The Road to Emmaus

Walking along with and Ministering to Patients with Depression and Anxiety

Fr. Joseph Perumpuzha Chacko, M.A, LPC, BCC

DEPRESSION

An Illness
and/or
A Dark Night of the Soul?

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

~Robert Frost 1923
Vignette

45-year-old white Catholic woman, mother of two, admitted in the hospital with poor sleep, lack of concentration, and anxiety. She is going through a painful divorce which is against her faith. She feels terribly guilty about divorce, has poor self-esteem, and feels she does not want to live any more. She quits eating and taking care of herself.

Psalm 38 (GNT)

1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. (guilt, fear)
2 For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. (feeling of being punished, shame)
3 Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. (feeling empty)
4 My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. (shame)
5 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly.
6 I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. (low self esteem)
7 My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. (physical pain)
8 I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. (vulnerability)
9 All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you.
10 My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. (anxiety)
11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away. (isolation)
12 Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception. (suspicion)
13 I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; (confusion)
14 I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply. (slow speech)
15 I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God.
16 For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips."
17 For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me. (hopelessness)
18 I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. (guilt)

19 Many are those who are my vigorous enemies; those who hate me without reason are numerous. (persecutory)

20 Those who repay my good with evil slander me when I pursue what is good.

21 O LORD, do not forsake me; be not far from me, O my God. (sense of abandonment)

22 Come quickly to help me, O Lord my Savior

“I want to be normal again.”
I have seen only two things ‘normal’ –

one is on the dishwasher

and the other is on the washing machine.

Depression Vs Bipolar
Chaplain's intervention is more helpful here

Psychiatric Chaplain's Role

What is a Disorder?

- Distressing
- Dangerous
- Deviant
- Dysfunctional

Types of Depression

- Mild
- Moderate
- Severe
Causes

• Chemical imbalance that takes place in the brain
• Thought process is affected by the chemical imbalance

Contributing Factors

• Genetic
• Environmental
• Biological
• Personality
• Past life events
• Substance abuse
• Seasonal

Treatments

• Antidepressant medications
• ECT (Electro-Convulsive Therapy)
• DBS (Deep Brain Stimulation)
• TMS (Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation)
• Psychotherapy (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, ACT, BAT, MBCT)
• SACBT (Spiritually Augmented Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)
Basic concepts of CBT & SACBT

- Healthy Emotion
- Healthy Behavior
- Rational Thought

- Unhealthy Emotion
- Unhealthy Behavior
- Automatic Thought

Spirituality

"Spirituality is that which brings peace, happiness, and love." Sri Sri Ravi Shankar BBC interview August 14/2010

One's way to maintain serenity, peace, joy, happiness, love, kindness and such other positive emotions in one's life journey is by establishing healthy relationships with one's own self, others and the Other (God).

- Connectedness
- Warm non-anxious presence

What disturbs our spirituality?

- Negative emotions: anger, anxiety, guilt, shame, jealous, hate, low self-esteem, feeling of emptiness.
- Internalized anger!
Spiritual crisis

A DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL
(John of the Cross & Thomas Moore)

Automatic Thoughts & Core Belief System

• Rationalize/analyze them and replace them with healthy thoughts
• Using Faith as an alternative thought
• Psalmist uses alternative thoughts
• What gives meaning for you?
• What roles do you play in your life?
• How does faith give you meaning/purpose?

Pastoral Examples I use

• Car’s battery and Minnesotan winter (Emphasize the need for medical help)
• Pop corn machine
• Window with tinted glass
• A Beautiful Mind (film)
• Twenty dollar bill (self esteem)
• Pen (things are neutral-we give interpretations)
• The shining star
Biblical Examples

- Jesus (dark night)
- Psalmist (dark night)
- Prophet Jonah (dark night)
- Jacob (wrestling in the night)
- Paul (blindness, thorn in the flesh)
- Job (dark night)

Biblical Examples

- Jesus at the garden (It is okay to have a crisis.)
- Prodigal son (Stay in the present.)
- Zacchaeus (Let go.)
- Workers of the vineyard (This the right time.)
- Samaritan woman (Internal peace – God within.)
- “Shake off the dust from your feet.” (Let go.)
- “Give us today our daily bread.” (Be in the present.)
- “I am who I am.” (Be in the present.)

Biblical examples

- Parable of the weed and the seed ~ accept one’s limitations and promote the positives
- Parable of the sower ~ focus on the seed that fell on the good soil
- Parable of the talent ~ try your best
- Peter and Judas ~ identify the good and bad guilt
Interpretation of the concept of “Devil”

- Jesus tempted by “devil”
- Jesus casting out seven “evil spirits” from a woman
- Jesus healing the “demoniac”

Other Images

- What are human beings, that you think of them; mere mortals, that you care for them? (Psalm 8:4)
- “I have asked the Lord for one thing; one thing only do I want: to live in the Lord’s house all my life and to marvel at his goodness”. (Psalm 27:4)

Distinguishing psychiatric issues from spiritual issues

- “Is my brain playing tricks?”
- Jesus is telling me, “It is okay to commit suicide.”
- Spiritual experience vs delusions.
- Importance of consultation or spiritual direction (Eli and Prophet Samuel)
Pastoral Methods

- Positive affirmation
- Story telling
- Parables
- Rituals
- Centering prayer
- Mindfulness

Illness

- Persistent
- Recurrent
- Spiritual reasons won’t explain all the symptoms

Take Home Messages

- Chaplain’s words do matter. (We are reminders of God’s presence.)
- We are not therapists. We are sojourners. (Emmaus Journey)
- Anxiety is contagious. Non-anxious/non-judgmental presence of the chaplain is very important.
- Remain calm.