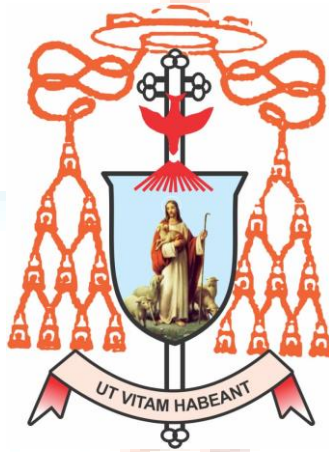


# **THE HOUR OF GLORY: SUFFERING IN THE LIFE OF A CHRISTIAN**



**PASTORAL LETTER 2023**

**MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE**  
ARCHBISHOP OF ONITSHA

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. GRATITUDE**

Our unlimited gratitude goes to God whose power of Grace has continued to manifest exceedingly in our lives and pastoral duties. To Him be glory, honor, praise and thanksgiving for ever, Amen. In the past one year, we celebrated the 90<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of our Father in Faith, His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the visit of the great Pastor and Saint, Pope John Paul II to our Archdiocese. Again, we are privileged to receive through the Holy Father, Pope Francis, the creation of a new diocese, the Aguleri Diocese carved out from our Archdiocese of Onitsha. These and many more are blessings for which we remain grateful to God. Furthermore, I am particularly grateful to our Archdiocesan Family and all men/women of goodwill for the enthusiasm with which my past pastoral letters have been received. May the contents continue to lead us closer to God, improving our relationship with him.

### **2. THE HOUR OF GLORY**

Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, “Father, the hour has come, glorify thy son that thy son may glorify thee...” (Jn. 17:1). These words which Jesus addressed to his disciples in the context of what could be called a farewell address, told them about his going back to the Father and his impending passion on the cross. Jesus called his suffering on the cross the hour of his glory because it will lead to not only his death but to his resurrection and glorious ascension to heaven, to the throne of his heavenly Father.

Whenever the Bible uses the expression “the hour of glory”, it refers to that moment when the Lord Jesus suffered and died on the cross of Calvary for the salvation of the world. Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen explained it when he said, “The Hour” obviously refers to His cross. Whenever the word “Hour” is used in the New Testament, it is used in relation to his passion, death and his glory” (cf. Fulton J. Sheen, *Life of Christ*, pg. 76).

3. The Jews made several attempts to arrest and kill Jesus before the “hour” but it never happened because God had destined the moment when his suffering and death at Calvary will yield the most effective result for the whole human race. St. John notes in his Gospel that “they wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come” (Jn. 7:30).

Jesus knew the hour his Father had destined for his suffering. He longed for it and waited for it with total self-abandonment to the will of his Father. When the hour finally came, Jesus exclaimed: “The hour has come for the son of man to be glorified...Now my soul is troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this hour that I have come” (Jn. 12: 23,27). Archbishop Sheen here concludes that, “the hour therefore referred to his glorification through his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension” (cf. Fulton J. Sheen, *The Life of Christ*, pg. 77). Thus, in Christian understanding, there is an intimate bond between suffering and glory.

4. From the origin of man, there has been a raging controversy about the nature and value of human suffering. The central question has been whether suffering is a good thing or a bad thing. This may seem an odd question to pose. Given the fallen nature of the human person, we easily conclude that suffering is something bad since it causes us pain and agony. However, our experience teaches us that suffering is unavoidable and ineliminable in this present life.

5. The central project of this pastoral letter therefore is how to make sense out of myriads of human suffering besieging us today especially in our Nigerian situation. How can we make suffering bearable and acceptable thereby reducing its pain and perhaps seeing some value in it. If we understand suffering and what Christ made out of it, how Christ has transformed it, we would be better equipped to endure it.

6. We shall proceed by first looking at the general concept of suffering, the idea of glory and the biblical concepts of suffering. We shall then examine some of the major modes of suffering in our present Nigerian situation. Then we shall consider some of the negative and positive solutions or responses people give when they are confronted with suffering. We shall then discover the positive evaluation of human suffering when united with the cross or sufferings of Christ. This will be followed by a reflection on the cross, human suffering and divine providence. Then our Mother Mary is presented to us as a model of Christian life with its attendant suffering. Finally, we discover that since God has made the cross of Christ the means of his exaltation, our own suffering or cross can certainly also be our path to glory.

7. This pastoral letter is therefore a call to Christians not to waste any of their pains and sufferings but to unite them all to the sufferings of the “Suffering Servant” - Christ. He will transform them into pearls of great price for their happiness here on earth and for the salvation of their souls in eternity.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **CLARIFICATION OF TERMS**

**8.1** The hour of glory is fairly understood even if primarily as the time of success, joy, blossom, glory and attainment of goal or desire. On the other hand, suffering ordinarily can be defined as a state of undergoing pain, distress or hardship (cf. Oxford Dictionary). It implies something bad or unpleasant.

Christ's suffering and death on the cross, is called his cross. With his cross, Christ redeemed the world, thereby giving another meaning and value to suffering. Consequently, for a Christian, cross is suffering while suffering becomes cross when it is joined to the suffering of Christ. When suffering becomes cross, it leads to glorification like that of Christ. The novelty which Christ introduced into the cross is the transformation of a curse-laden instrument into a saving reality. As such, no one should waste his or her suffering. The cross is the bridge between heaven and earth. It connects victimisation to glorification, pain to glory, rejection to acceptance, and forlornness to victory. When suffering becomes cross, it becomes a journey onto glory.

### **8.2 MOTIVATION AND CHOICE OF TOPIC**

The signs of the times reveal different levels of hardship, challenges and suffering today. All soliciting responses or solutions. And, due to the level of suffering in our society, many have taken to crime and other evil activities. Indifference to God, especially Christianity and resort to fetish centres in search of success and breakthroughs are on an alarming increase. Sadly, some ignorant, mischievous or misguided preachers confuse the faithful with their false, baseless teachings on suffering and the cross. They sell a discounted and counterfeit Christianity to the masses. They teach people Christianity without the cross and assure them that suffering is not their portion. A picture of comfortable life is presented; a life with no sickness, no suffering; a life of affluence without sorrow. These are what some false pastors preach.

Given that “the joys and the hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (Vat. II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. I), it behoves us as teachers of faith and shepherds of souls to direct the flock properly. It is my conviction that when they are fed with the truth and rich nourishment on the question of the cross, they will see meaning and purpose in their condition and live it purposefully and graciously to attain the optimal result. Thus, it is my wish as the Shepherd of our Local Church to say that once Christ is in any cross, the bearer carries it adequately to glory.

### **8.3 GENERAL NOTION AND NATURE OF SUFFERING**

Suffering is one of the most profound and unsettling experiences of man on earth. The word suffering poses a serious threat to the beauty and meaning of human life. Since it is a phenomenon that strikes at the core of the faith we have in life, different religions and cultures have different meanings and conceptions of suffering. A core Buddhist may understand suffering as a happy means of purification which is part and parcel of human existence while an Igbo traditionalist may understand it as a punishment from the gods for an offence committed by an individual or by his ancestors. We shall briefly look into the general notion and nature of suffering and man's attempt to explain suffering.

#### **9.1 Human Suffering: A Perennial Question**

Suffering has always been an ever-present challenge for every aspect of human life on earth. We can say that suffering deeply challenges and shapes the way we see the world and relate to it. Historically, suffering poses a challenge for all cultures, religions and civilizations, demanding that they account for why suffering exists and how the human person should respond to it. This challenge becomes more demanding on the Christian Faith, since it must reconcile its view of an all good, all powerful, all benevolent and all merciful God, creator of the world with the many cases and instances of suffering in the world. However, this challenge is not an exclusive responsibility of the Christian faith, but it concerns all individual persons who make effort to find an answer or a solution to his or her own personal sufferings. Despite long tradition and millennia of discussions on the problem of suffering, an adequate answer to the question still remains a challenge to man.

#### **9.2 General Notion and Definition of Suffering**

Human suffering is a very complicated reality which is deep rooted in the everyday experience of man. There is no human being, religion or culture which escapes suffering. At the same time, no human being can claim the monopoly of suffering. It is a universal experience which transcends tribe, ethnicity, race and colour. Eric Cassel defines suffering as a state of severe distress associated with events that threaten the intactness or integrity of a person. He explains that suffering requires consciousness of the self, involves emotions, has effects on the person's social relationships, and has an impact on the body (cf. E. Cassel, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine*, 2004, pp. 32, 224).

Following similar line of thought, Michael Stoeber defines suffering as "the experience of emotional pain, a mode of consciousness that can arise from sensation of intense physical pain, but which need not at all be associated with



it... a painful state of consciousness that we wish we do not have to experience” (cf. Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflections on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation*, 2005, pg.20).

Suffering does not refer just to maladies, pains, or difficulties with which we can and should cope. It involves crises and threats that constitute a degradation or alienation of our existence. Bert Ghezzi aptly observed that “in its root, the word suffering means, enduring pain or distress, sustaining loss or damage, being subject to disability or handicap, and ultimately submitting to death. It comes in all shapes. Daily nuisances that frustrate us, repeated failures discourage us, bills we cannot pay pressure us. A disintegrating relationship racks us. Depression defeats us. Violence wounds us or a loved one. Illness ravages us or a family member. Suffering afflicts everybody, one size fits all” (Ghezzi Bert, *The Sign of the Cross: Recovering the Power of the Ancient Prayer*, pp. 57-58).

Generally, suffering is understood in terms of threats to human life, loss or threat to an individual’s value system, or as an experienced negative feeling. Pope JohnPaul II in his Encyclical letter, *Salvifici Doloris* distinguished four categories of suffering: Physical, Moral, Personal and Social Sufferings.

**9.3 Physical Suffering;** occurs when the human body is affected in one way or the other by hurt or pain. St. JohnPaul II teaches that, “insofar as the words “suffering” and “pain” can up to a certain degree, be used as synonyms, physical suffering is present when the body is hurting in some way” (*Salvifici Doloris*, no. 5).

**9.4 Moral Suffering;** exists when a person is in anguish over having done or not done that which conflicts with a deeply embedded moral code. The person’s conscience is troubled and will not let go. St. JohnPaul II describes it as “pain of the soul” (*SD*, no. 5). Sometimes, it becomes pathological when the most earnest attempt to repair the damage that was done does not assuage the despair. This is sometimes known as scrupulosity and refers to the inability to trust even the mercy of God. It often leads to depression.

**9.5 Personal Suffering;** according to Pope JohnPaul II, exists when the world of suffering is divided into many, very many subjects. Every individual, through personal suffering, constitutes not only a small part of this “world”, but at the same time that “world” is present in him as a finite and unrepeatable entity (cf. *SD*, no. 8).

**9.6 Social Suffering;** is parallel to personal suffering. St. JohnPaul II holds that, “the world of suffering possesses as it were its own solidarity. People who suffer become similar to one another through the analogy of their situation, the trial of

their destiny, or through their need for understanding and care, and perhaps above all through the persistent question of the meaning of suffering. Thus, although the world of suffering exists “in dispersion”, at the same time it contains within itself a singular challenge to communion and solidarity” (*SD*, no. 8).

There seems to be some agreement that suffering is something which threatens man’s happiness and integrity towards which man has moral obligations to alleviate, but there is less agreement or consensus on the origin or source of suffering and how man should respond to the problem of human suffering.

### **9.7 Man’s Attempts to Explain the Origin of Suffering**

Attempt to explain the origin of human suffering is as ancient as man himself. All through the ages, there has been numerous attempts to explain the origin and source of human suffering. We will briefly summarize here some of the prominent attempts made by man to find answers to the origin of suffering.

#### **9.8 The Dualistic Approach:**

One of the oldest or perhaps the most ancient approach to the problem of human suffering is known as dualism. It is the belief which holds that there are two opposing forces at work in the world. It teaches that there is the power of light and the power of darkness, the power of good and the power of evil. Thus, the good god according to this school of thought, is responsible for every good thing in the world, while the evil god is responsible for all the sufferings and evils seen in the world. This view is abundant in the ancient myths of the Middle East. This is the belief that there is a conflict between the benevolent god and the malevolent god.

#### **9.9 The Process Approach:**

This is also called, “The Process Theology” approach. According to this school of thought, human suffering is understood as an integral part of an unfinished world that is moving towards perfection and fulfilment. In this sense, human suffering is seen as an unavoidable growing pain that accompany the development of man to the fulness of his being. It posits that God did not create a perfect world but a world in the process of perfection.

#### **9.10 The Classical Approach:**

St. Augustine of Hippo is one of the prominent proponents of this view. It can be summarized into two parts: the first view holds that human suffering has its source in the original sin of Adam and Eve. From the time of their grave disobedience and subsequent expulsion from paradise, man has been subjected to suffering. With the original sin, man lost the preternatural and supernatural gifts



of immortality and self-control. With the fall of man, there came ignorance and loss of knowledge as well as loss of intimacy with God, together with inability to accomplish the good man intends to do (cf. Rom. 7:14-15). As a result of original sin, man lost the dominance of reason over passion, lost that which is responsible for creating a balance between human reason and the heat of passion. Thus, this loss, according to this school of thought, accounts for human suffering. The second view holds that people have free will to choose between good and evil. It argues that God gave humans freewill. Thus, this view believes that man only suffers due to the bad choices he makes or the bad choices others make which directly or indirectly affect him.

### **9.11 Redemptive Approach:**

This is a view which holds that suffering is redemptive. The word redeem means to rescue, set free, ransom or to pay the penalty incurred by another person. Those who hold this view argue that Jesus Christ is the archetype of one whose suffering is redemptive in nature. St. Paul strongly upholds this view when he wrote to the Corinthians saying, "For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. If we suffered, it is for your comfort and salvation" (2 Cor. 1:5-6).

It is good to note that though St. Paul strongly believes in the redemptive value of suffering, he is not proposing it as the origin of human suffering.

### **Human Suffering as A Mystery:**

**9.12.** Suffering is mysterious because it eludes the complete grasp of the human mind. It is a typical experience in which faith compensates for the deficiency of human comprehension. It is a mystery as its meaning lies beyond its expression. Human suffering or cross has meaning beyond the face value of its existence. It is multi-dimensional in context and complexity. That man suffers in different ways is not contestable. In all his progress in science, technology and religion, man is yet to unravel the mystery of suffering. The more people try to understand and overcome the mystery, the more it is challenging in its substance and style. The truth is that suffering has brought the human intellect to its knees, and has left man with the only conclusion that it is a mystery, which invites us to find and fathom the best way to engage it, since no adequate rational solution has been found.

Since human intelligence has failed to give a satisfactory answer or explanation to the problem of human suffering, we have to look onto revelation for a possible solution. The reality of human suffering continues to supersede man's full understanding and solution. Despite the best rational explanations of why

suffering exists and how it fits into the whole order of things, suffering continues to torment man. A problem is something that can be solved, even if temporarily, but a mystery is something that goes beyond human understanding, it is something which beats the capacity of man to find its solution. It is a phenomenon which every man must encounter, yet it defies man's understanding.

Since man's sincere attempts could not solve the problem of human suffering, it has come to be understood as a mystery. The word "mystery" traces back its root to Latin and Greek words (*mysterium* and *mysterion*) which means secrets, especially religious rites performed through hidden signs and symbols. The Greek root *myein* means "to close" or "to shut". In this sense, mystery is a reality closed from human intelligence. It means a hidden reality which is beyond human understanding and comprehension. Human suffering indeed falls into this category or description. Man, therefore understands the mystery of suffering as part of the mystery of God. The great theologian Karl Rahner puts it this way; the incomprehensibility of suffering is part of the incomprehensibility of God. Not in the sense that we could deduce it as necessary and thus inevitable.... But the very fact that it is really and eternally incomprehensible means that suffering is truly a manifestation of God's incomprehensibility in his nature and in his freedom. In his nature because, despite what might be described as the terrible amorality of suffering (at least on the part of children and innocent people) we have to acknowledge the pure goodness of God, which needs no acquittal before our tribunal. In his freedom, because this, too, if it wills the suffering of the creature, is incomprehensible, since it could achieve without suffering the sacred aims of the freedom that wills suffering. Suffering then is the form...in which the incomprehensibility of God himself appears (cf. Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, vol 19, Faith and Ministry*, pg. 208).

The implication of the above is that suffering is a mystery. It is only when man accepts the mystery of God that he will be able to appreciate the mystery of human suffering.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF SUFFERING**

**10.** The Holy Bible has many views on human suffering. It tries to explain or resolve the question of origin, causes and effects of human suffering. We shall examine some of the concepts.

#### **11. Suffering in the Old Testament**

The Old Testament did not provide a systematic treatment of the problem of suffering. But we can see its discussions scattered throughout its pages beginning from the book of Genesis. One meets verses, chapters and even an entire book in the bible discussing human suffering in general or the suffering of the innocent or both. The Old Testament books give various explanations on suffering and we shall discuss a few of them.

##### **11.1 Suffering as a Punishment for Evil**

That human suffering is caused by the disobedience of Adam and Eve is dominant in the Old Testament. Starting from the book of Genesis Chapter 3, suffering is understood and explained in terms of retributive justice. It is understood as a consequence of human actions. The Old Testament clearly teaches that good actions attract good rewards while bad actions attract punishment which is manifested in the manifold sufferings experienced by man. Consequently, the Old Testament teaches that man's fate depends on his fidelity to the covenant. In this pattern of thought lies the ancient theological structure of the close relationship between reward and punishment. Here the act of man or of the people, and its good or bad consequences, have direct relationships.

##### **11.2 Suffering as Part of Nature**

Another important teaching of the Old Testament with regard to human suffering is that it is part and parcel of nature. This view teaches that suffering is inherent in the nature of creation. The view holds that God found his work of creation good but not necessarily perfect. God alone is perfect and it is the lot of man to suffer on earth since creation, including man, is not perfect. The book of Job captures this idea very well when it says; "Do not mortals have hard service on earth? Are not their days like those of hired laborers? Like a slave longing for evening shadows, or a hired labourer waiting to be paid, so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me" (Job 7: 1-3).

### **11.3 Suffering as Medicine**

Another understanding of suffering in the Old Testament holds that it is a means through which God calls back his people to return to the covenant. It teaches that God punishes Israel for her sins, but through such suffering, he subtly urges her to return to his love. This is dominant in the preachings and teachings of the prophets. Thus, like bitter medicine, suffering is seen as a means of calling God's people to repentance. This teaching presumes that suffering will make a person to reflect on his actions and ask necessary questions which will bring him back to the original plan of God for him. This idea is dominant in the book of Ezekiel where the exile is used as a means of bringing back the Israelites to covenantal fidelity.

### **11.4 Suffering as a Test**

This is the dominant idea in the book of Job. God often tests his people's faithfulness through many kinds of troubles and afflictions. This idea was already present in God's relationship with Abraham. Trial often precedes a saving intervention of God and in many cases usually tends to guarantee the Israelites a blessing as a response to fidelity proved and verified. Here we already realize that not all suffering came as a consequence of sin and evil. Proven characters like Job and Tobit also suffered. The Lord tests the fidelity of his elect through suffering.

### **11.5 Suffering as Purification**

Many prophets of the Old Testament use the image of purifying fire to describe the sufferings of God's people. This is what Jeremiah proclaimed when he said: "I have presented you as a strong tester among my people. And you will test and know their ways. They are all grievous revolters, walking with slanders: they are brass and iron; they are all corrupters. The bellows are burned, the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed" (Jer. 6: 27-29). The Prophet Micah uses the image of a woman in her labour to describe and explain the sufferings of the people of Israel (cf. Micah 4,5). Here, the idea is that suffering will only last "in the meantime". In other words, when the sufferer is purified, the suffering ceases and the person or people become better for it.

### **11.6 Suffering at the Service of God's Mysterious Plan**

This is one of the most outstanding teachings of the Old Testament, as exemplified in the lives of many biblical characters but more especially in the life of Joseph, the son of Jacob. Joseph experienced a lot of wickedness from his own brothers and went through so much suffering due to their heartlessness. However,

Joseph explained his ordeal differently when he revealed himself to his brothers. “Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me”, when they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt. And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you, to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God” (Gen. 45:4-8). The Old Testament therefore teaches that God can use suffering to achieve divine purpose.

### **11.7 Vicarious Suffering**

It is a known fact that the idea of vicarious suffering is sufficiently present in the Old Testament. Vicarious suffering means, suffering in the place of another. A number of words and ideas are used to express this concept in the Old Testament. However, the most prominent biblical passage is the famous suffering servant of the prophet Isaiah chapters 52 and 53. In these chapters, there is presented a person who suffers terribly even to the point of death because of the sins of others. This person has been traditionally given the title “the Suffering Servant”. Thus, the prophet Isaiah records, “Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.... But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities...” (Isa. 53: 4-5).

## **12. SUFFERING IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

More than the Old Testament, the New Testament gave a clearer teaching on the value and purpose of suffering in human life. The New Testament makes it clear that suffering is part and parcel of the normal Christian Life. We shall briefly examine some of the views of the New Testament on Suffering.

### **12.1 Suffering: A means of Identifying with Christ**

Reading through the life of Jesus Christ according to the Gospels, one immediately recognizes the presence of suffering from the beginning to the end of Jesus earthly life. He assumed all suffering by living it in himself and redeeming it. In this way he has recapitulated in himself the whole story of man, which is a story of suffering. Christ intentionally took on himself the suffering of the whole humanity so that he can change the meaning of suffering. The New Testament therefore teaches that it is important to unite one’s suffering to the suffering of Christ in order to gain the redemptive value of his suffering. Therefore, our suffering, pain, losses, sickness and other challenges of life are opportunities for every Christian to enter into the suffering of Christ. The New



Testament teaches that suffering in union with Christ is a way of “living in Christ” which is expected of all Christians.

Suffering *per se* leads to nothing, but when Christ is introduced into suffering, it becomes a cross, it becomes salvific. Recall the statement of Christ to his disciples; “if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk. 9:23; Mtt. 16:24).

### **12.2 Suffering creates Compassion in Man**

Another teaching of the New Testament is that suffering helps us to connect with others who suffer since we have experienced a situation similar to theirs. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that, “Because Christ himself was tested through suffering; he is able to help those who are being tested” (Heb. 2:18). The same letter teaches that Christ suffering gives us confidence that Christ will understand our own suffering so that we should not be afraid to approach him. It states that, “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been similarly tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help” (Heb. 4:15-16). Consequently, following the example of Christ, those who have undergone a particular kind of suffering are better positioned to understand the sufferings of others who are undergoing painful experiences. In this way, they become a comfort and are able to give consolation to others. This power to console others comes from the consolation we ourselves have received from Christ.

### **12.3 Suffering as a Condition for True Discipleship**

Jesus is very clear that all those who love him and want to follow him must suffer on his account. He says; “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). It follows that the experience of suffering is intrinsically connected with following Jesus Christ. In this regard, the New Testament teaches that suffering affords us the opportunity to witness to the power of God in our lives. A person who has suffered for Christ and overcome his troubles will be in a better position to talk about the faithfulness of God. When people suffer for the sake of Christ, they preach more effectively by their fidelity to Christ than they could have done with mere words. This is called Christian Witnessing.



## **12.4 Suffering as a Test of Faith**

Just like the Old Testament, the New Testament also presents suffering as a means of testing God's people. St. James in his letter presents suffering as a test of Faith. He says; "my brothers, consider it a great joy when trials of many kinds come upon you, for you well know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance and perseverance must complete its work so that you will become fully developed, complete, not deficient in any way" (Jm. 1:2-4). A test exposes a person's inner character and reveals his true substance. Suffering therefore provides man the opportunity for character development and growth. Some good and virtuous characters can only be developed in suffering or difficult conditions. The letter to the Hebrews teaches that "Christ though he was son, learnt obedience through suffering" (Heb. 5:8).

## **12.5 Suffering for the Love of the Church**

Christians can suffer for the good of the Church, that is, in favour of the Church. This is another explanation of suffering in the New Testament. It is called the ecclesial benefits of suffering. Christ himself offered his suffering for his bride. Therefore, whoever suffers can offer his pains in favour of the mystical body of Christ. St. Paul is a champion of this doctrine when he said: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh, I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col. 1:24).

## **13. ST. PAUL AND THE MYSTERY OF HUMAN SUFFERING**

Here we have what can be called the Christian theology of human suffering according to St. Paul.

St. Paul is one person who bequeathed to the Church a deep answer to the mystery of suffering. In this regard, Pope John Paul II says, that when it comes to suffering, St. Paul, 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" (cf. *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 1). St. Paul in his teachings on suffering sees many advantages when one unites his suffering with that of Christ. St. Paul did not make any attempt to explain why particular suffering should come to a particular individual rather he focused his explanation on the inner meaning of suffering which helped him to endure his own sufferings and helps other Christians to maintain their peace and positive attitude during suffering.

**14.** The first lesson St. Paul teaches is that suffering is the secret of Christ's glory. He made it very clear in his letter to the Philippians when he said: "Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, did not count

equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. And for this, God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2: 5-11). Thus, St. Paul, holds that the only path to Jesus’ glory is his cross.

**15.** Another important lesson St. Paul teaches us is that if we must have a share in the glory and resurrection of Christ, we must also have a share in his suffering. This is why he says; Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own....., the righteousness from God depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his suffering, becoming like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead (cf. Phil. 3:8-11).

**16.** St. Paul also teaches that suffering is one of the most effective ways through which a Christian can imitate Christ. He insists that “For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:19-21). It is through suffering that one imitates and gradually becomes more Christ-like. In this sense, St. Paul holds that life or death makes no difference in him. His life is a participation in the suffering of Christ while his death will be a participation in the resurrection and glory of Christ. This is a deep mystery explained in simple terms. Thus, for St. Paul, to live is gain and to die is gain.

**17.** Another theological explanation which St. Paul gave is that through our suffering, we gain righteousness. St. Paul teaches that we cannot gain righteousness through our personal show of piety but through the righteousness that flows from the sufferings of Christ. Consequently, suffering becomes a means of sanctification for all those who believe in Christ Jesus and the efficacy of his cross. For him, the cross of Christ is our power to holiness and righteousness. He puts it this way; “the message of the cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation, it is the power of God. While the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks look for

wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ: to the Jews, an obstacle they cannot get over, to the gentiles, foolishness, but to those who have been called, whether they are Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is both the power of God and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24).

**18.** Again St. Paul teaches that it is only when we unite our suffering with that of Christ that we can experience the comfort that comes from Christ. He assured the Corinthians of this truth when he said; “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the merciful Father and the God who gives every possible encouragement; he supports us in every hardship, so that we are able to come to the support of others, in every hardship of theirs because of the encouragement that we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives; so too does the encouragement we receive through Christ. So, if we have hardships to undergo, this will contribute to your encouragement and your salvation; if we receive encouragement, this is to gain for you the encouragement which enables you to bear with perseverance the same sufferings as we do. So, our hope for you is secure in the knowledge that you share the encouragement we receive, no less than the sufferings we bear. So, in the hardships we underwent in Asia, we want you to be quite certain, brothers, that we were under extraordinary pressure” (2 Cor. 1:3-7).

**19.** The apex of the teachings of St. Paul on this is that St. Paul sees suffering for Christ or suffering united to that of Christ as a privilege, one in which every Christian should take pride. For this he prayed; “Far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal. 6:14). St. Paul did not treat suffering as an academic subject but as an experience which he tasted, ending with his martyrdom in Rome. He was scourged with 39 lashes, beaten three times with the rod, stoned once. He experienced shipwreck three times and almost drowned in the sea for a night and a day (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24ff). In all these, St. Paul never complained rather he always thanked God for considering him worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SOME COMMON MODES OF SUFFERING TODAY**

**20.** Given that human suffering is a universal reality, it manifests itself in various forms. We should therefore not limit ourselves to a rigid uniform concept of suffering as though it includes only malignant cancer or death of a loved one. Even though human suffering includes these, but it includes much more than these. It includes everything that threatens the integrity of human existence. It will be necessary for us to discuss some common modes of suffering so that people may realize when they are dealing with what can be united with the sufferings of Christ. Many people are experiencing more sufferings than they realize because our concept of suffering is too limited. We shall briefly look at some of the common modes of human suffering especially in our peculiar environment. We do not intend to exhaust the list but just a random selection of some of the major ones.

#### **21. Bereavement**

Very few things in life compare to the pain of losing someone we love. Certain types of death create prolonged suffering, sorrows and agonies. These include the death of a husband, wife, child, father, mother, a close relative or friend. Sometimes the suffering that follows the death of loved one is overwhelming. Sometimes one may experience waves of intense and very difficult emotions, ranging from profound sadness, emptiness, despair, shock, numbness, to guilt and regret. Someone might rage at the circumstances of one's bereavement focusing one's frustrations on one self, doctors, other people suspected to be the cause of the death or even on God. Very often, we see people who may find it difficult to accept the reality of the death of a loved one or who find it really challenging to struggle, recover and move on with life after the death of a loved one.

While it is difficult to avoid intense feeling of suffering and grief, at the loss of a loved one, there are healthier ways to come to terms with one's bereavement. The first step is the realization that death is the inevitable end of man on earth. It must surely come when God permits. The way people see and approach death matters considerably with regard to how they endure bereavement. Some understand death negatively while some others do so positively.

The second step is to appreciate what Christ did for us through his death and resurrection. Christ has made suffering and death the instruments of victory. Thus, if one lives with Christ in this present life, he is sure of rising in glory with Christ after his death. Indeed, our faith holds that, "In him the hope of blessed resurrection has dawned, that those saddened by the certainty of dying, might be

consoled by the promise of immortality to come. Indeed, for your faithful, Lord, life is changed not ended, and, when this earthly dwelling turns to dust, an eternal dwelling is made ready for them in heaven” (Preface 1, For the dead).

We conquer the suffering and agony of bereavement with the knowledge that death does not have the last word for those who believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently, our separation by death with those we love does not last forever.

## **22. SICKNESS**

Sickness is one type of suffering that has been with man from the beginning of the history of human existence. Sometimes, sickness comes to man in a mysterious manner in such a way that defies all scientific explanations. Sickness is one great problem we have to contend with in our present-day Nigeria, a country where adequate medical facilities are lacking. Some do not have the financial resources to pay for the medical services they receive in the few good hospitals available. Sickness is not a respecter of persons. It attacks anybody of any age, profession and social status. There are many types of sicknesses which people suffer, ranging from minor to major ones. Some are incurable or terminal. The suffering from sickness makes it extremely difficult for some people to make a meaning out of their lives. Sickness constitutes one of the greatest challenges man faces today. A clear example is the devastating effects left by covid-19. It is a mode of suffering which can come to any human person.

## **23. POVERTY AND HUNGER**

Poverty here is understood as a state or condition of not having enough money to meet basic needs including food, clothing and shelter. It is a condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources and essentials for a minimum standard of living. This implies that the income level from employment is so low that people find it extremely difficult and sometimes impossible to meet the basic human needs. This is the situation in Nigeria today. There are some families who live without proper housing, food and medical care.

At the corporate or societal level, high poverty rates obstruct economic growth and this is always associated with societal ills like crime, unemployment, urban decay, lack of education, and poor health.

One of the major consequences of poverty in our society today is hunger. Hunger is a very dangerous phenomenon which can give rise to many evils. It is said that a hungry man is an angry man. It is particularly more painful in our society, our country which has been blessed by God with wealth and natural resources which is capable of providing comfortable, decent life for all Nigerians. Worst still, while some people who have access to our common wealth waste the money on



expensive celebration, their neighbours are dying of hunger and other poverty induced sicknesses. If men and women of goodwill realize that the wealth of this world are for all God's children, and act as stewards, poverty and hunger will drastically reduce or be totally eliminated.

## **24. INSECURITY AND VIOLENCE**

One of the major challenges facing Nigeria today as a country is insecurity and violence. This has led to the loss of lives, property and destruction of means of livelihood. In the last decade, insecurity and violence have taken an unprecedented level in our national history. The attacks came in the form of bombing churches, mosques, schools, police stations and market places with improvised explosive devices. Kidnapping of innocent citizens including school children and ministers of the Gospel have become the order of the day. There are instances of destruction of oil facilities, devastation of farm lands and crops. There is increase in cases of depression due to loss of lives and means of livelihood.

The consequences of the above carnage caused by insecurity are that many people have been rendered hopeless, homeless, jobless and disabled. Many children and young people have become orphans without hope of a good future.

A good number of Nigerians today have become prisoners in their own country. Many are so afraid even to go to their farms or their work places on certain days due to the fear of attacks from the criminal elements. This situation can explain why the number of people who suffer from hypertension is on the increase in our society today. No place is totally safe in our country today and no one is fully immuned. The worst is that this level of insecurity seems to have overwhelmed the security agents as they appear incapable of handling the situation. Today, hardly would a day pass by without a report of one deadly security challenge or the other. we can no longer measure the cost of the prevalent insecurity in Nigeria. It is a major mode of suffering in our midst.

## **25. FAMILY AND MARRIAGE CRISES**

Marriage and family are the foremost and basic social institutions we have. The human family is a blessing and marriage is the first social institution created by God. Marriage and family are the bedrock of any human society. These institutions provide its members with protection, companionship, security, morality and socialization. It is obvious that almost every human being in the society grew up within something that could be regarded as a family.

Unfortunately, family and marriage are threatened today by various circumstances and events that can come from the external as well as internal



environments of the family. There is a rising profile of broken homes in the Nigerian society today. Many Nigerian families are riddled with marital problems and crises. The collapse of many marriages has led to poor emotional, mental, moral, psychological and spiritual health of both the couples and their children. It has also contributed massively to the escalation of social evils and vices such as drug abuse, sexual abuse, prostitution, out of school children and even death. Many families today are characterized by incessant bickering and quarrelling, witnessing gradual disintegration of family norms, values and cohesion.

One of the major causes of marital crisis in our society today is infertility. Some couples especially the female partners have suffered untold humiliation and mockery due to childlessness. It has led many marriages to divorce and in some extreme cases to suicide. In some local communities, their culture is not sympathetic to childless couples making life very miserable and unliveable for them. Sometimes, it gets to the point where suffering couples start avoiding interactions with their friends who have children to avoid being ridiculed.

Another major cause of family crises is infidelity. This generates hatred, suspicion, violence, separation, murder and suicide among many others. It can be a real school of suffering.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### SOME NEGATIVE RESPONSES TO HUMAN SUFFERING

**26.** People perceive and approach life in different ways. Also, there are different approaches and responses to human suffering. While we thank God for the spread of Christianity among us, we must also observe that some negative influences from our traditional religion still hold a good number of our Christians in bondage. This is particularly true when it comes to our responses to human suffering. Archbishop Stephen Ezeanya aptly puts it this way, “in traditional religion of our people, suffering is seen as an evil that must be got rid of by all means. There is therefore no question of resignation to the will of God, no matter the nature of suffering and no matter the duration. Suffering can never serve a useful purpose in life” (cf. Ezeanya S. N., *The Christian and Suffering*, pg. 15).

We shall now examine some of the negative ways through which some Christians respond to the sufferings in their lives.

#### **27. Visit to Witch Doctors and Diviners**

Some Christians easily fall for the lie that native doctors can give solutions to their sufferings. This attitude is partly caused by ignorance and partly caused by shallow faith in God. Archbishop Stephen Ezeanya presents it this way; “The mentality of our traditional religionists is still very strong among our people in varying degrees. This explains why some of our Christians especially converts, even though they admit in theory and confess with their mouths that “an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one” (1 Cor. 8:5) still very easily give in to superstitious practices like consulting diviners, offering sacrifices to divinities and ancestors, wearing of charms...They do these sometimes openly, sometimes in secret or through their traditionalist relatives” (cf. Ezeanya S. N., *The Christian and Suffering*, pg.16). It is important to remind ourselves that consulting native doctors, fortune tellers, diviners and so on, is a sin against the first commandment of God.

Some go to native doctors when they feel that someone is holding their destiny or when they feel that their business is not progressing as they would wish. This situation is much prevalent today among our young generation with the satanic phenomenon of “*oke ite*”. It has even become fashionable for some of our youths to publicly profess their belief and commitment to native doctors. No one is against anybody looking for solutions to his sufferings but it must be done in the right way, right place and through true faith in God.

Unfortunately, we have also observed that some who consult these native doctors do not actually set out to do so, but were deceived by some agents of these fortune

tellers. Before they could realize what they were into, they have found themselves trapped in the quagmire. It is therefore very important that people should ask questions before following those who volunteer to take them to the places where they will find solutions to their sufferings. It is good to note that sometimes too, some Christians may refuse to go to the house or shrine of the native doctors but are willing to provide the finances and other sacrificial materials so that others may go on their behalf. This is hypocrisy which was condemned vehemently by Jesus in the Gospel.

## **28. Undue Grief and Complaint**

Grief is a normal human response to suffering common to all mortals. It is impossible to go through life without having an experience that may lead to grief. Christians are free to grieve during suffering but St. Paul invites us all believers in Christ not to grieve like the rest of human beings who have no hope. Admonishing Christians about the grief that follows the death of a loved one, St. Paul says; “Brothers and Sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who are asleep, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13).

Here, St. Paul is admonishing Christians that when grief is taken out of the context of our Christian hope, it no longer serves any good purpose. Archbishop Stephen N. Ezeanya was very correct when he observed that “Because many of our Christians have not understood the necessity of suffering in our lives as Christians and the fatherly care that God takes of us as his children, they complain and some even blame God for giving them the ‘punishment’ they say they do not deserve” (cf. Ezeanya S.N., *The Christian and Suffering*, pg.17). There are people who grieve and lament without hope when they encounter the sufferings of life. However, when grief and lamentation stretch longer than necessary, they become problems to the individual. Some sick people in such situations are often psychologically broken, adding to the complications of their sickness. This is a wrong attitude or response to human suffering.

## **29. Resignation to Confusion and Frustration**

Given the level of suffering in our society today, many people end up being confused and feeling helpless. Some cruel people who claim to be “men of God” take advantage of the confusion to exploit many Christians. They give fake prophecies and visions and since such a sufferer is already confused, he tends to believe anything including such dangerous destructive prophecies. Sometimes, people find themselves in a situation where their sense of direction is completely lost. At such dangerous times, some contemplate suicide, others blame

themselves or their sins, all because they no longer see meaning in their lives. Some have ended up as psychiatric patients because they surrendered to the confusion that accompany suffering.

### **30. Pointing accusing fingers on others**

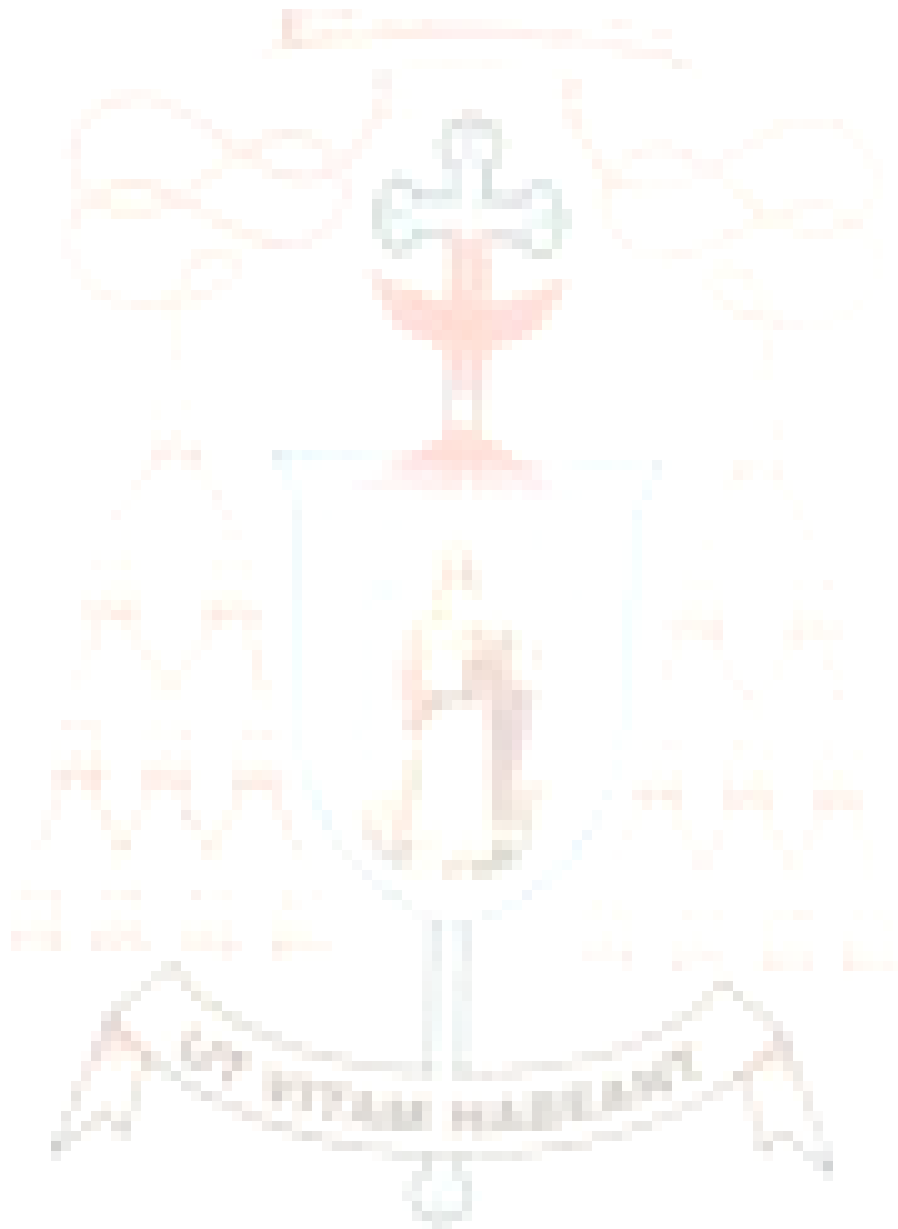
The devil uses the Igbo philosophy of “*ife adighi eme na nkiti*” (meaning nothing happens without a cause), to destroy a lot of families, kindreds and communities. Misfortune and suffering are part and parcel of human existence but today in Igboland, every misfortune and suffering must be explained, and somebody must be held responsible for it. The fortune tellers and fake prophets are having a field day telling people whom to hold responsible for their problems and suffering. It becomes worst when one member of the family is financially blessed while the rest are poor. Gradually the rich one becomes a suspect. He is often accused of tying the luck of the rest of the members of the family. People generally point accusing fingers in order to exonerate themselves from blame and responsibility. Today, it seems every death is caused by someone. Even the death of an elderly person of 99 years who had suffered terminal sickness must be subjected to controversy. Someone must be held responsible for his death. The worst scenario is that when one is passing through a difficult time, some people around him will immediately conclude that he is suffering for his sins or the sins of his ancestors. The biblical Job was not spared of this accusation by his friends but they were wrong. We as Christians today should avoid this wrong attitude of pointing accusing fingers on others.

### **31. Despair**

One of the most effective weapons which the devil uses against Christians today is despair. Despair can be defined as complete loss or absence of hope. Once the devil succeeds in putting someone in a situation of despair, the person falls in love with words like discouragement, distress, anguish, desperation, misery, defeatism and pessimism.

Experience has shown that a person can survive for days without food or water but not without hope. Despair is to feel an overwhelming hopelessness. Archbishop S.N. Ezeanya rightly says that when people live in despair, ‘they lose confidence in God. Some even call on God to take away their lives and thus end their suffering. A few go to the extreme of committing suicide. They see no reason why they should continue to live and suffer for nothing’ (Ezeanya S.N., *The Christian and Suffering*, pg.17).

As Christians, we must live in hope that never dies. We must keep hope alive. We must stand on our faith in God who is love, who is faithful and who can do all things.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SOME POSITIVE RESPONSES TO HUMAN SUFFERING**

**32.** Since suffering is part and parcel of our existence here on earth, it is our responsibility to find a way of making sense out of every suffering that comes our way. We are therefore invited to handle our suffering in such a way as to make it a time of peace, not despair, a time of joy not sorrow, a time of merit not complaint.

According to Pope St. JohnPaul II, the Church sees in all of Christ's suffering brothers and sisters, multiple instruments of Jesus supernatural power. 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. Human suffering provides another opportunity for one to spiritually perfect oneself. We shall now reflect on some of the positive responses which can help people make meaning out of their suffering.

#### **33. Knowledge of the Reality and Value of Suffering**

The first step towards a positive response to human suffering is the knowledge of the reality and value of suffering in human life. There is a famous Buddhist adage that if you want to know the truth about the universe, about the meaning of life and about your own identity, you have to start by observing suffering and exploring its value. One fact that is undeniable. Many people who have passed through the school of suffering, subjecting themselves to its discipline, have found themselves infinitely better due to the experience. Knowing that suffering is part of our life here on earth will help us to endure it when it comes. If we accept this fact, we will not be surprised when suffering hits us unexpectedly. One wonderful necessary lesson from the experience of Job is that suffering is not always a result of human mistake or sin. It is an integral part of our life here on earth.

#### **34. Acceptance**

We all encounter suffering in our day to day lives because it is inevitable, as it is part of being human. These sufferings might come as a result of bereavement, sickness, business failure, marriage crises, fatal accident etc. Sometimes people shy away from accepting the reality of the situation they have found themselves. In other words, they live in denial. There is a deep-seated instinct in man which makes him prefer denial and not confrontation of difficult situations. We do this to hide our suffering from people around us or even from ourselves. We become helpless in the face of suffering unless we first of all accept and own up the situation. That is the first step towards solution. This does not however mean that



you have given approval to your difficult situation or that you do not want to do anything to change it. It does not also mean that you go about looking for suffering. No! But acceptance is a necessary step towards dealing with the problem. When we accept our suffering, we open the door to freedom and develop the courage to face it. In this perspective, Christians have an added advantage over others because they know that God can use their sufferings for his greater glory. Thus, Christians are expected to accept their sufferings, especially during prayerful encounter with God who knows how best to use human brokenness for his purpose.

### **35. Prayer as a Response to Human Suffering**

Prayer can be described in very simple terms as the act of moving one's heart, mind, intellect, emotions and might towards God confidently in order to surrender one's self entirely to God as a child surrenders to his father. To pray, therefore, is to come into the presence of God confidently to dialogue with him about all that concerns you. Prayer therefore implies confident appreciation for God's favours and supplication for his divine intervention in the future. Prayer is founded on one's relationship with God.

**36.** Prayer connotes the idea of exhortation or invitation to wholeheartedly pour out one's entire feelings and sentiments to God with the confidence that God our merciful Father hears. The Prophet Jeremiah, speaking on behalf of God says; "you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you". (Jer. 29:12). Prayer encompasses the whole person and makes one come before God with his whole being and in an attitude of humble submission.

Through prayer, man is sustained by God in an enduring, intensive divine favour. It is the expression of the believer's total dependence on God. It includes acknowledgement of God's salvific deeds in the past, request for deliverance from all kinds of evils and courage to face every suffering. Prayer is an inalienable right of every child of God. Prayer is a very positive response to human suffering.

### **37. Hope:**

One of the best gifts which Christianity has for humanity is hope in the midst of suffering. Christian hope can be a light in the darkness caused by human suffering. God offers real hope to those who put their trust in him. Christian hope is not the same as wishful thinking. It is a practical hope based on God's unchanging word. God assures us through the words of Jeremiah; "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future" (Jer. 29:19). Christians serve and worship a God of hope. Hope is part of his nature and character, he never fails.

God has unassailable promise of hope for everyone who is going through human suffering with confidence in him. He says “Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear him, upon those who count on his mercy, to deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive through famine...” (Psalm 33:18-22). The hope offered by the Christian God is based on the person of Jesus Christ. St. Paul is a good example for Christians when in the face of his mortal sufferings, he insists that, “indeed, we had accepted within ourselves the sentence of death, that we might trust not in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. He rescued us from such great danger of death, and he will continue to rescue us; in him we have put our hope that he will also rescue us again” (2 Cor. 1:9-10). We can see that Paul’s ability to survive his difficult challenges was not based on his capacity but on his hope in God.

Christian hope is not just a feeling or a tidal wave of transient peace but a permanent anchor which keeps us from being overwhelmed by the storms of life. We can hope because we know, He is with us, will empower us, and can reveal himself to us in the midst of suffering.

### **38. Faith is our Shield**

The opposite of faith can be fear. Fear is one of the greatest weapons of the devil. In difficult situations, the devil uses fear to convince man that God has abandoned him and that his troubled situations are beyond his power. Fear simply makes us see problems and sufferings from man’s point of view and not from God’s point of view.

Faith on the other hand, helps us to bring the reality of God’s presence into our concrete situations. God never promised us a problem-free world, but he promised always to be with us. God said through the Prophet Isaiah; “Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name, you are mine. Should you pass through the waters, I shall be with you; or through rivers, they will not swallow you up. Should you walk through fire, you will not suffer, and the flame will not burn you. For I am Yahweh, your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour” (Is. 43:1-3). Looking up to God in faith is always the best response to suffering. When we focus our gaze constantly on God, we can walk on the waters of life like the Apostle Peter did. This is called “Faith Solution” to our sufferings.

### **39. Love as Conqueror to all Suffering**

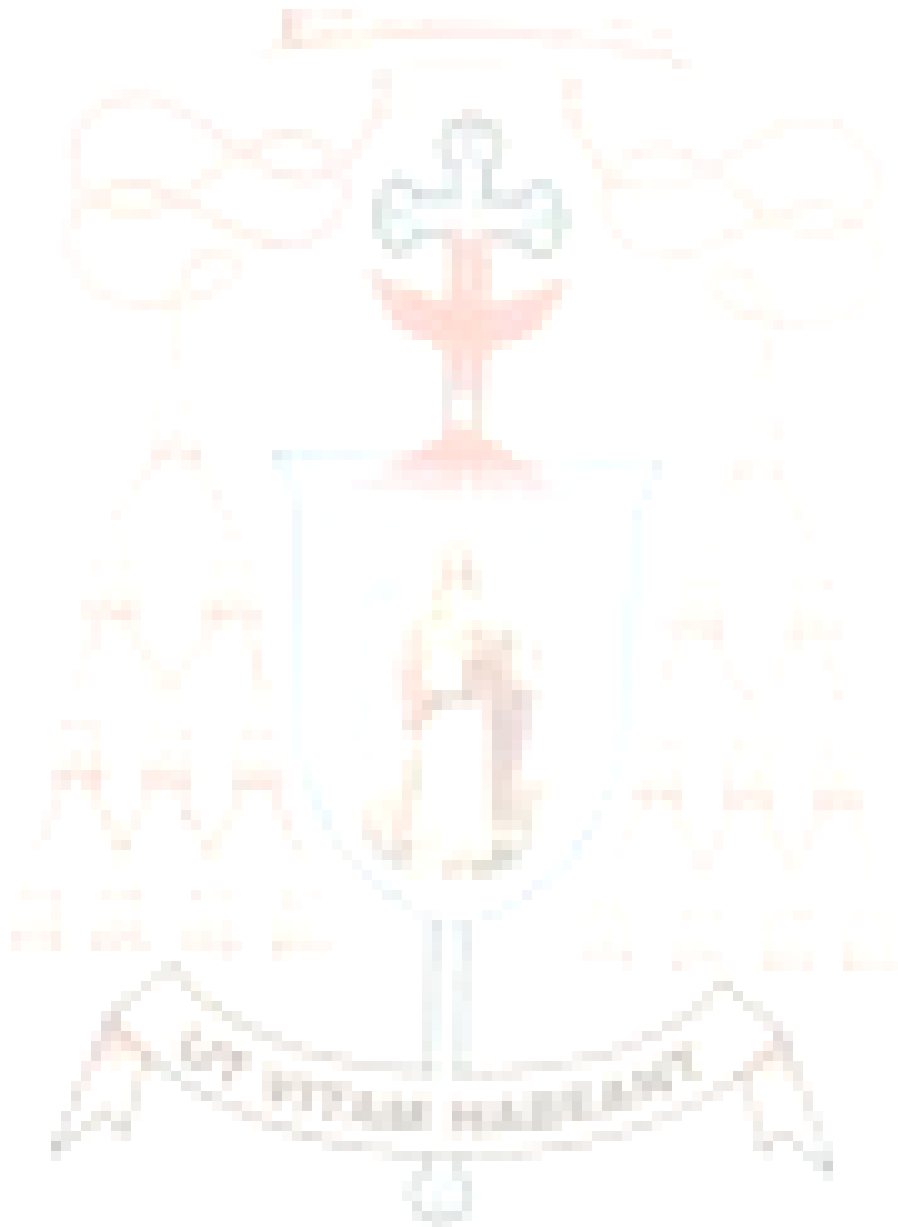
One of the most popular passages in the Bible is the Gospel of John which says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son” (Jn. 3:16). This “giving” cost the Father his only son and cost Jesus his life. Jesus happily accepted suffering as his necessary destiny. He told his followers that “he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised” (Matt. 16:21). The suffering of Jesus on the cross was a demonstration of great love for every man on the face of the earth, as well as an expression of his unlimited love for God his heavenly Father. It is love that made the Father to offer his son for the salvation of the world and it is the same love that made the son to accept passion and death for the salvation of mankind. Love by itself means sacrifice and involves pain. “True love, self-giving love, life-giving love, requires sacrifice” (Scott Hahn, *The Fourth Cup*, pg. 176). The passion and death of Jesus Christ shows the apex of God’s love for humanity. From time to time, Jesus told his disciples that whoever wants to be his disciples, must take up his cross and follow him (cf. Lk. 9:23). When Jesus finished his work of redemption and gloriously ascended to heaven, he called on his apostles to prove their love for him and for the Church through their many sufferings.

**40.** When love is the motivation for any suffering, it diminishes or entirely removes the pain of suffering. When people are in a passionate, all-consuming love, there is a significant reduction in the pain they experience during suffering for the sake of that love. The moment one truly loves, he discovers the grace of endurance and the beauty of suffering for the sake of love hitherto unknown to him.

Jesus was able to endure his brutal suffering because of the love he has for his Father and for humanity. Jesus taught us that love is painful. It has a price. When we truly love God, we are open to accept whatever suffering it pleases him to send our way which we cannot change.

In the Christian world view and spirituality, suffering means walking with Christ and therefore redemptive and transformative. This explains why many saints saw suffering as a proof of their love for God. St. John of the Cross insists that “the road is narrow. He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his walking stick. In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things. St. Ignatius of Loyola observed that “If God gives you an abundant harvest of trial, it is a sign of great holiness which he desires you to attain”. Do you want to become a great saint? he asked; Ask God to send you many sufferings. The flame of divine love never rises higher than when fed with the wood of the cross, which the infinite charity of the Saviour

used to finish his sacrifice. All the pleasures of the world are nothing compared with the sweetness found in the gall and vinegar offered to Jesus Christ. These are hard and painful things endured for Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ. When we truly love, we can accept suffering for the sake of love. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man will lay down his life for his friends” (cf. Jn. 15:13).



## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **MAKING SENSE OUT OF HUMAN SUFFERING**

**41.** The problem of human suffering is not irreconcilable with the love of a benevolent creator. In this chapter we shall discuss some values of human suffering while limiting our discussion to some benefits which one can derive from the cross when one accepts one's suffering with the right mindset.

#### **42. Suffering reminds us of our Fragility**

Nothing else on earth reminds the human person of his frailty and fragility more than suffering. It imposes on man the reality that he is not God. Sometimes people are tempted to think or even believe that they are the architect of their destiny and designers of their future. They believe that they are accountable to no one and they can do and live anyhow they like.

However, when such people are confronted by one type of suffering or the other, they are forced to remember that they are human beings made of sand and dust. Suffering exposes our vulnerability both to us and to the world. Thus, suffering opens us up to a great reality and to the existence of a Being who controls and pilots the affairs of this world.

#### **43. Suffering makes us seek the Face of God**

God has on many instances, used suffering as a means of drawing man's attention back to himself. When man finds himself in a state of agony and misery without respite, the only option open to him is to turn towards a higher source of help. Sometimes, people find themselves in a precarious situation that defies human logic or solution. At such moments, human stubbornness is broken, and the person becomes more open for assistance from a supernatural being. In this way, suffering becomes a school of prayer. Prayer is a learned experience. When the disciples saw the comfort and joy of Jesus after his prayer experience, they requested him, "Lord teach us how to pray" (Lk. 11:1). The disciples observed that even in the face of intense attack and provocative accusations by the pharisees, Jesus was always at peace after prayer enjoying a state of tranquillity. They realized that there was a supernatural power that comes through prayer and they requested Jesus to teach them the secret which he happily did. Generally, under the burden of suffering, one learns how to pray as he never has prayed before.

#### **44. Suffering helps us to reorder our priorities**

Sometimes, we spend our lives on earth accumulating things that are not really necessary. However, when we go through the experience of an intense suffering

which may bring us closer to the door of death, we are forced to accept the transient and ephemeral nature of all things in this world. At such a moment, the entire universe takes on a meaning and we develop a new worldview.

Thus, we are forced to realise that there are things which have more values than others. We can therefore say that suffering has the capacity to reset our mindset and reorder our priorities. Indeed, suffering helps us to discover our idols, those things or persons which we consider more important than God in our lives. Sometimes, we feel that there are things or persons we cannot live without and such we allow to rule our lives. Surprisingly, at the moment of terminal sickness for example, we discover that such things or persons can no longer help us or rescue us from the crushing hand of suffering despite all their sincere efforts. Thus, suffering brings us to the consciousness and inadequacy of placing our hope on people or things in this passing world.

#### **45. Suffering develops Compassion in us**

A famous adage says that we should not judge a person until we have walked a mile in his shoes. We have already discussed this when we talked about suffering in the bible. Suffering helps us to develop sympathy and sensitivity to others who are going through the same suffering we have experienced. It helps us to put our whole heart into helping a fellow sufferer and do not spare any assistance we could offer since it was an experience we have been through. We can understand why the letter to the Hebrews calls Jesus a compassionate high priest who is able to sympathize with us because he himself experienced our suffering when he was on earth (cf. Heb. 4:15). Truly, suffering develops empathy in people, that is, the ability to enter into the painful state of the sufferer because one has been in that state before.

#### **46. Suffering ennobles our Character**

Some virtues are only developed and nurtured in man in the face of challenges and suffering. A good example is the virtue of courage. This is a most desirable virtue for a successful existence. Courage is defined as the ability to act rationally and firmly in the face of fear. This implies that no one can develop the virtue of courage unless there is fear. If fear does not exist then courage may never be needed nor developed. In the same way, patience is a priceless Christian virtue but it cannot be developed and practiced unless one is provoked. Human suffering comes with fear and provocation. Thus, when we are able to face the suffering with courage and patience, we gradually grow into mature and stable human beings. Suffering therefore, becomes the fire that brings out the best in the human person, just as fire brings out the best in gold. Suffering separates quality



Christians from superficial Christians. It is true that no one should pray for suffering to come, nevertheless, we admit with all honesty that suffering also has great value especially when faced with the proper attitude or mindset.

#### **47. Suffering makes us Home-Sick**

Suffering is one of the instruments that helps man to come to terms with the greatest truth of human existence here on earth, which is, “this world is not a permanent home” for anybody. During the Christian persecution, in the first century, Peter the Apostle kept reminding the early Christians not to despair during their sufferings because they were only sojourners and pilgrims here on earth (cf. 1 Pt. 2:11). When someone visits a place outside his home, no matter how comfortable or uncomfortable the place may be, he lives with the consciousness that he is out of home and longs to go back. In the same way, St. Paul reminds us that “our true homeland is in heaven, from where we are expecting a saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (cf. Phil. 3:20). Suffering sharpens this awareness and consciousness that we are pilgrims here on earth. St. Paul teaches us that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us (cf. Rom. 8:18).

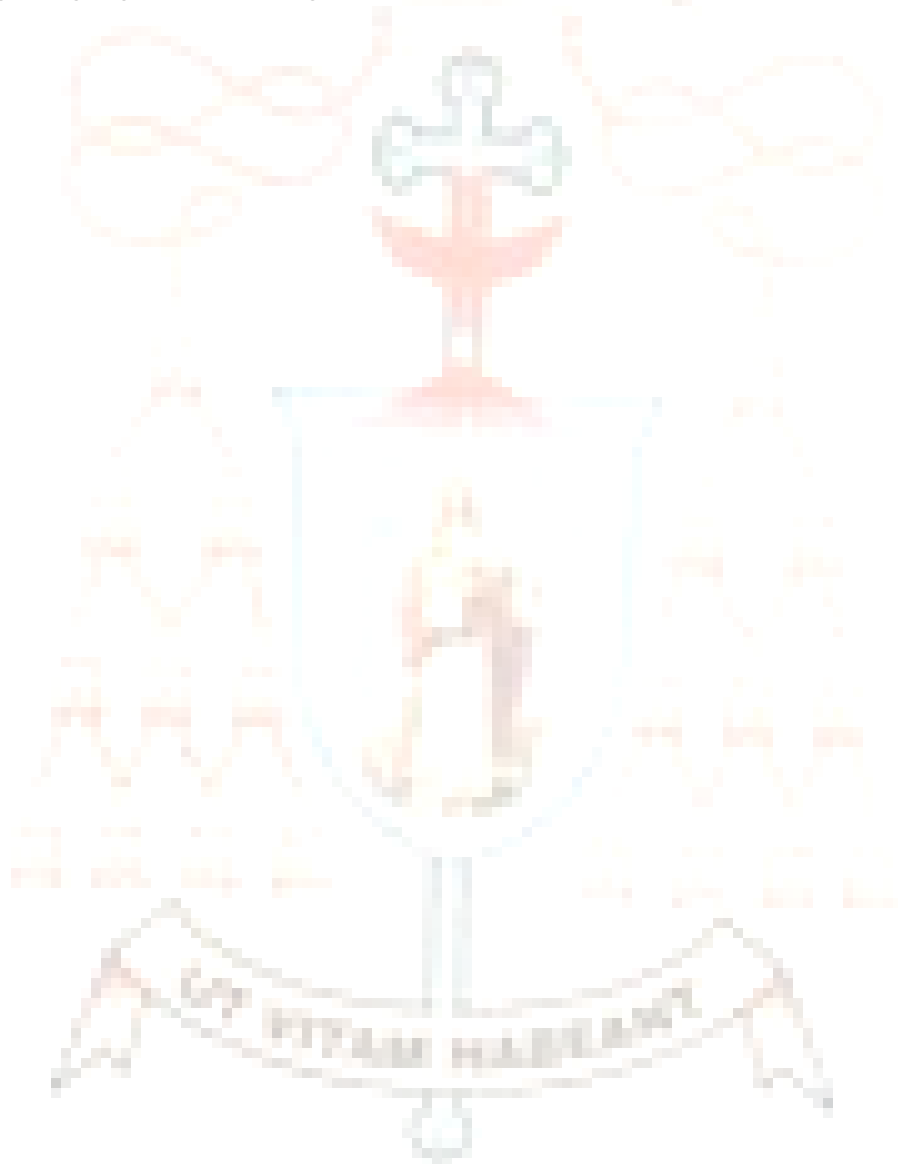
The grace of suffering makes the human person to think of a world where there are no sorrows, no death, no sickness or where we shall never grow old. The lyrics of the song “Never grow old” by the great singer Jim Reeves, brings out the beauty of the land where our true home exists, where our lowly bodies will be gloriously transformed and all tears wiped away (cf. Canon 3 of the Holy Mass). A home where there will be no suffering, no sorrows and no growing old.

Jim Reeves sings: “I have heard of a land, on a faraway strand, ‘T is a beautiful home of the soul built by Jesus on high, there will never shall die, ‘T is the land where we’ll never grow old.....”

**48.** St. Paul gives us a clearer picture of our destination in the journey of life. He says, “So we do not lose heart, though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling...For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for

this very thing is God, who has given us the spirit as a guarantee (cf. 2 Cor. 4:16ff).

**49.** The above passage joyfully reminds us that here and now are not all we have in life. It reminds us that God is working out something and preparing us for our final destination. It is important for us to realize that all the sufferings and hardships we experience here and now are part of God's design to prepare us for our true home. God sometimes uses suffering to produce in us a deep and motivating longing and burning desire for a home much better and eternal.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### MARY: MOTHER OF SORROWS, OUR EXAMPLE

**50.** The honour the Church accords to Mary is not without justification. She is a woman of faith and of silent suffering. She dedicated her life wholly in surrender to the will of God. By so doing, she knew suffering by her faithful solidarity to her son's salvific mission. The Church honours her with the following titles which demonstrate her pride of place in the cloud of witnesses as an example to Christians: Queen of martyrs, Mother of sorrows, Comforter of the afflicted, Help of Christians, among others. She brings light by her example and solace by her maternal solidarity to all who suffer. She is a woman of faith and of the cross. Through her silent sufferings, she grew in grace and favours from the Lord such that she was highly raised by the Lord for which she gratefully sang the Magnificat. In her favour and those of all the faithful suffering people, the Lord announced the reversal of fortunes.

**51.** No one else exemplifies the redeeming dimension of human suffering like Mary, the Mother of our Redeemer. The words of the scripture can be comfortably applied to her without fear of contradiction: "Come, all you who pass by the way, look and see whether there is any suffering like my suffering" (Lam. 1:2ff). Simeon predicted that through her participation in the redemptive work of Christ, a sword will pierce her soul (cf. Lk. 2:35). Indeed, many swords pierced her soul. She endured all her sufferings without complaint not only as a sign of her strong faith in God but also as her contribution to the salvation of the world. Her unique participation in the sufferings of Christ came to its climax or highest point at Calvary on Good Friday when her son gave her the special role of being a mother, a model and a consolation to the suffering humanity. Due to the many sufferings of Mary, a greatly honored tradition has risen in the Church, giving us a true devotion of her, known as the "Seven Sorrows of Mary". Through the centuries, the Church has described Mary as "The Mother of Sorrows". This is not a negative appellation but a name which presents Mary to all Christians as a model on how to respond to our sufferings and pains, and as an example of one who integrated her suffering into her appreciation of life. Mary's attitude towards suffering re-echoes and re-enforces the teachings of Jesus Christ that the way to true happiness and fulfilment is the way of the Cross. Hence, he invites his followers to take up their cross and follow him. We shall here briefly examine the seven sorrows of Mary which she endured in perfect submission to the will of our Heavenly Father.

### **52. The First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon (Lk. 2:34)**

Mary was a young mother who came to the temple to fulfil the ritual laws which follow the birth of a first-born son. She was greeted with a prophecy which was not easy for her to analyse or understand: “As the child’s father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed, and a sword will pierce your soul too, so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare” (Lk. 2:33-35). Nothing could have caused more suffering and pain to the heart of a young mother than to hear such words concerning her child’s future and her life. Simeon did not stop at predicting the suffering of her child but also spoke directly to her, that a sword would pierce her own soul. Nevertheless, all these prophecies and predictions did not change Mary’s total dependence on God rather they helped to strengthen her. She kept pondering these messages in her Immaculate Heart, in a prayerful dialogue with God.

### **53. The Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt (Matt. 2:13)**

The young Mother, Mary, shortly after her child-birth was now faced with the real threat of the murder of her first and only son. One can only imagine how painful and anguished her state of mind was when she heard about the dream of Joseph and the message of the Angel to take the little baby and escape to Egypt. Many thoughts would be running through her mind: the fragility of the child (the little and innocent baby), travelling to a strange land, the wickedness of Herod who wanted the life of an innocent child.... These and many more could be truly worrisome for a young mother’s heart. In the face of all these, Mary did not doubt the love of God for her and her family. With Joseph, she promptly took the child and ran into Egypt. She did not challenge God to come and save the child himself since the Angel said the child would be the son of God. She underwent the hazardous journey in order to fulfil the will of God. She was not scared by the possibility of being attacked on the way or the hostility of the people she might meet in Egypt. She just went because God has made the demand. This is called trust in divine providence.

### **54. The Third Sorrow: The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple (Lk. 2:43-45)**

The bible narrates that “when he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. They assumed he was somewhere in the party, and it was only after a day’s journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. When they failed

to find him, they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere” (Lk. 2:43-45). The hearts of Mary and Joseph were anguished when they could not find Jesus among the caravans. What could have happened to the little boy, they wondered? This thought with the attendant suffering pounded their hearts for good three days while the search for the young Jesus lasted. Worst still, after three days of hectic, intense, anxious and bitter grief, they found the child Jesus, only for him to tell them that there was no need for the search since he was about his father’s business. That was another mystery to grapple with. Yet, in these tortuous experiences, neither Mary nor Joseph lost their patience.

### **55. The Fourth Sorrow: The Meeting of Jesus and Mary on the way of the Cross**

Who could imagine the emotional condition of Mary when she heard that her son, Jesus, was arrested by a weapon-wielding mob. She must have ran towards the garden of Gethsemane and must have been heart broken when she met them along the road. Her greatest torture must include her helplessness in stopping the evil and conspiracy against her innocent son. Worst still, she was not given the opportunity to comfort or console her son. She must have experienced darkness all over her. She watched the heartless soldiers brutally assaulting her son as if he was a common criminal. There was nothing she could do except to walk with him spiritually on his way to calvary. While Jesus was being tortured physically, Mary was equally being tortured emotionally and psychologically. Each and every one of the strokes of the cane on the body of Jesus wounded Mary’s heart. It was a heart battered with suffering, yet she did not complain or ask God questions. She simply lived the mystery.

### **56. The Fifth Sorrow: The Crucifixion**

The death of a child is one of the worst sufferings any parent could ever experience. The pain must have been unimaginable for Mary because not only that they killed her son, but it was also a most brutal and shameful death: Crucifixion. In addition, Mary knew very well that her son was innocent and guiltless. Mary witnessed the crucifixion of her son with all the humiliation that goes with it; the flogging, the stripping, the nailing and many more. While Jesus was suffering all over his body, Mary was passing through the deepest depth of spiritual and emotional torment. Her own cup of suffering was running over. Only a spiritually brave woman could stand to see what Mary experienced at Mount Calvary, under the cross. This was arguably the most brutal thrust of the sword that Simon prophesied about her. The fact that she withstood these sufferings exemplifies her courage, strength, grace, dignity and faith in ways that many people could not match. Mary is indeed our model in suffering.

### **57. The Sixth Sorrow: The Taking down of the Body of Jesus from the Cross**

While others were gradually leaving the scene of the crucifixion, Mary and a few followers of Jesus refused to go. While Jesus' dead body was being lowered from the cross, Mary instinctively stretched out her hands and received the broken, battered, dead body of her son. This is the artistic rendition presented by Michelangelo in the famous "Pieta". With the assistance of those close friends of Jesus still around, Mary carried him to the borrowed grave and laid Jesus in the tomb. At this point, one can rightly say that everything about Mary was pain and sorrow. Though this was an experience no one could wish his or her enemy but when Mary said yes to God through the Angel's message, she had given her consent to God to do with her whatever he wanted.

### **58. The Seventh Sorrow: The Burial of Jesus**

The Bible reports that "they took the body of Jesus and bound it in linen cloths with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews. Now, in the place where he was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been buried. Since it was the Jewish day of preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there" (Jn. 19:40-42). At this moment, the reality of the death of Jesus must have hit Mary like a thunderbolt. With the big stone the grave was covered following Jewish custom and the body of Jesus was hidden from the eyes of Mary. Perhaps now the situation became clearer to Mary and she came to the realization that Jesus was no more. Who can imagine the pains, the suffering and sorrow going through the heart of this brave mother. All we know is that her heart and her mind were with Jesus in the tomb. It must have been an immense heartache for Mary. But she endured it all for the glory of God and for the salvation of the world.

Finally, before Jesus died on the Cross, he conferred upon the Blessed Virgin Mary a new kind of motherhood which is spiritual and universal. Thus, it is the wish of the dying Jesus Christ that every suffering individual on earth could remain together with Mary, who is already closely united to him (Christ) on the cross, so that every form of suffering might be transformed into glory by the power of the Cross.



## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **THE CROSS AND THE HOUR OF GLORY**

**59.** On the cross of Calvary, Christ changed the meaning of suffering and sacrifice. In the Old Testament, the victims were different from the priests. The priests of the old covenant offered sheep and cattle to God. But in the New Testament, Christ offered himself to God. He united in his person both the priest and the victim. This is the apex of love. Moreover, the cross now becomes the most powerful revelation about the meaning of human suffering. Through his suffering and death, Jesus is glorified by his heavenly Father, he enters into the sanctuary of heaven where he intercedes for us, and he occupies his royal seat at the right hand of the Father. As we already observed when we unite our sufferings with Christ, it becomes a cross. Let us briefly examine some of the treasures which the cross of Christ has bequeathed to Christians and to the entire humanity.

#### **60. Jesus is the Answer to the Mystery of Suffering**

God offered a permanent solution to the mystery of suffering when he sent his beloved son to rescue humanity through his own suffering. Thus, Jesus has become an answer to the problem of human suffering. He took up the brutal suffering of the cross, endured it in his human nature but used his divine nature to turn all suffering into the path of glory and salvation. The prophet Isaiah described the suffering of Christ when he said; “For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground, he had no form of comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed” (Is. 53:2-5). This is how God chose it to be. God could have used another means to save the world if he wanted but he chose the death of his son. This is a mystery we cannot fully understand. It is the mystery of God’s love, for “God so loved the world that he gave his only son...” (Jn. 3:16).

#### **61. From Pains to the Hour of Glory**

There are people who think and probably believe too that Christ has suffered for us therefore, Christians must not suffer again. This is far from the truth. Suffering and pain are necessary part of human life here on earth. The death of Christ on the cross destroyed sin and death in such a way that the devil has no more power

over us. However, we still live in an imperfect world. Even though our human nature abhors and avoids suffering because of its pains and agonies, yet suffering is a necessary part of our imperfect world. Jesus having made the cross the path to his glory, invites all his followers to do the same. According to Bert Ghezzi, “Jesus did not only promise suffering, he made embracing it daily a requirement for all of his followers: “then he said to them all, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Bert Ghezzi, *The Sign of the Cross*, pg. 58).

We are familiar with the ancient wisdom which says; “No cross, No crown”. This proverb harbours a profound truth. Just as Christ did not achieve his glory without suffering on the cross, so no one can expect to achieve anything worthwhile without suffering.

Note that the hour of glory is not only futuristic, it is also constantly being realized in the here and now of each person’s individual life. As we carry our cross with the right attitude in the journey of life, God sends his encouragement, crown or glory from time to time before the ultimate hour of glory.

## **62. The Eucharist: Our Participation in the Cross of Christ**

The Holy Eucharist is the memorial of the Calvary event. Taking part in the Holy Eucharist particularly on Sundays, means entering and experiencing the victory of Christ on the cross. That the Eucharist is the memorial of the death and resurrection of Jesus is not an exaggeration, it is real. Pope Francis says that memorial here does not merely mean the recollection of past events but makes them in a certain way present and real. As in every Passover celebration, Israel understands that her liberation from Egypt and the Exodus event are made present, so does the Mass make present the memorial of Christ Passover, Christ ‘exodus’ which he carried out for us, to introduce us to the promised land of eternal life... It is making present what happened 20 centuries ago (cf. Pope Francis, Wednesday Audience, Nov. 22, 2017). The action of Jesus becomes a gift and a challenge to us in the celebration of the Eucharist. Jesus offered himself up to the Father so we are expected to offer ourselves to God and for the good of humanity. Jesus words “Do this in memory of me”, is an invitation and a directive to enter the suffering of Jesus through the breaking of ourselves, to discover his presence in our own suffering, and to be strengthened to assist others.

## **63. Discipleship: A Call to Self-Denial**

Whoever decides to follow Jesus has accepted the call to deny himself take up his cross and follow the Master. St. Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive; yet, it is no longer I, but Christ living in me. The life that I am now living, subject to the limitation of human nature, I am living in faith, faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20). Discipleship means self-denial, that is, dying to oneself so that Christ will live in us. Denying oneself does not come naturally to us due to our fallen nature. It is painful. It necessarily comes with its suffering. But when one dies to himself, no suffering will overwhelm him since he has given up everything, including his life, for the glory of God. He now walks in the footsteps of Christ.

#### **64. The Sign of the Cross**

The sign of the Cross is a Christian response to the mystery of human suffering. When we sign ourselves with the cross, it means we are open to the solution it proffers and the commitment it demands. The early Christians used the sign of the cross as an ancient weapon against suffering. It is a recognition and acceptance of what the Lord Jesus did at the cross of Calvary. B. Ghezzi rightly says, “making the sign of the cross proclaims our yes to this condition of discipleship. When we sign ourselves, we are ‘taking up our cross’ and accepting whatever suffering comes to us. With that ancient gesture, we are saying that we welcome our suffering in God’s terms. Though we would rather not endure pain, we are subordinating our wills to God, just as Jesus subordinated his will to his Father when he gave himself to the cross. So, tracing Christ’s cross over our bodies is a serious matter. We must never do it casually” (Bert Ghezzi, *The Sign of the Cross*, pg. 58).

Whenever we make the sign of the cross, we are in dialogue with God. The sign of the cross is a full prayer and a complete human act expressing communion and communication with God. According to B. Ghezzi, “making the sign of the cross invites the Lord to join us in our suffering...like the Psalmist who sought safety beneath the shadow of the Lord’s wings, we sign ourselves, seeking safety beneath the shadow of his arms extended on the cross (cf. Ps. 17:8; 36:7; 57:1; 61:4; 63:7). The Lord’s outstretched arms pledge that he understands our suffering and shares it with us” Bert Ghezzi, *The Sign of the Cross*, pg. 58).

## **CHAPTER NINE**

### **CONCLUSION**

**65.** It is a pity that many Christians are yet to realize that suffering is a path to success and glory. This explains why many people make vigorous efforts to avoid even the tiniest suffering that come their way. Some even believe the false teaching that since Christ has suffered for us, no Christian should suffer again.

However, it is always good to remember that suffering is part of human nature. Due to the fall of man, everyone becomes a partaker in the experience of suffering and pain. But suffering is also salvific. Accepting divine providence or living by the will of God entails the willingness to embrace the cross when it comes. Suffering when united with the sufferings of Christ becomes a cross and when carried with faith and love leads onto glory. Aversion to suffering is part of human nature but endurance of suffering and compassion for the sufferings of others is part of redeemed human nature. The journey to success is not easy, hence, a lot of people give up on the way. Those who withstand the sufferings on the journey of life achieve their dreams by becoming successful. The secret of successful people among other things includes the ability to embrace their sufferings with faith and walk to glory through it.

### **PRAYER**

**66.** O God, who willed that your only begotten Son should undergo the Cross to save the human race, grant, we pray, that we who have known his mystery on earth, may merit the grace of his redemption in heaven.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God forever and ever, Amen.

(From the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross)

**Given in Onitsha, at the Cathedral Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity, on  
22<sup>nd</sup> February, Ash Wednesday, in the year of our Lord 2023**

  
**MOST REV. VALERIAN M. OKEKE**  
Archbishop of Onitsha

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