

On Scrupulosity, VII

St. Gregory Nazianzen says that to truly know God, one must be at ease. St. Teresa of Avila said “Let nothing disturb you.” This applies to everyone who strives to grow in the interior life, but it is especially important for one who suffers from scrupulosity not to become agitated. He must realize that thoughts – even horrible ones – are mere temptations and not sins. Even our good Lord endured temptations.

If a scrupulous man wastes time in wondering if he has consented to a sin, he will be perturbed and not at all at ease. He needs to stop that waste of time and energy by checking certainty. If he is certain that he consented, as certain as two plus two equals four, then he can admit his sin and ask God’s pardon. If he is not certain, he must think it is not a sin. He must make a decision not to worry in either case, but instead to trust God.

Also, he needs to understand the difference between feeling and consent, in order not to be disturbed. If Jack puts a spoonful of pepper on Jill’s tongue when she thought it was going to be honey, Jill would feel it, experience a bad taste, gag and spit it out. True, it was in her, and it was very unpleasant but she did not consent to it. The pepper is like a blasphemous thought about God; the scrupulous man feels it and knows it is inside him, but he does not consent. There is no sin and he did not want the thought. If Jill puts

a spoonful of poisoned sugar on Jack’s tongue, he would feel it, but if he knew it was poison he would spit it out immediately. This is like a lustful thought; the thought is pleasant perhaps, but Jack does not consent because he knows it is wrong. He did not desire or will the feeling or the thought. He must not let his feelings convince him that he consented. God sees the anxiety of the scrupulous man and knows his true heart.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that one “...must obey the certain judgment of his conscience,” but that it can happen that his “moral conscience remains in ignorance and makes erroneous judgments about acts to be performed or already committed.” (CCC 1790) The Church teaches that all of us have the duty to correct any errors in moral conscience; for a scrupulous man this is best done by obedience to a spiritual father.

Again, he must change his ways of thinking, especially his pride, in order to heal and be at peace. As our Lord once said to St. Faustina, “You should not become discouraged, but strive to make my love reign in place of your self love.”

Another area which he must avoid in order to remain undisturbed is wondering whether he is in a state of grace. Human life must proceed without absolute certitude on

things, and God wants us to do our present duty without striving to be certain of things which are beyond us. The tormentors of St. Joan of Arc pestered her about whether she was in a state of grace. Her answer was simple, and perfect. "If I am in a state of grace, may God deign to keep me there; if I am not, may He deign to put me in it." That is an excellent example of how to live in the freedom of the children of God.

An attitude of being grateful for blessings received and the development of a sense of humor are excellent means to defray disturbance. It's as though thanksgiving and humor dispel the toxic emotions of fear and anxiety and work against pride and self-pity and make one much less vulnerable to the temptations of the devil. "Rejoice in the Lord always: again, I say, rejoice. Let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh. Be nothing solicitous: but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your petitions be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 4.6-7) If a

man were to write down each morning three things for which he is thankful to God; after 30 days he would have 90 different things. This can change his image of God.

Lastly, he must not worry about dreams that involve immoral content. Dreams are not conscious; there cannot be any consent involved with them.

The excellent French poet Charles Peguy once wrote in a fine little book called The Portal of the Mystery of Hope, "You must have confidence in God, He certainly has confidence in us. You must trust God, He has certainly put His trust in us. You must hope in God, He has certainly hoped in us. You must give God a chance, He has certainly given us a chance."

In the next insert – which will be the last one on scrupulosity – I'll put down ten rules to follow, and a prayer to be said for those who are scrupulous.