessing and this grace." On some days, it may take very little effort to identify those graces and blessings, while on others, a little more effort or creativity may be required. Regardless, it is always worth the effort.

This spiritual practice underlines and brings to individual awareness the awesome power of God's grace