

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May is Mental Health Month. In honor of that, I share a few thoughts and techniques I have used to help me ride through the waves of my own grief, anxieties and stress. I am not “preaching” but offering some personal reflections from Father Scott’s homilies and practices I have picked up from mental health counselors in our Archdiocese. I am not an expert in mental health, but I do have resources and names from others who are and am happy to build connections for anyone who asks.

COVID-19 has created unprecedented changes to our lives, literally overnight. EVERY person has been affected and experiences loss, worry and anxiety. As God’s people, we find courage to embrace our pain, and rise above our fears through FAITH and HOPE. I found great comfort in this Gospel reading from John:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn,
while the world rejoices;
you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.
When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived;
but when she has given birth to a child,
she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy
that a child has been born into the world.
So you also are now in anguish.
But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy away from you.
On that day you will not question me about anything.
Amen, amen, I say to you,
whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you.”

John 16:20-23

The metaphor of child birth resonated with me. We as God’s people are an EASTER people. We witnessed Jesus’ great suffering, crucifixion and death, yet we remembered Jesus’s message about the love of our Father and about the everlasting life of joy ahead of us. We witnessed that joy in Jesus’ resurrection. Through death, there is faith in a resurrection.

Grief, pain and loss are extremely difficult, but not unsurmountable. It takes courage in knowing *this too shall pass* and that there is something wonderful ahead. Our faith is in knowing that we are not alone. God walks alongside of us, *not to prevent pain and suffering*, but to give us the strength and courage to face it head-on and to look for joy on the other side.

You ask us not to be afraid. Yet our faith is weak and we are fearful. But you, Lord, will not leave us at the mercy of the storm. Tell us again: “Do not be afraid” (Mt 28:5). And we, together with Peter, “cast all our anxieties onto you, for you care about us” (1 Pet 5:7).

-Pope Francis Strong in the Face of Tribulation: A Sure Support in Time of Trial

I hold on to the thought that *this too shall pass. And I know, I must find courageous ways to fortify my strength to get me through those dark moments of grief and anxiety.* A few weeks back I presented the following GLAD technique as a tool that helps me put my anxiety into perspective, and helps me to self-regulate my emotions and behaviors. They also help me to think of others and answer God's call to serve. I present two more mindfulness activities below. These reflections, along with walking the neighborhood, gardening, zooming and Face Timing with friends and family have all helped me ride my waves of grief and anxiety. I offer them to you in hopes that they give you comfort and strength as they have me.

With great respect and care,
Monica Wingard, Principal

BE Glad and Rejoice

G—One Gratitude that you're thankful for today

L—One new thing you Learned today

A—One small Accomplishment you did today

D—One thing of Delight that touched you today

RULER TECHNIQUE.... A WAY TO SELF REGULATE

R- Recognize what we're feeling

U=Understand what we're feeling

L=Label what we're feeling...Name it to tame it

E=Express what we're feeling

R=Regulate thru a variety of skills

SOAR TECHNIQUE

S = SPIRITUALITY.... How are you all finding /feeling God's Presence in this pandemic? How is this bringing us all closer to God? To our highest version of ourselves?

O = OUTREACH.... How are you serving others at this time?

A = ATTITUDE What positive attitude are you bringing to the table right now? Gratefulness, humility, curiosity, acceptance, patience, tolerance, etc.

R = REINVESTMENT Embracing life, living in a new norm. Incorporating these losses as part of our new baseline. How are you all doing this? Living from a BOTH/AND perspective? I'm learning I can feel scared and be safe, feel sad and move forward, feel angry and still cope, and.....