

COPING EMOTIONALLY AND SPIRITUALLY WITH THE CORONA VIRUS

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All of St Thomas Parish is affected by the Corona virus. It is a global pandemic. We are witnessing immense suffering. More than 33,000 have died. Thousands more are on ventilators.

This is a tense and critical time for all of us. We have seen nothing like it. We don't know what the future holds. We live in fear and anxiety. We have distress and low-grade depression.

We are experiencing some loneliness. We have physical isolation. We work remotely. We have separation and loneliness. We have fear about the future. We are frightened. There is panic in the air.

Along with all of this our churches are shut down. There are no public masses. There are no public stations of the cross. There are no public novenas. There are no public recitations of the rosary.

There are no parish gatherings. We feel the spiritual emptiness. We feel a great loss. We feel a deep void. There is a felt hunger for the Eucharist. We hunger for the touchable comfort and protection of God.

The universal quest is how do we best survive all of this. How do we cope with the loss and the fear and the loneliness? How do we best manage and survive in this moment? How can I become happier and feel safer right now?

What we need to keep in mind in this moment of crisis is that the one thing we have not lost is the power to choose. We still have the power to think. We still have the power to make choices. We still have the power to think about what is happening to us and all around us in this moment.

The awareness of our power to think and make decisions is so key to how well we will survive this time of crisis. Fundamentally, *"We are disturbed by our thoughts and not by the external events"* says Epictetus in the 4th century.

In other words, you can enhance your coping skills by making a catalogue of your daily fears. You need to get to know your fears. You need to get to know your anxieties. You need to get to know the disturbing thoughts that trigger your fears and your anxieties.

Just noting your fears and just letting them come to the surface helps reduce some of the anxiety you are experiencing. Just exploring what you are telling yourself at this time of confusion is very helpful.

This is not the time to blame ourselves for our fears and anxieties. Our negative emotions come from our negative thoughts. And we can lessen these negative thoughts. And we can shrink the intensity of these negative cognitions by becoming more aware of them.

This is the time to take in all the loving-kindness that is so evident all around us. There are so many reaching out to help one another. Neighbor is helping neighbor. Kind and caring neighbors are so very evident. It is an opportunity for love in abundance. They are practicing love. Jesus did say *"Love one another"*.

Many are going the extra- mile to aid and support the elderly and the home-bound. Many are opening up and talking to one another. They are talking about their families and about their fears and about their anxieties. Many are shopping for one another. They are going to the grocery store for each other. They are picking up prescriptions at the pharmacy for each other. So much compassion and so much support.

Our nurses and our doctors and first responders and all in public service are an inspiration to all of us. They inspire us with their courage and with their care and with their concern for the sick and the dying.

They are modeling for us how to be selfless and how not to be self-absorbed. Jesus did say *"Greater love than this no one has than to lay down one's life for one's friends"*.

Our common task at this time is to suspend as far as possible all negative self-judgments. Instead take in and soak up the many wonderful and uplifting things that are happening to us and all around us. Notice them and rejoice in them and celebrate them.

This kind of thinking and behavior can help us replace our habitual negative thoughts. This can enable us to have a more adaptive out-look in the midst of this horrific crisis. And of course, that can be a huge challenge as well as a huge blessing even for the healthiest among us.

This is a time to appreciate ourselves in small moments. It could be a time to smell the flowers or watch an absorbing movie. This is definitely a time to eat more healthily and exercise more regularly. It's a good time to get plenty of rest and relaxation.

Keep in mind you can always take a break from your habitual thinking. Instead of over-focusing on the outside world of the corona virus you can look to Christ. Look to the Christ who died for us. Look to the Christ who rose for us. Look to the Christ who loves us. Look to the Christ who is with us always.

This can truly be a time for more intense prayer and meditation. We can transform the mind in a positive way through prayerfully and reflectively reading the four Gospel stories of Mathew, Mark, Luke and John. Or, you may want to read the story of your favorite saint.

Daily you can pray the Mass on line. Daily you can make a spiritual communion. You can desire God. You can desire a heartfelt presence of God. You can pray the rosary. The Divine is always there for us and with us.

Ask and you will receive. Believe and receive. *"Even though, I walk in the dark valley I fear no evil; for you are at my side"* says the Psalmist.

With some of these regular spiritual awareness and practices we gradually become more spiritually and more mentally healthy in this unprecedented time of ours.