

SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

December 2003

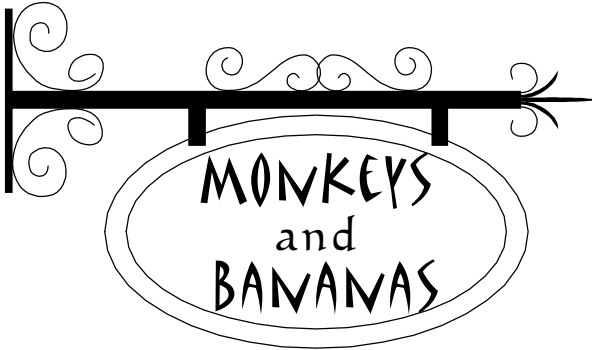
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a service to its readers.



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In certain parts of Africa the monkey serves as a necessary protein source for the diet of the indigenous tribes. Monkeys, however, are very difficult to capture because of the height they are capable of climbing and the speed with which they are able to climb out of reach of their pursuer. Over time the African hunter has adopted a way of catching a monkey that neutralizes both the speed and the height consideration. Hunters create a box with a hole in it just large enough for the monkey to insert his hand. Inside the box are bananas and, when the monkey puts his hand in the box and grabs the banana, the fist he forms cannot be withdrawn from the box. Of course all the monkey has to do is let go of the banana and he would be easily able to withdraw his hand and make his escape, but more often than not, the monkey will not let go

of the banana and, as a result (because the box neutralizes the speed and the ability of the monkey to swiftly climb), is easily captured.

This story can serve as an example that could also illustrate human behavior, but in our case, it has little to do with bananas.

Human beings often persist in holding on to certain behaviors, feelings, emotions, and a wide variety of other singularly human experiences, well beyond the point where they are either needed or helpful. There are even occasions in our lives when we know that what we are grasping with all of our strength might even be harmful to us, but we nevertheless persist in holding on. There are a variety of explanations that might perhaps provide some form of insight for us that could be helpful.

The primary reason we might hold on and refuse to let go is fear. We might be well aware of our particular situation, we might be well aware of the pain and the anxiety that we feel, but we prefer what we know, no matter how unpleasant it might be, to the experience of what could happen to us if we make a change or another choice. There is a part of us that believes it is better to deal with the pain and the anxiety with which we are familiar rather than to risk that which is unknown. Often this fear can become so paralyzing for us that it makes it almost

impossible for us to engage in any kind of significant change of direction in our lives.

A secondary reason, that is in fact a complimentary and a complicating experience that intensifies fear, is that we are quite capable of convincing ourselves that “this is the way that it is supposed to be.” Some of us might even pursue this line of reasoning to the point where we complicate it even further and convince ourselves that it is the way because it “is the will of God for us.” Even when someone might point out to us that we are not created to suffer and that we are not created by God in order to be punished, we are nevertheless reluctant to let go. It might sound good, it might even sound appealing and truthful, but at the same time there is at least a small part of ourselves that nevertheless doubts if it could be true for us. “After all,” we can hear ourselves saying, “there are always exceptions and I may well be the exception, then what?”

If fear is the primary reason we may find it difficult to change our behavior, yet another explanation may be discovered in the experience of pride, fueled by anger, arrogance, and oftentimes embarrassment. In other words, if we have persisted in a certain behavior or have held a strong opinion about something for a long period of time, if we choose to change we will have to admit to ourselves, and often to another person, that we had been mistaken. This is a very difficult thing to do and often becomes a stumbling block to real change or conversion in our lives.

This may best be illustrated by recalling the

necessary steps used in the twelve-step programs of recovery for addictive behaviors. It is not enough, in order for real healing to take place, to simply acknowledge your particular dependency to God and to yourself, but it is also necessary and required to acknowledge your behavior to those who may have been affected by your addiction and be willing to make the necessary amends. This takes great humility and is certainly not accomplished overnight. More than one person in a twelve-step recovery program has struggled with the requirements of this process!

Yet another reason human beings find it difficult to make a significant change in their lives, even when such a change is needed, often has to do with our level of being comfortable with the present situation. Even though we may recognize that change is needed, and we might have even acknowledged that we are fearful and perhaps not humble enough, the real stumbling block can be honestly discovered when we realize that we are just simply not willing to make the change. We know what is required but we are simply not willing to begin or maintain the effort.

Scrupulosity can be understood, in particular instances, as a type of destructive behavior that we cling to, despite the grace that we are offered to slowly become free of the trap that scrupulosity is. I am not talking about sin in this instance but rather talking about the human condition as I briefly outlined it above. For some of us, we have made enough progress, with the help of God’s grace, to arrive at the point where we are invited to “let go,” but we are resisting the invitation. For still others of us,

we have not yet progressed to the point where we can “let go,” but we have at least progressed to the point where we begin the grace-filled spiritual journey which will eventually bring us to the point of freedom. Perhaps we need to ask for the extra grace that we might need in order to have the strength to take the next step.

With the coming of the new year of God’s grace and activity in our life, calling each of us each day to the fullness of life and love, it might be a good time to take the next step in our spiritual journey. Despite the fear, despite the anxiety, even despite the fact that we might have arrived at a certain level of comfortableness, we are nevertheless called by God each day to move forward. It might not be giant steps, our journey might be barely discernable, but it is nevertheless progress toward what the Lord has called us to be.

Admittedly, it will not be easy. The tentacles of scrupulosity bind us closely to our fears and anxieties, many times in such a way that if

the fear or the anxiety is not present, we have learned to not trust the experience. Many scrupulous people experience so many doubts and so many questions in their lives that when a moment of clarity is experienced, they truly doubt if it can be real. There is also the feeling of comfort that is experienced when things seem to be normal, even when that which is normal is in fact the manifestation of scrupulosity. That being the case, strengthened and fortified by the grace of God active in our lives, we can nevertheless make progress and learn each and every day that we need not be trapped and that we can in fact let go and enjoy fully the freedom of the children of God. May God bless you and grant you the grace that you need each day to progress in his love and believe in his loving mercy and forgiveness.

Father Santa’s e-mail address is tmscssr@cs.com. Also visit www.liguori.org to read the current bulletin as well as past issues.



Grant each of us, Lord,
the confidence we need
to face our fears and overcome them.
Teach us how to draw upon
the courage and confidence
that you constantly hold out to us.
Let us realize that if we face life
with more faith in your loving care,
we will be able to face whatever
life brings to us, not only more easily
but also more successfully.

Don’t let us be afraid
to risk failure in pursuit of success,
to risk disappointment
in search of contentment,
to risk sadness in our quest for happiness.
Let us learn, dear God,
to look forward, confidently,
to each new phase in our lives.

Renee Bartkowski
Author of *Prayers for Married Couples*
and *Prayers for Parents*
Liguori Publications



Q I am very grateful to receive the SA bulletin. Could you direct me to a priest who specializes in spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation for people with OCD and scrupulosity? It would be a great help to me if I could have your recommendation.

A I am often asked this question and I am unfortunately unable to answer it. We do not keep a database of priest confessors and/or spiritual directors. Perhaps it would be wonderful to have such a resource but at the moment such a resource does not exist. If someone could come up with a workable way to produce and manage a resource directory, it would certainly be a great service to the members of SA.

The best answer that I can provide you is to ask your priest for his help. Your local priest may very well know someone with this kind of expertise and would be more than happy to direct you to the person that might be able to help you. If you feel uncomfortable asking your priest, it would not be inappropriate to call Catholic Social Services, for example, or even identify someone else on your parish staff who might be willing to provide you with the information that you need. Seeking such help might be a little embarrassing at first, but I think you will be pleasantly surprised to discover that there are people who are willing to help you and who are willing to direct you to the person that may be most helpful for you. God bless you.

Q It is almost that time of year again and people start thinking about new year's resolutions. Do you have any suggestions for an appropriate resolution for the members of SA?

A I have two suggestions. The first suggestion is not to make a resolution of any kind if the resolution is going to be a source of frustration and anxiety for you. If it is going to become one more experience of imperfection, self-doubt, or worry and anxiety, then I think it would be best to leave well enough alone. If, on the other hand, you have discovered that a resolution is helpful for you on your spiritual journey, I would suggest that you choose a resolution that is attainable, measurable, and which directly contributes to your own sense of self-worth and accomplishment. May God bless you.

Q This may sound like a silly question, but it is one that I have been wondering about. Do you ever get tired of the members of SA asking you all of these questions?

A I sometimes get a little overwhelmed if one question follows another question, especially when the questions I answer are answered through e-mail. On more than one occasion I just finish answering one question, send off the answer, and before I have a chance to answer someone else, a new question pops up in my mailbox. I try and remind myself how terrible scrupulosity is and how frightening it is. I realize it is not the person who is asking the question that is the source of my feeling of being overwhelmed, but rather it is the specific manifestation of scrupulosity through questioning that can wear me down. I also try and imagine what the person who asks the question must be feeling like and I say a prayer for them. God bless you and thanks for asking your "silly question."