

During Holy Week, I am offering as daily

Face your fears with faith.

Examine your assumptions in light of the facts.

Attack your anxieties with action.

Release your cares to God.

These four steps can be helpful in confronting our fears at this time of uncertainty. Last week, I focused on the first practice: Face your fears with faith. Today, we're looking at the second: Examine your assumptions in light of the facts.

Last week I made a lot of phone calls to offer my care and support. I called people from the church, and people from the community of Crete. I called friends, and colleagues and family members. I asked how they were coping with this new reality of Covid-19. I learned that many of them were staying apprised of new developments but putting limits on how often they checked the news (usually one or two times a day). They were aware of what the national and state orders and guidelines were for social distancing, sheltering in place, personal hygiene, etc., and they were following them to the best of their ability.

But I also became aware of two extremes. On the one hand, some of the folks I talked to believed the severity of the coronavirus was being over-blown, it was not as contagious and not as deadly as they thought we were being led to believe. Their way of dealing with the coronavirus appeared to me to be carrying on with life much as they had in the past, with few personal restrictions. On the other side of the spectrum, there were folks who thought the coronavirus was being under-blown and their behavior seemed to indicate that belief.

Wherever we are on this spectrum (and we may find ourselves occasionally moving from one to another), one thing that may help is to examine the facts. Facts can be allies in combating our fear, as Adam Hamilton says. This practice of examining our assumptions in light of the facts "recognizes that feelings often begin with thoughts, and those thoughts are sometimes distorted, based on inaccurate information, faulty assumptions, overly negative views of oneself or the world, or mistaken beliefs---what some call 'stinkin' thinkin'" It is "a process that is used to identify faulty thinking or assumptions and replace those thoughts with more accurate and more positive thinking, which in turn offers relief from the problematic feelings." p.45

As we try to examine our assumptions in light of the facts, I see two things that make this practice particularly hard at this time. First, we live in a time when our national confidence in facts are at an all time low. A recent poll from the Pew Research Center (www.people-press.org) reported that "half of U.S. adults say made-up news and information is a very big problem in the country today, and about two-thirds say it causes a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events. They also say made-up news and information has a big impact on Americans' confidence in government (68%) and in each other (54%)".

(It might be helpful to fact check what you are hearing on the news or online sources with the World Health Organization [a specialized agency of the United Nations responsible for international public health] and the CDC [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the US agency charged with tracking and investigating public health trends].)

The second problem is that we are trying to determine the facts in a context where the facts are rapidly changing. For example, yesterday morning we woke to the news that President Trump has extended the order for social distancing from Easter to the end of April.

With this being said, I hope you will find this be a helpful tool in these days of the coronavirus and in the days beyond it for this too shall pass.

I pray for you courage in these days. I leave you with these words from Psalm 27:1, 14

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? . . . Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!