

Managing Stress and Anxiety during Difficult Times

By Rev. Thomas E. Konopka, LCSW

We are all under a lot of stress and anxiety at the moment. Many of the suggestions I've offered to priests, deacons, and others in parish leadership are suggestions that everyone can use. The two I would highly recommend: limit the amount of exposure to social media and news. Stay informed, but watching 24 hours a day is like pouring gasoline on a fire. Second, don't isolate. I have never been a fan of Facebook, but it is becoming my way to connect with parishioners at this time.

Our faith does tell us that we believe in the empty tomb after the passion of Good Friday. My prayer is that this become a watershed moment for us Catholics and Christians. The reality that God is the One we turn to and is the true source of our comfort and our hope. Together as a people of prayer may we hold each other in prayer. Even if we are not in the same room together, we are joined together by the love of God.

Here are a few more ways to manage your anxiety and worry:

1. Breathe. When people are anxious, they tend to breath from the upper chest. "Gut" breathing is the antidote to anxiety. Here's a YouTube video on relaxation breathing to learn how to do this: <https://youtu.be/8v45WSuAeYI>
2. Take time every day to relax and just be. Read a novel. Listen to music. Play an instrument. Go out for a walk or run or bike ride (if allowed). Garden. Find something physical to do. DO something that you love to do. We need to affirm the goodness of the world in a time of fear.
3. Be honest with yourself about your worry and your fear. It is normal. We have never been through anything like this before. No one has an "internal" road map to follow as to how to deal with this, so our brains are reacting to the unknown. The uncertainty of everyday plays into our fear. I look to the Cross (literally) when I get overwhelmed by it all. This seems to help me calm down and find my center.
4. Try to connect with others every day using whatever means you have. A phone call or text from a family member or a friend can lift our spirits. We probably cannot meet for a cup of coffee but a Facetime chat is also good. Isolation will only add to our anxiety and fear.
5. Try to find some humor in some of what is happening. Personally, I am trying to figure out the toilet paper craze.
6. Eat healthy meals. Comfort food is ok; but, too much is not healthy. Sometimes too much caffeine will mimic anxiety. It may be a good idea to limit how much coffee, soda, etc. you take in at this time.
7. Remember, this will come to an end. We don't know how, but are we not people who see hope in a cross and a tomb?
8. Obviously, prayer. Pray as you always do, but also join with others in prayer through Facebook streaming, if available to you.

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