

## Managing Anxiety:

What do I do when I hit the wall?

*This is Part 3 in an ongoing series of managing stress and anxiety during difficult times.*

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Part 1 and Part 2 looked at the practical coping skills we can develop and how we “re-map” our coping mechanisms. In spite of our best efforts to maintain or develop good coping skills in the middle of all this, we will all have our day or days when we will “hit the wall” or “hit bottom.” There is no predicting when it will happen, but some red flags to look for are:

- Increased irritability
- Over thinking about everything that is happening
- Just feeling overwhelmed by everything
- The realization that “I” am not in control of the external events of the world
- An increased sense of being off center

What is important to realize is that it is not a sign of weakness to have a meltdown. It is allowing the mind to let go of all the feelings that are there. Some people have their moments of just feeling so overwhelmed that they burst into tears. That is not a sign of a weakness; in fact, to go with it could be the healthiest thing you do that day. The increased irritability that most of us are feeling opens the door for us to have many feelings that can run the gamut of tears to yelling, from fear to hope. The important thing to remember is that many of these reactions are normal. We need to worry if our meltdown becomes self destructive or harmful to another. If we allow ourselves to be honest about how overwhelmed we are feeling and put into place some good ways to cope, then our meltdown will not last long and we will get up and move on.

I am a believer in pre-planning on how to deal with a situation. In these uncertain times, it could be a great idea to have a plan to deal with your eventual melt down. For example, to allow yourself a good cry, leave whatever situation you are in and go for a walk or exercise, find some good mindfulness YouTube videos and give yourself the 20 minutes to be and feel, say the Rosary, reach out to someone to just vent and be listened to and be grateful for a very human moment.

These are not normal times. As I have said, we are creating a map as we go along and as with any unexplored territory, we will hit dead ends and we will get lost. Drawing a new map, also mean we risk making mistakes and experience the anxiety of getting lost. There is nothing wrong with all this. The reality is that at some point, we will all breathe easier and walk with more trust in our environment. We have lost control of the world because something that is so microscopic has caused more change and fear than anything any of us have experienced. When we are not in control, our first instinct is to try to reestablish the old control, but, today, our meltdowns are the signals that we need new and more realistic ways to interact with our world and environment.

Since I am writing this at the beginning of Holy Week, personally, my own paradigm (today) seems to be the Agony on the Garden. I think Jesus was so overwhelmed by the reality of what was to come that he wants his friends (who fall asleep) to be there. So, he turns to the one place that is His constant and ours: His Father. Like many of us, he prays that this cup be taken away. St Luke tells that this “melt-down” was so intense that “his sweat became like drops of blood falling on the ground.” (Lk. 22/4). How

Jesus finally resolves it is found in his final statement of the Agony in the Garden: Your will be done (Mt. 26/42-45). When I have gotten overwhelmed by the world situation and had my own meltdown(s), my heart has turned to the Cross and now to the agony. God didn't cause this; but, he is right here next to us as he was to Jesus in the garden. "Your will be done."

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