

APOSTOLIC LETTER
SALVIFICI DOLORIS
OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF
JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS, TO THE PRIESTS,
TO THE RELIGIOUS FAMILIES
AND TO THE FAITHFUL
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

ON THE CHRISTIAN MEANING OF HUMAN SUFFERING

Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Declaring the power of salvific suffering, the Apostle Paul says: "In my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church"(1).

These words seem to be found at the end of the long road that winds through the suffering which forms part of the history of man and which is illuminated by the Word of God. These words have as it were the value of a final discovery, which is accompanied by joy. For this reason Saint Paul writes: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake"(2). The joy comes from the discovery of the meaning of suffering, and this discovery, even if it is most personally shared in by Paul of Tarsus who wrote these words, is at the same time valid for others. The Apostle shares his own discovery and rejoices in it because of all those whom it can help—just as it helped him—to understand *the salvific meaning of suffering*.

2. The theme of suffering—precisely under the aspect of this salvific meaning—seems to fit profoundly into the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption as an extraordinary Jubilee of the Church. And this circumstance too clearly favours the attention it deserves during this period. Independently of this fact, it is a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth: in a certain sense it co-exists with him in the world, and thus demands to be constantly reconsidered. Even though Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, wrote that "the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now"(3), even though man knows and is close to the sufferings of the animal world, nevertheless what we express by the word "suffering" seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself, precisely because it manifests in its own way that depth which is proper to man, and in its own way surpasses it. Suffering seems to belong to man's transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.

3. The theme of suffering in a special way demands to be faced in the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption, and this is so, in the first place, because the *Redemption* was

accomplished *through the Cross of Christ*, that is, *through his suffering*. And at the same time, during the Holy Year of the Redemption we recall the truth expressed in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: in Christ "every man becomes the way for the Church"(4). It can be said that man in a special fashion becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life. This happens, as we know, at different moments in life, it takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost *inseparable from man's earthly existence*.

Assuming then that throughout his earthly life man walks in one manner or another on the long path of suffering, it is precisely on this path that the Church at all times-and perhaps especially during the Holy Year of the Redemption-should meet man. Born of the mystery of Redemption in the Cross of Christ, the Church has *to try to meet* man in a special way on the path of his suffering. In this meeting man "becomes the way for the Church", and this way is one of the most important ones.

4. This is the origin also of the present reflection, precisely in the Year of the Redemption: a meditation on suffering. Human suffering evokes *compassion*; it also evokes *respect*, and in its own way *it intimidates*. For in suffering is contained the greatness of a specific mystery. This special respect for every form of human suffering must be set at the beginning of what will be expressed here later by the deepest *need of the heart*, and also by the deep *imperative of faith*. About the theme of suffering these two reasons seem to draw particularly close to each other and to become one: the need of the heart commands us to overcome fear, and the imperative of faith—formulated, for example, in the words of Saint Paul quoted at the beginning—provides the content, in the name of which and by virtue of which we dare to touch what appears in every man so intangible: for man, in his suffering, remains an intangible mystery.

III. THE QUEST FOR AN ANSWER TO THE QUESTION OF THE MEANING OF SUFFERING

9. Within each form of suffering endured by man, and at the same time at the basis of the whole world of suffering, there inevitably arises *the question: why?* It is a question about the cause, the reason, and equally, about the purpose of suffering, and, in brief, a question about its meaning. Not only does it accompany human suffering, but it seems even to determine its human content, what makes suffering precisely human suffering.

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Both questions are difficult, when an individual puts them to another individual, when people put them to other people, as also when man *puts them to God*. For man does not put this question to the world, even though it is from the world that suffering often comes to him, but he puts it to God as the Creator and Lord of the world. And it is well known that concerning this question there not only arise many frustrations and conflicts in the relations of man with God, but it also happens that people reach the point of actually *denying God*. For, whereas the existence of the world opens as it were the eyes of the human soul to the existence of God, to his wisdom, power and greatness, evil and suffering seem to obscure this image, sometimes in a radical way, especially in the daily drama of so many cases of undeserved suffering and of so many faults without proper punishment. So this circumstance shows—perhaps more than any other—the importance of *the question of the meaning of suffering*; it also shows how much care must be taken both in dealing with the question itself and with all possible answers to it.

10. Man can put this question to God with all the emotion of his heart and with his mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it, as we see in the Revelation of the Old Testament. In the Book of Job the question has found its most vivid expression.

The story of this just man, who without any fault of his own is tried by innumerable sufferings, is well known. He loses his possessions, his sons and daughters, and finally he himself is afflicted by a grave sickness. In this horrible situation three old acquaintances come to his house, and each one in his own way tries to convince him that since he has been struck down by such varied and terrible sufferings, *he must have done something seriously wrong*. For suffering—they say—always strikes a man as punishment for a crime; it is sent by the absolutely just God and finds its reason in the order of justice. It can be said that Job's old friends wish not only to *convince him* of the moral justice of the evil, but in a certain sense they attempt to *justify* to themselves the moral meaning of suffering. In their eyes suffering can have a meaning only as a punishment for sin, therefore only on the level of God's justice, who repays good with good and evil with evil.

The point of reference in this case is the doctrine expressed in other Old Testament writings which show us suffering as punishment inflicted by God for human sins. The God of Revelation is the *Lawgiver and Judge* to a degree that no temporal authority can see. For the God of Revelation is first of all the Creator, from whom comes, together with existence, the essential good of creation. Therefore, the conscious and free violation of this good by man is not only a transgression of the law but at the same time an offence against the Creator, who is the first Lawgiver. Such a transgression has the character of sin, according to the exact meaning of this word, namely the biblical and theological one. *Corresponding to the moral evil of sin is punishment*, which guarantees the moral order in the same transcendent sense in which this order is laid down by the will of the Creator and Supreme Lawgiver. From this there also derives one of the fundamental truths of religious faith, equally based upon Revelation, namely that God is a just judge, who rewards good and punishes evil: "For thou **art just in all that thou hast** done to us, and all thy works are true and thy ways right, and all thy judgments are truth. Thou hast

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13. But in order to perceive the true answer to the "why" of suffering, we must look to the revelation of divine love, the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists. Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery: we are conscious of the insufficiency and inadequacy of our explanations. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.

In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must open ourselves wide to the human subject in his manifold potentiality. We must above all accept the light of Revelation not only insofar as it expresses the transcendent order of justice but also insofar as it illuminates this order with Love, as the definitive source of everything that exists. Love is: also the fullest source of the answer to the question of the meaning of suffering. This answer has been given by God to man in the Cross of Jesus Christ.

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VI. THE GOSPEL OF SUFFERING

25. The witnesses of the Cross and Resurrection of Christ have handed on to the Church and to mankind a specific Gospel of suffering. The Redeemer himself wrote this Gospel, above all by his own suffering accepted in love, so that man "should not perish but have eternal life"(80). This suffering, together with the living word of his teaching, became a rich source for all those who shared in Jesus' sufferings among the first generation of his disciples and confessors and among those who have come after them down the centuries.

It is especially consoling to note—and also accurate in accordance with the Gospel and history—that at the side of Christ, in the first and most exalted place, there is always his Mother through the exemplary testimony that she bears *by her whole life* to this particular Gospel of suffering. In her, the many and intense sufferings were amassed in such an interconnected way that they were not only a proof of her unshakeable faith but also a contribution to the redemption of all. In reality, from the time of her secret conversation with the angel, she began to see in her mission as a mother her "destiny" to share, in a singular and unrepeatable way, in the very mission of her Son. And she very soon received a confirmation of this in the events that accompanied the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, and in the solemn words of the aged Simeon, when he spoke of a sharp sword that would pierce her heart. Yet a further confirmation was in the anxieties and privations of the hurried flight into Egypt, caused by the cruel decision of Herod.

And again, after the events of her Son's hidden and public life, events which she must have shared with acute sensitivity, it was on Calvary that Mary's suffering, beside the suffering of Jesus, reached an intensity which can hardly be imagined from a human point of view but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of the world. Her ascent of Calvary and her standing at the foot of the Cross together with the Beloved Disciple were a special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her Son. And the words which she heard from his lips were a kind of solemn handing-over of this Gospel of suffering so that it could be proclaimed to the whole community of believers.

As a witness *to* her Son's Passion by her *presence*, and as a sharer in it by her *compassion*, Mary offered a unique contribution to the Gospel of suffering, by embodying in anticipation the expression of Saint Paul which was quoted at the beginning. She truly has a special title to be able to claim that she "completes in her flesh"—as already in her heart—"what is lacking in Christ's afflictions ".

In the light of the unmatched example of Christ, reflected with singular clarity in the life of his Mother, the Gospel of suffering, through the experience and words of the Apostles, becomes *an inexhaustible source for the ever new generations* that succeed one another in the history of the Church. The Gospel of suffering signifies not only the presence of suffering in the Gospel, as one of the themes of the Good News, but also the revelation *of the salvific power and salvific significance* of suffering in Christ's messianic mission and, subsequently, in the mission and vocation of the Church.

Christ *did not conceal* from his listeners *the need for suffering*. He said very clearly: "If any man would come after me... let him take up his cross daily" (81), and before his disciples he placed demands of a moral nature that can only be fulfilled on condition that they should "deny themselves" (82). The way that leads to the Kingdom of heaven is "hard and narrow", and Christ contrasts it to the "wide and easy" way that "leads to destruction" (83). On various occasions Christ also said that his disciples and confessors would *meet with much persecution*, something which—as we know—happened not only in the first centuries of the Church's life under the Roman Empire, but also came true in various historical periods and in other parts of the world, and still does even in our own time.

Here are some of Christ's statements on this subject: "They will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake. This will be a time for you *to bear testimony*. Settle it therefore in your minds, not to meditate beforehand how to answer; for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and kinsmen and friends, and some of you they will put to death; you will be hated by all *for my name's sake*. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives" (84).

The Gospel of suffering speaks first in various places of suffering "for Christ", "for the sake of Christ", and it does so with the words of Jesus himself or the words of his Apostles. The Master does not conceal the prospect of suffering from his disciples and followers. On the contrary, he reveals it with all frankness, indicating at the same time the supernatural assistance that will accompany them in the midst of persecutions and tribulations "for his name's sake". These persecutions and tribulations will also be, as it were, a *particular proof* of likeness to Christ and union with him. "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you...; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you... A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me they will persecute you... But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me" (85). "I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (86).

This first chapter of the Gospel of suffering, which speaks of persecutions, namely of tribulations experienced because of Christ, contains in itself *a special call to courage and fortitude*, sustained by the eloquence of the Resurrection. Christ has overcome the world

definitively by his Resurrection. Yet, because of the relationship between the Resurrection and his Passion and death, he has at the same time overcome the world by his suffering. Yes, suffering has been singularly present in that victory over the world which was manifested in the Resurrection. Christ retains in his risen body the marks of the wounds of the Cross in his hands, feet and side. Through the Resurrection, he manifests *the victorious power of suffering*, and he wishes to imbue with the conviction of this power the hearts of those whom he chose as Apostles and those whom he continually chooses and sends forth. The Apostle Paul will say: "All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted"(87).

26. While the first great chapter of the Gospel of suffering is written down, as the generations pass, by those who suffer persecutions for Christ's sake, simultaneously another great chapter of this Gospel unfolds through the course of history. This chapter is written by all those *who suffer together with Christ*, uniting their human sufferings to his salvific suffering. In these people there is fulfilled what the first witnesses of the Passion and Resurrection said and wrote about sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Therefore in those people there is fulfilled the Gospel of suffering, and, at the same time, each of them continues in a certain sense to write it: they write it and proclaim it to the world, they announce it to the world in which they live and to the people of their time.

Down through the centuries and generations it has been seen that *in suffering there is concealed a particular power that draws a person interiorly close to Christ*, a special grace. To this grace many saints, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Ignatius of Loyola and others, owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person. He discovers a new dimension, as it were, of *his entire life and vocation*. This discovery is a particular confirmation of the spiritual greatness which in man surpasses the body in a way that is completely beyond compare. When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior *maturity and spiritual greatness* become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal.

This interior maturity and spiritual greatness in suffering are certainly the *result* of a particular *conversion* and cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. It is he himself who acts at the heart of human sufferings through his Spirit of truth, through the consoling Spirit. It is he who transforms, in a certain sense, the very substance of the spiritual life, indicating for the person who suffers a place close to himself. *It is he*—as the interior Master and Guide—*who reveals* to the suffering brother and sister this *wonderful interchange*, situated at the very heart of the mystery of the Redemption. Suffering is, in itself, an experience of evil. But Christ has made suffering the firmest basis of the definitive good, namely the good of eternal salvation. By his suffering on the Cross, Christ reached the very roots of evil, of sin and death. He conquered the author of evil, Satan, and his permanent rebellion against the Creator. To the suffering brother or sister Christ *discloses* and gradually reveals *the horizons of the Kingdom of God*: the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world being built on the saving power of love. And slowly but effectively, Christ leads into this world, into

this Kingdom of the Father, suffering man, in a certain sense through the very heart of his suffering. For suffering cannot be *transformed* and changed by a grace from outside, but *from within*. And Christ through his own salvific suffering is very much present in every human suffering, and can act from within that suffering by the powers of his Spirit of truth, his consoling Spirit.

This is not all: the Divine Redeemer wishes to penetrate the soul of every sufferer through the heart of his holy Mother, the first and the most exalted of all the redeemed. As though by a continuation of that motherhood which by the power of the Holy Spirit had given him life, the dying Christ conferred upon the ever Virgin Mary a *new kind of motherhood*—spiritual and universal—towards all human beings, so that every individual, during the pilgrimage of faith, might remain, together with her, closely united to him unto the Cross, and so that every form of suffering, given fresh life by the power of this Cross, should become no longer the weakness of man but the power of God.

However, this interior process does not always follow the same pattern. It often begins and is set in motion with great difficulty. Even the very point of departure differs: people react to suffering in different ways. But in general it can be said that almost always the individual enters suffering with a *typically human protest* and *with the question "why"*. He asks the meaning of his suffering and seeks an answer to this question on the human level. Certainly he often puts this question to God, and to Christ. Furthermore, he cannot help noticing that the one to whom he puts the question is himself suffering and wishes *to answer him* from the Cross, *from the heart of his own suffering*. Nevertheless, it often takes time, even a long time, for this answer to begin to be interiorly perceived. For Christ does not answer directly and he does not answer in the abstract this human questioning about the meaning of suffering. Man hears Christ's saving answer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ.

The answer which comes through this sharing, by way of the interior encounter with the Master, is in itself *something more than the mere abstract answer* to the question about the meaning of suffering. For it is above all a call. It is a vocation. Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else he says: "Follow me!". Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering! Through my Cross. Gradually, *as the individual takes up his cross*, spiritually uniting himself to the Cross of Christ, the salvific meaning of suffering is revealed before him. He does not discover this meaning at his own human level, but at the level of the suffering of Christ. At the same time, however, from this level of Christ the salvific meaning of suffering *descends to man's level* and becomes, in a sense, the individual's personal response. It is then that man finds in his suffering interior peace and even spiritual joy.

27. Saint Paul speaks of such joy in the Letter to the Colossians: "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake"(88). A source of joy is found in the *overcoming of the sense of the uselessness of suffering*, a feeling that is sometimes very strongly rooted in human suffering. This feeling not only consumes the person interiorly, but seems to make him a burden to others. The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others,

and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ *transforms* this depressing *feeling*. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"; the certainty that in the spiritual dimension of the work of Redemption *he is serving*, like Christ, *the salvation of his brothers and sisters*. Therefore he is carrying out an irreplaceable service. In the Body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the Cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that *is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things* which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering, more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption. In that "cosmic" struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil, spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians(89), human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, *constitute a special support for the powers of good*, and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers.

And so the Church sees in all Christ's suffering brothers and sisters as it were a *multiple subject of his supernatural power*. How often is it precisely to them that the pastors of the Church appeal, and precisely from them that they seek help and support! The Gospel of suffering is being written unceasingly, and it speaks unceasingly with the words of this strange paradox: the springs of divine power gush forth precisely in the midst of human weakness. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special *particle of the infinite treasure* of the world's Redemption, and can share this treasure with others. The more a person is threatened by sin, the heavier the structures of sin which today's world brings with it, the greater is the eloquence which human suffering possesses in itself. And the more the Church feels the need to have recourse to the value of human sufferings for the salvation of the world.

VII. THE GOOD SAMARITAN

28. To the Gospel of suffering there also belongs—and in an organic way—the parable of the Good Samaritan. Through this parable Christ wished to give an answer to the question: "Who is my neighbour?"(90) For of the three travellers along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, on which there lay half-dead a man who had been stripped and beaten by robbers, it was precisely the Samaritan who showed himself to be the of the victim: "neighbour" means also the person who carried out the commandment of love of neighbour. Two other men were passing along the same road; one was a priest and the other a Levite, but each of them "saw him and passed by on the other side". The Samaritan, on the other hand, "saw him and had compassion on him. He went to him, ... and bound up his wounds", then "brought him to an inn, and took care of him"(91). And when he left, he solicitously entrusted the suffering man to the care of the innkeeper, promising to meet any expenses.

The parable of the Good Samaritan belongs to the Gospel of suffering. For it indicates what the relationship of each of us must be towards our suffering neighbour. We are not allowed to "pass by on the other side" indifferently; we must "stop" beside him. Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, whatever form it may take, is a Good Samaritan. This stopping does not mean curiosity but availability. It is like the opening of a certain interior disposition of the heart, which also has an emotional expression of its own. The name "Good Samaritan" fits every individual who is sensitive to the sufferings of others, who "is moved" by the misfortune of another. If Christ, who knows the interior of man, emphasizes this compassion, this means that it is important for our whole attitude to others' suffering. Therefore one must cultivate this sensitivity of heart, which bears witness to compassion towards a suffering person. Some times this compassion remains the only or principal expression of our love for and solidarity with the sufferer.

Nevertheless, the Good Samaritan of Christ's parable does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone. They become for him an incentive to actions aimed at bringing help to the injured man. In a word, then, a Good Samaritan is one who brings help in suffering, whatever its nature may be. Help which is, as far as possible, effective. He puts his whole heart into it, nor does he spare material means. We can say that he gives himself, his very "I", opening this "I" to the other person. Here we touch upon one of the key-points of all Christian anthropology. Man cannot "fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself"(92). A Good Samaritan is the person capable of exactly such a gift of self.

29. Following the parable of the Gospel, we could say that suffering, which is present under so many different forms in our human world, is also present in order to unleash love in the human person, that unselfish gift of one's "I" on behalf of other people, especially those who suffer. The world of human suffering unceasingly calls for, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a certain sense man owes to suffering that unselfish love which stirs in his heart and actions. The person who is a "neighbour" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another: this in the name of fundamental human solidarity, still more in the name of love of neighbour. He must "stop", "sympathize", just like the Samaritan of the Gospel parable. The parable in itself expresses a deeply Christian truth, but one that at the same time is very universally human. It is not without reason that, also in ordinary speech, any activity on behalf of the suffering and needy is called "Good Samaritan" work.

In the course of the centuries, this activity assumes organized institutional forms and constitutes a field of work in the respective professions. How much there is of "the Good Samaritan" in the profession of the doctor, or the nurse, or others similar! Considering its

"evangelical" content, we are inclined to think here of a vocation rather than simply a profession. And the institutions which from generation to generation have performed "Good Samaritan" service have developed and specialized even further in our times. This undoubtedly proves that people today pay ever greater and closer attention to the sufferings of their neighbour, seek to understand those sufferings and deal with them with ever greater skill. They also have an ever greater capacity and specialization in this area. In view of all this, we can say that the parable of the Samaritan of the Gospel has become one of the essential elements of moral culture and universally human civilization. And thinking of all those who by their knowledge and ability provide many kinds of service to their suffering neighbour, we cannot but offer them words of thanks and gratitude.

These words are directed to all those who exercise their own service to their suffering neighbour in an unselfish way, freely undertaking to provide "Good Samaritan" help, and devoting to this cause all the time and energy at their disposal outside their professional work. This kind of voluntary "Good Samaritan" or charitable activity can be called social work; it can also be called an apostolate, when it is undertaken for clearly evangelical motives, especially if this is in connection with the Church or another Christian Communion. Voluntary "Good Samaritan" work is carried out in appropriate milieux or through organizations created for this purpose. Working in this way has a great importance, especially if it involves undertaking larger tasks which require cooperation and the use of technical means. No less valuable is individual activity, especially by people who are better prepared for it in regard to the various kinds of human suffering which can only be alleviated in an individual or personal way. Finally, family help means both acts of love of neighbour done to members of the same family, and mutual help between families.

It is difficult to list here all the types and different circumstances of "Good Samaritan" work which exist in the Church and society. It must be recognized that they are very numerous, and one must express satisfaction at the fact that, thanks to them, the fundamental moral values, such as the value of human solidarity, the value of Christian love of neighbour, form the framework of social life and interhuman relationships and combat on this front the various forms of hatred, violence, cruelty, contempt for others, or simple "insensitivity", in other words, indifference towards one's neighbour and his sufferings.

Here we come to the enormous importance of having the right attitudes in education. The family, the school and other education institutions must, if only for humanitarian reasons, work perseveringly for the reawakening and refining of that sensitivity towards one's neighbour and his suffering of which the figure of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel has become a symbol. Obviously the Church must do the same. She must even more

profoundly make her own—as far as possible—the motivations which Christ placed in his parable and in the whole Gospel. The eloquence of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and of the whole Gospel, is especially this: every individual must feel as if called personally to bear witness to love in suffering. The institutions are very important and indispensable; nevertheless, no institution can by itself replace the human heart, human compassion, human love or human initiative, when it is a question of dealing with the sufferings of another. This refers to physical sufferings, but it is even more true when it is a question of the many kinds of moral suffering, and when it is primarily the soul that is suffering.

30. The parable of the Good Samaritan, which —as we have said—belongs to the Gospel of suffering, goes hand in hand with this Gospel through the history of the Church and Christianity, through the history of man and humanity. This parable witnesses to the fact that Christ's revelation of the salvific meaning of suffering is in no way identified with an attitude of passivity. Completely the reverse is true. The Gospel is the negation of passivity in the face of suffering. Christ himself is especially active in this field. In this way he accomplishes the messianic programme of his mission, according to the words of the prophet: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"(93). In a superabundant way Christ carries out this messianic programme of his mission: he goes about "doing good"(94). and the good of his works became especially evident in the face of human suffering. The parable of the Good Samaritan is in profound harmony with the conduct of Christ himself.

Finally, this parable, through its essential content, will enter into those disturbing words of the Final Judgment, noted by Matthew in his Gospel: "Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was in prison and you came to me"(95). To the just, who ask when they did all this to him, the Son of Man will respond: "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me"(96). The opposite sentence will be imposed on those who have behaved differently: "As you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me"."

One could certainly extend the list of the forms of suffering that have encountered human sensitivity, compassion and help, or that have failed to do so. The first and second parts of Christ's words about the Final Judgment unambiguously show how essential it is, for the eternal life of every individual, to "stop", as the Good Samaritan did, at the suffering of one's neighbour, to have "compassion" for that suffering, and to give some help. In the

messianic programme of Christ, which is at the same time the programme of the Kingdom of God, suffering is present in the world in order to release love, in order to give birth to works of love towards neighbour, in order to transform the whole of human civilization into a "civilization of love". In this love the salvific meaning of suffering is completely accomplished and reaches its definitive dimension. Christ's words about the Final Judgment enable us to understand this in all the simplicity and clarity of the Gospel.

These words about love, about actions of love, acts linked with human suffering, enable us once more to discover, at the basis of all human sufferings, the same redemptive suffering of Christ. Christ said: "You did it to me". He himself is the one who in each individual experiences love; he himself is the one who receives help, when this is given to every suffering person without exception. He himself is present in this suffering person, since his salvific suffering has been opened once and for all to every human suffering. And all those who suffer have been called once and for all to become sharers "in Christ's sufferings"(98), just as all have been called to "complete" with their own suffering "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"(99). At one and the same time Christ has taught man to do good by his suffering and to do good to those who suffer. In this double aspect he has completely revealed the meaning of suffering.

VIII. CONCLUSION

31. This is the meaning of suffering, which is truly supernatural and at the same time human. It is supernatural because it is rooted in the divine mystery of the Redemption of the world, and it is likewise deeply human, because in it the person discovers himself, his own humanity, his own dignity, his own mission.

Suffering is certainly part of the mystery of man. Perhaps suffering is not wrapped up as much as man is by this mystery, which is an especially impenetrable one. The Second Vatican Council expressed this truth that "...only in the mystery of the Incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. In fact..., Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his love, fully reveals man to himself and makes his supreme calling clear"(100). If these words refer to everything that concerns the mystery of man, then they certainly refer in a very special way to human suffering. Precisely at this point the "revealing of man to himself and making his supreme vocation clear" is particularly indispensable. It also happens as experience proves—that this can be particularly dramatic. But when it is completely accomplished and becomes the light of human life, it is particularly blessed. "Through Christ and in Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death grow meaningful"(101).

I now end the present considerations on suffering in the year in which the Church is living the extraordinary Jubilee linked to the anniversary of the Redemption.

The mystery of the Redemption of the world is in an amazing way rooted in suffering, and this suffering in turn finds in the mystery of the Redemption its supreme and surest point of reference.

We wish to live this Year of the Redemption in special union with all those who suffer. And so there should come together in spirit beneath the Cross on Calvary all suffering people who believe in Christ, and particularly those who suffer because of their faith in him who is the Crucified and Risen One, so that the offering of their sufferings may hasten the fulfilment of the prayer of the Saviour himself that all may be one(102). Let there also gather beneath the Cross all people of good will, for on this Cross is the "Redeemer of man", the Man of Sorrows, who has taken upon himself the physical and moral sufferings of the people of all times, so that in love they may find the salvific meaning of their sorrow and valid answers to all of their questions.

Together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the Cross(103), we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man.

We invoke all the Saints, who down the centuries in a special way shared in the suffering of Christ. We ask them to support us.

And we ask all you who suffer to support us. We ask precisely you who are weak to become a source of strength for the Church and humanity. In the terrible battle between the forces of good and evil, revealed to our eyes by our modern world, may your suffering in union with the Cross of Christ be victorious!

To all of you, dearest brothers and sisters, I send my Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome, at Saint Peter's, on the liturgical Memorial of Our Lady of Lourdes, 11 February 1984, in the sixth year of my Pontificate.

REFERENCES

- 1) Col. 1:24.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) Rom. 8:22.
- 4) Cf. nos. 14, 18, 21, 22: AAS 71 (1979) 284f., 304, 320, 323.
- 5) As Hezekiah experienced (cf. Is. 38:1-3).
- 6) As Hagar feared (cf. Gn. 1-16), as Jacob imagined (cf. Gn. 37:33-35), as David experienced (cf. 2 Sm. 19:1).
- 7) As Anna, the mother of Tobias, feared (cf. Tb. 10:1-7); cf. also Jer. 6:26; Am. 8:10; Zec. 12:10.
- 8) Such was the trial of Abraham (cf. Gn. 15:2), of Rachel (cf. Gn. 30:1), or of Anna, the mother of Samuel (cf. 1 Sm. 1:10).
- 9) Such was the lament of the exiles in Babylon (cf. Ps. 137[136]).
- 10) Suffered, for example, by the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 22[21]:17-21) or by Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 18:18).
- 11) This was a trial for Job (cf. Jb. 19:18; 3():1, 9), for some Psalmists (cf. Ps. 22[21]:7-9; 42[41]:11; 44[43]:16-17), for Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 20:7), for the Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 53:3).
- 12) Which certain Psalmists had to suffer again (cf. Ps. 22[21]:2-3; 31[30]:13; 38[37]:12; 88[87]:9.19), Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 15:17), or the Suffering Servant (cf. Is. 53:3).
- 13) Of the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 51[50]:5), of the witnesses of the sufferings of the Servant (cf. Is. 53:3-6), of the prophet Zechariah (cf. Zec. 12:10).
- 14) This was strongly felt by the Psalmist (cf. Ps. 73[72]:3-14), and Qoheleth (cf. Eccl. 4:1-3).
- 15) This was a suffering for Job (cf. Jb. 10:19), for certain Psalmists (cf. Ps. 41[40] :10; 55[54]:13-15, for Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 20:10), while Sirach meditated on this misery (cf. Sir. 37:1-6)

16) Besides numerous passages of Lamentations, cf. the laments of the Psalmists (cf. Ps. 44[43]:10-17; 77[76]:11; 89[88]:51), or of the Prophets (cf. Is. 22:4; Jer. 4:8; 13:17; 14:17-18; Ez. 9:8; 21:11-12); also cf. the prayers of Azariah (cf. Dn. 3:31-40) and of Daniel (cf. Dn. 9:16-19).

17) For example, Is. 38:13; Jer. 23:9; Ps. 31[30]:10-11; Ps. 42[41]:10-11 .

18) For example, Ps. 73[72]:21; Jb. 16:13; Lam. 3:13.

19) For example, Lam. 2:11.

20) For example, Is. 16:11; Jer. 4:1[9]; Jb. 30:27; Lam. 1:20.

21) For example, 1 Sm. 1:8; Jer. 4:19; 8:18; Lam. 1:20, 22; Ps. 38[37]:9, 11.

22) In this regard, it is useful to remember that the Hebrew root r" designates in a comprehensive way what is evil, as opposed to what is good (tob) without distinguishing between the physical, psychological and ethical senses. The root is found in the substantive form ra' and ra'a indicating indifferently either evil in itself, or the evil action, or the individual who does it. In the verbal forms, besides the simple one (qal) variously designating "being evil," there are the reflexive passive form (niph'al) "to endure evil," "to be affected by evil" and the causative form (hiphil) "to do evil," "to inflict evil" on someone. Since the Hebrew lacks a true equivalent to the Greek "pascw," "I suffer," this verb too occurs rarely in the Septuagint translation.

23) Dn. 3:27ff.; cf. Ps. 19[18]:10; 36[35]:7; 48[47]:12; 51[50]:6; 99[98]:4; 119[118]:75; Mal. 3:16-21; Mt. 20:16; Mk. 10:31; Lk. 17:34; Jn. 5:30; Rom. 2:2.

24) Jb. 4:8.

25) Jb. 1:9-11.

26) 2 Mc. 6:12.

27) Jn. 3:16.

28) Jb. 19:25-26.

29) Jn. 1:29.

30) Gn. 3:19.

31) Jn. 3:16.

32) Acts 10:38.

- 33) Cf. Mt. 5:3-11.
- 34) Cf. Lk. 6:12.
- 35) Mk. 10:33-34.
- 36) Cf. Mt. 16:23.
- 37) Mt. 26:52, 54.
- 38) Jn. 18:11.
- 39) Jn. 3:16.
- 40) Gal. 2:20.
- 41) Is. 53:2-6.
- 42) Jn. 1:29.
- 43) Is. 53:7-9.
- 44) Cf. 1 Cor. 1:18.
- 45) Mt. 26:39.
- 46) Mt. 26:42.
- 47) Ps. 22[21]:2.
- 48) Is. 53:6.
- 49) 2 Cor. 5:21.
- 50) Jn. 19:30.
- 51) Is. 53:10.
- 52) Cf. Jn. 7:37-38.
- 53) Is. 53:10-12.
- 54) Jb. 19:25.
- 55) 1 Pt. 1:18-19.

- 56) Gal. 1:4.
- 57) 1 Cor. 6:20.
- 58) 2 Cor. 4:8-11, 14.
- 59) 2 Cor. 1:5.
- 60) 2 Thes. 3:5.
- 61) Rom. 12:1.
- 62) Gal 2:19-20.
- 63) Gal. 6:14.
- 64) Phil. 3:10-11.
- 65) Acts 14:22.
- 66) 2 Thes. 1:4-5.
- 67) Rom. 8:17-18.
- 68) 2 Cor. 4:17-18.
- 69) 1 Pt. 4:13.
- 70) Lk. 23:34.
- 71) Mt. 10:28.
- 72) 2 Cor. 12:9.
- 73) 2 T m. 1:12.
- 74) Phil. 4:13.
- 75) 1 Pt. 4:16.
- 76) Rom. 5:3-5.
- 77) Cf. Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24; Jn. 12:25.
- 78) Col. 1:24.

- 79) 1 Cor. 6:15.
- 80) Jn. 3:16.
- 81) Lk. 9:23.
- 82) Cf. ibid.
- 83) Cf. Mt. 7:13-14.
- 84) Lk. 21:12-19.
- 85) Jn. 15:18-21.
- 86) Jn. 16:33.
- 87) 2 Tm. 3:12.
- 88) Col. 1:24.
- 89) Cf. Eph. 6:12.
- 90) Lk. 10:29.
- 91) Lk. 10:33-34.
- 92) Gaudium et spes, no. 24.
- 93) Lk. 4:18-19; cf. Is. 61:1-2.
- 94) Acts 10:38.
- 95) Mt. 25:34-36.
- 96) Mt. 25:40.
- 97) Mt. 25:45.
- 98) 1 Pt. 4:13.
- 99) Col. 1:24.
- 100) Gaudium et spes, no. 22.
- 101) Ibid.

102) Cf. Jn. 17:11, 21-22.

103) Cf. Jn. 19:25.

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