

SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS

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a service to its readers.

The SA Mailbox

Rev. Thomas M. Santa, C.Ss.R.

INTRODUCTION:

It seems that this time of year my SA mailbox fills up with all sorts of questions and dilemmas. Although I try to keep up with my correspondence, I do fall behind every once in a while. The questions I receive are important, not only to the person who asks the questions, but I think they are also important to the members of SA. Not all of us are concerned with each and every question that may be asked, but usually we are at least interested in the answer. I hope you find some of the dilemmas that follow helpful for your own spiritual growth.

QUESTION

I make a generic confession each week. My pastor and sometimes the visiting priest also accept my confession with no difficulty. However, I worry that some confessor will not accept my generic confession. From the time that I get up in the morning on Saturday until my confession is over, I feel fear, dread, and slightly ill. I am grateful for the opportunity to go to confession and I wish that I could go everyday.

ANSWER

You are experiencing scrupulosity and one of the manifestations of the scrupulous conscience. If it isn't one thing, it is another thing. Scrupulous people can always find something to worry about. With the manifestations that you experience each Saturday, I cannot imagine why you would want to go to confession everyday. I can almost assure you that you would begin to feel the same symptoms every day that you now experience only on Saturday.

My best advice to you would be to see if you could not go to confession every Saturday and try going every other Saturday. In addition, I believe that you should determine that you will celebrate the sacrament only when your pastor is in the confessional or when there is a visiting priest that you know is comfortable with people

suffering from scrupulosity. Our Lord does not require that you go through this kind of agony week after week. God bless you.

QUESTION

I am really worried about sins that might be a cause of scandal to another person. I am really worried about whether I should write my bishop and let him know when a priest gives an answer that is not correct. I don't know what to do about words and phrases that appear in things that I might be reading that are not "good" words and phrases. I am sure that if someone saw me reading this kind of material, it would be a source of scandal. What should I do?

ANSWER

You should do nothing and you should most certainly not go to the bishop with your fears in this matter. The best advice for the scrupulous, repeated often in this column by all of the priest directors of SA, is to tread very lightly when you form a judgment about another person. As far as scandal goes, I cannot imagine what kind of words or phrases you might be coming across in an otherwise reputable magazine or newspaper that could be a source of scandal for anyone. Scandal is a very serious matter and it is usually not stumbled upon. If, on the other hand, you are habitually reading something that might provide an opportunity for the serious matter of scandal, I might worry more about your choice of reading material and what it is doing to your spiritual life—this would be a much bigger concern for me than what it may or may not be doing to someone else. God bless you.

QUESTION

I can't tell if I am being tempted or if I am sinning by taking pleasure in the thoughts that I have. I can't tell if I am doing the three things that are necessary for a mortal sin or not. I go to Mass almost everyday and I am a daily communicant and I am still having these thoughts. I would appreciate anything that you could do for me.

ANSWER

Perhaps what I can offer you is some sense of peace. If you are not freely choosing to fulfill the three requirements for mortal sin, then you are not committing a mortal sin. You cannot accidentally commit a mortal sin; you need to be fully aware of what you are choosing and why you are choosing it. What you are experiencing are normal thoughts and desires and you are trying your best to live the way that God wants you to live. In fact, because you go to Mass and communion every day, you are trying your very best to cooperate with God's plan for you and your life. God bless you.

QUESTION

I receive unsolicited mailings, many times with some sort of picture of our Blessed Mother or the Lord included. Would it be disrespectful and/or sinful to just throw all of this in the trash? I live in an apartment building and it would be difficult, if not impossible, to bury them in the yard or burn them. Thank you for your help.

ANSWER

Feel free to throw this material away, it is in no way a sign of disrespect or in any way sinful. If you feel better about it, you might want to

make sure that you tear the mailing up into smaller pieces, but please do not go overboard on this. What I am suggesting is a reasonable tearing into smaller pieces, not an attempt to make the pieces so small as to be unrecognizable. Thank you and God bless you.

QUESTION

What happens if you discover, after talking with your spouse, that there are circumstances that would probably have made an annulment of your marriage possible. I have felt, in the thirty-one years we have been married, that perhaps this marriage was never valid. Much of our marriage has been very unhappy, but we have stuck it out, and we have matured and we are doing much better. I would just like to know.

ANSWER

I think most married couples could probably find something in their marriage that might seem to fulfill the requirements that could have made an annulment possible; I think it is human nature to be filled with weakness and imperfection. However, that being the case, it certainly does not mean that your marriage is not valid. It sounds like you have tried your best, despite all of the things that have not gone right or that could have been better, to cooperate with the grace of God. I hope your last mature years together will be a source of great blessing for each of you. God bless you.

QUESTION

My hobby is sculpting reliefs of both religious and secular subjects. I was taught a certain method, which I have improved on and per-

fectured, so that I can be very accurate. If I enter into competition where some of the people do not have the same skills or method that I enjoy, would that be cheating? If it were cheating, would it be a mortal sin or a venial sin?

ANSWER

It is not a sin at all. It is simply using the skills that you have and the creative ability that God has given you. God bless you.

QUESTION

If I haven't confessed all of the sins that I have committed against impurity throughout my life, are they, nevertheless, forgiven? I realize that it is difficult to know what has been covered and what has not. I hope to hear from you soon because I may not receive communion until I hear from you.

ANSWER

I mean this question, which will serve as the introduction to my answer to you, with all due respect to you and to all of the other members of our group. "Why are we always concerned about the sexual sins that we may have forgotten to confess? Why are our sexual sins more of a concern for us than any of the other sins that we might have not confessed as accurately as possible?"

I am afraid if I tried to answer the question that I posed to you, it would take pages and pages of this newsletter and I would still not be able to answer it in a way that would satisfy all of our readers. But, it is an important question to try and answer for ourselves. It is important to try and come to some understanding of why we might be so concerned about our

perception that we might have some kind of unconfessed or imperfectly confessed sexual sins. Do we believe that God will deal more harshly with us because of our sins against the sixth commandment and not as harshly with us concerning the other nine commandments?

One possible answer is that we feel more responsible for our sexual sins because of the nature and the intimacy of the thoughts, words, actions, and desires associated with sexuality. Sexual expression always produces some deep feeling or emotion, the strongest which seems to often be guilt, and as a result, the memory is with us for a long time. Perhaps it might be helpful to bring before the Lord in our prayer, not the memory of our sexual sins, but rather the feeling of guilt that we often have as a residual memory, and ask for his healing power and help in this regard. God bless you.

QUESTION

My husband and I are both retired and we would like to do some traveling beyond the continental USA. We would like to take cruise ships, but it seems that we might not be able to attend Sunday Mass all of the time as a result of the ship's schedule. Of course we definitely want to go to Mass, but it just doesn't seem like it will always work out. Because of this, does this mean that we can not go on these cruises?

ANSWER

Thank you for thinking ahead and for placing the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist as a priority in your planning.

You are free to go on any cruise ship that

you like. I think you will be surprised to discover that many ships have made plans for their Catholic customers to attend Sunday Mass. If, on the other hand, you find yourself in a situation where it is simply not possible to attend Mass, then simply set aside the time on Sunday morning that you would have used to go to Mass, and use that time for prayer and thankfulness to God. God bless you and I hope that you enjoy your travels!

Dear God,

Please help me overcome
the guilt I feel.

Give me your love to ease
my heart
and lift these feelings of remorse.

Help me to recognize that
I can not go back
and change the past.

Let me remember that
You have already forgiven me.

Please soothe my mind
so that I may forgive myself.

Guide me so that I may move forward.

Focus my thoughts and actions
on today and tomorrow
instead of the regrets of
yesterday.

Amen.

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