

A very blessed Christmas season to all!!

A while back, I received a call from a family member saying that they were experiencing persistent sadness, no interest in anything, fatigue, sleeping all the time and not eating, unable to concentrate, and ... not understanding why they needed to even be alive. God created me to be both a pharmacist and a deacon for a reason which became very clear at that moment.

Thanks be to God...on this date, December 29, in 1987, the FDA approved the antidepressant medication, Prozac, marking a significant turning point in the treatment of depression. Multiple other medication options have been released subsequent to Prozac. Clinical research helped to redefine depression as a legitimate mental disorder, rather than a personal failing. By the early 2000s, antidepressants had become among the most commonly prescribed medications, reflecting a growing public awareness and acceptance of mental health issues.

Unfortunately, the stigma of depression still lingers. Some continue to view it as spiritual failure, linking it to sin or a lack of faith. However depression is a health issue requiring both spiritual support (prayer, community) and professional treatment (therapy, medication), acknowledging that faith doesn't always prevent illness but can aid recovery.

Catholic social teaching views depression as a serious human suffering, affirming those suffering depression as embedded with God-given human dignity. All individuals are made in God's image, deserving compassion, support, and integration into the Church. Faith offers spiritual strength but it only complements, not replaces, professional care. Jesus' ministry models how we should treat those suffering depression and other mental disorders, calling believers to help the suffering by showing compassion, offering support, and encouraging both spiritual and professional help.

Approximately 30% of Americans report having dealt with periods of depression. With a condition so prevalent in our society, it is everyone's duty to actively support and assist those suffering from this condition.

In order to help facilitate efforts to support and assist those experiencing depression or other mental disorders, Catholic Charities of Stockton offers direct mental health services such as general clinical counseling, bereavement counseling, connecting people to health care as well as supportive services such as case management, food, housing, and other resources. Our services are available to all individuals regardless of any personal identifying status. All services are confidential. In addition to reducing social conditions leading to poverty and increasing access to basic needs; Catholic Charities also works in close collaboration with other local organizations to more fully assist those in need.

Many experience the "holiday blues, ". Factors like financial stress, work burn-out, family pressure, grief, isolation, shorter daylight, and unmet expectations, make it a common yet challenging time for mental health.

I cannot think of any better way to conclude than to share with you Pope Francis' prayer intention for November, 2021.

*Overwork and work-related stress cause many people to experience extreme exhaustion —mental, emotional, affective, and physical exhaustion. Sadness, apathy, and spiritual tiredness end up dominating people's lives, who are overloaded due to the rhythm of life today.*

*Let us try to be close to those who are exhausted, to those who are desperate, without hope. Often, we should just simply listen in silence, because we cannot go and tell someone, "No, life's not like that. Listen to me, I'll give you the solution." There's no solution. Let us pray that people who suffer from depression or burn-out will find support and a light that opens them up to life.*

At the end of the day, let us reflect on the scripture found in Matthew 11:28: "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" May our arms, legs, minds and hearts be the tools that our Lord uses to help lighten the burden of others.

Blessings,

Deacon Mike