

JOHN PAUL II



On the
**Christian
Meaning
of Human
Suffering**

ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

With Commentary by
Myles N. Sheehan, SJ, MD

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Preface:

Why? Why Does God Allow Suffering?

That is the question addressed in Saint John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*, on the meaning of salvific suffering. The title gives the key to the answer: suffering is part of our human history and is caught up with the meaning of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. As is common with the Holy Father's writing, the letter is lyrical, filled with faith and a profound understanding of the human condition. *Salvifici Doloris* (Salvific Suffering) addresses the question of suffering by using Christ's redemptive suffering as a lens to see the meaning of one's own distress, pain, and anguish.

Why are you reading this letter and commentary? I suspect that you too are wondering about the meaning of suffering, but readers may consider this question from a variety of personal perspectives and experiences. You may be reading to answer the question of suffering in your own life. Others may wonder about suffering not because of a particular problem they now face, but because of the questions that they know fill our world. I expect others are searching in the writings of John Paul II to deepen their faith. A few are reading this letter not as believers, but because they wonder

how this great teacher addresses a question that all of humanity feels.

Saint John Paul II wrote *Salvifici Doloris* as part of his contribution to the Holy Year of the Redemption in 1984. As we come to the thirtieth anniversary of its publication, the mystery of suffering remains a question and challenge for humanity. John Paul II was well acquainted with suffering. His mother died when he was a little boy. His father died early in World War II, leaving him without immediate family. He experienced the Nazi occupation of Poland and risked arrest and death for his artistic and religious activities, even while working at a quarry and later a chemical factory. Entering the seminary secretly, aware that the Nazi occupiers would arrest and likely kill him, Karol Wojtyla continued to know great suffering in his life as a priest and bishop in Poland. Educated in philosophy and theology, this young scholar taught and worked in a Poland that was under Communist rule and experienced both the suffering of the Polish people and persecution of the Church. In 1978, to the world's surprise, Karol Wojtyla was elected pope, succeeding John Paul I, who had died suddenly. Wojtyla was then Archbishop of Cracow and a prominent member of the Polish Church, well known for his thoughtful, peaceful, and strong resistance to the Communist rule of his country.

Suffering for John Paul II did not end with his election as Pope but accompanied him throughout his time as the Vicar of Christ. *Salvifici Doloris* was published three years after an assassination attempt nearly killed the Holy Father, resulting in serious wounds and a complicated recovery. It seems

obvious that this experience likely influenced him in writing this letter. The meditative and prayerful reflection suggests an author who has wrestled with the problem of suffering as a philosopher, theologian, priest, and, above all, as one who loves Christ and has experienced great suffering. The publication of *Salvifici Doloris* did not mark the end of John Paul II's suffering. Further problems included a broken hip due to a fall, a large though benign colon tumor, and, as many can remember, a long struggle with Parkinson's disease, which wreaked havoc with the once vigorous and athletic man. I was struck watching John Paul II on television during a 2003 Good Friday broadcast of the Stations of the Cross from the Roman Colosseum. The picture showed him vested and hunched over, holding his staff with the crucified Christ leaning out in agony, while the Holy Father himself was drooling and appeared almost frozen from the effects of Parkinson's disease. For a moment, I was repelled by the image and thought it was inappropriate for the Pope to be seen in such a state. Then I realized this was a profound image of the suffering this man endured with Christ and a remarkable icon of John Paul II's sharing in the Cross.

The Pope's reflections on suffering are especially important thirty years later. As I write these words, we in the United States are still reeling from horrible events that have filled the last years: September 11, 2001, and the death of nearly three thousand Americans; the resulting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with the loss not only of American lives but of many more people in those countries, including large numbers of innocent civilians; and more recently, terrible episodes of gun

violence. In 2012, America experienced senseless slaughter in a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, the massacre of peaceful worshippers in a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, and the horrible deaths of over twenty children and their teachers in an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut. In the wake of Newtown, people questioned how God could allow the deaths of these little children and the sacrifice of their teachers who died trying to protect them. And in my home town of Boston, a beautiful Marathon day was shattered by terror.

The public and well-known examples of suffering from war and violence occur against a backdrop of suffering that is as old as humanity. As part of my work as a Jesuit priest, I practiced medicine for a number of years, specializing in Internal Medicine and Geriatrics. I had a special interest in palliative care for my older patients. Working as a physician, I not only saw people suffering but also found myself grappling with many questions, just as my patients and their friends and families did. As a physician, I dealt with the need for medical and nursing care to alleviate physical pain and other symptoms. But what I often found more troubling was the mental anguish, the social disruption illness brings, and the very difficult, poignant question “Why has this happened to me?” As a priest, one of the hardest challenges was caring for people who did not have faith and who found themselves dispirited, demoralized, and seemingly without hope as they faced the end of their struggle with illness.

Salvifici Doloris is not an easy text to read. The Holy Father’s style, appropriate to such a weighty topic, reflects the depth of his knowledge of philosophy and theology, as well as his own

experience of human suffering. That does not mean the text is inaccessible. My suggestion, however, is that this text will not be fully appreciated simply by reading and study. Human reason cannot fully understand suffering. For some people, suffering has no reason; it is absurd and meaningless. They see the randomness of human suffering and the many bad things that happen to people as evidence that suffering and evil are part of a world where there is no God, where only physical and statistical laws govern life, and where attempts to explain suffering are foolish. Likewise, for many believers, attempts to explain suffering can seem callous and out of touch with reality, a topic that the Holy Father addresses. But the key to a full appreciation of *Salvifici Doloris* comes from the Holy Father's clear message that suffering is linked to mystery: the mystery of humanity, God, and the redemption brought by Christ. This text will require the reader's commitment to ponder, pray, and consider what appropriate actions to take in order to personally respond to the mystery of suffering.

In theology, mystery does not mean that a topic is inexplicable, but that reason will not fully penetrate the question and provide full understanding. The mystery of suffering can be considered rationally, as is obvious in reading John Paul II's apostolic letter, but it also requires an openness to God and the message of God to humanity, that is, revelation. Reading *Salvifici Doloris* carefully will lead to a greater level of understanding, but to grasp the full import of the Holy Father's words requires a prayerful approach. This leads the person to be open to God and to spend time in prayer, pondering the revelation of Scripture and tradition.

Salvifici Doloris has eight parts. Starting with a broad picture of human suffering, the text then moves to the nature of suffering, the lessons from Scripture, and then to a profound meditation on the meaning of salvific suffering as found in the death of Christ. Readers who do not share the Christian faith may not be convinced by John Paul II's exposition. But all who take the time to engage and wrestle with this text will be brought to a deep and profound reflection on human suffering in the light of faith. In reading the text, I would suggest that you approach it not as an expository argument, but as a text that is meant to engage you not just intellectually, but more importantly, spiritually. Read it prayerfully, take time to savor it, and keep close at hand a copy of the Bible so you can relish the message of John Paul II with all your heart and soul.

Topical Outline

Part I: Introduction (1–4)

Part II: The World of Human Suffering (5–8)

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APOSTOLIC LETTER OF THE
SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II

**On the Christian Meaning
of Human Suffering**

Salvifici Doloris

To the Bishops, to the Priests, to the Religious Families,
and to the Faithful of the Catholic Church

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

PART I

Introduction

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

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

2. The theme of suffering—precisely under the aspect of this salvific meaning—seems to fit profoundly into the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption as an extraordinary Jubilee of the Church. And this circumstance, too, clearly

favors the attention it deserves during this period. Independently of this fact, it is a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth: in a certain sense it coexists with him in the world, and thus demands to be constantly reconsidered. Even though Paul, in the Letter to the Romans, wrote that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now,”³ even though man knows and is close to the sufferings of the animal world, nevertheless what we express by the word “suffering” seems to be particularly *essential to the nature of man*. It is as deep as man himself, precisely because it manifests in its own way that depth which is proper to man, and in its own way surpasses it. Suffering seems to belong to man’s transcendence: it is one of those points in which man is in a certain sense “destined” to go beyond himself, and he is called to this in a mysterious way.

3. The theme of suffering in a special way demands to be faced in the context of the Holy Year of the Redemption, and this is so, in the first place, because the *redemption* was accomplished *through the cross of Christ*, that is, *through his suffering*. And at the same time, during the Holy Year of the Redemption we recall the truth expressed in the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*: in Christ “every man becomes the way for the Church.”⁴ It can be said that man in a special fashion becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life. This happens, as we know, at different moments in life, it takes place in different ways, it assumes different dimensions; nevertheless, in whatever form, suffering seems to be, and is, almost *inseparable from man’s earthly existence*.

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

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



PONDER

“Human suffering evokes *compassion*; it also evokes *respect*, and in its own way *it intimidates*” (SD 4). In his introduction, John Paul II situates the context from which he will address the meaning of suffering and how human suffering is part of our salvation in Christ. This letter was written for the Holy Year of Redemption in 1984, the 1,950th anniversary of Christ’s death. John Paul II wants to engage the reader from the perspective of faith but also in the depths of the heart. He describes how the cross of Christ, and Christ’s redemptive suffering, is at the heart of the meaning of suffering. Suffering is a universal human experience, part of what it means to be human. Suffering is more than a brute fact of human existence. One’s own experience opens a path to transcend personal suffering and follow Christ in the experience of his death and resurrection.

Suffering is a critical question for the Church. In the experience of humanity the Church finds the ongoing presence of Christ. This engagement of suffering and the people who follow Christ has been part of the Christian experience from the beginning. John Paul II presents the example of Saint Paul as a person who suffered greatly but found in it a way to live in the life of Christ. Paul dares to express joy in the suffering he experiences: in suffering he shares something with Christ on the cross, the One who brought us from death to eternal life. Paul’s experience is not simply the example of a remarkable apostle. John Paul II argues it is a path to the

deepest reality of what suffering means and how it uncovers an essential part of human nature.

1. When you consider suffering, what comes to mind? Do you think of your own experience, of the experience of someone you love, or are you struck by the widespread example of innocent suffering that seems so prevalent and so terrible? Is suffering a challenge to your faith?
2. John Paul II describes Saint Paul's example of suffering as a key to unlock the mystery that unites the suffering of the individual, the life of the Church, and the suffering experienced by Christ on the cross. Have you ever considered Paul's example of suffering? What do you know about Saint Paul's life and sufferings?
3. John Paul II views suffering as part of the mystery of humanity and an essential area for the Church to consider and address. Does your experience of the Church engage you in the deepest levels of who you are? How has that experience engaged you in your own suffering or in your own questions about the meaning of human suffering?
4. Some may have had experiences where suffering is presented in an exaggerated way that may have unhealthy aspects. Is this John Paul II's approach? How does your own experience—for example, what you have heard about suffering in homilies or been taught about it—influence your openness to what John Paul II is teaching?

PRAY

Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits), developed an approach to deepening one's life in Christ through reflection, meditation, and contemplation of the life of Christ, which he called the Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius begins the Spiritual Exercises with what he calls the Principle and Foundation. In it he describes our purpose in life, stating that all the things that happen to us in life are ways in which we can fulfill that purpose.

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls. The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in the pursuit of the end for which they are created. From this it follows that we ought to use these things to the extent that they help us toward our end, and free ourselves from them to the extent that they hinder us from it. To attain this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent from all created things, in regard to everything which is left to our own free will and is not forbidden. Consequently, on our own part we ought not to seek health rather than sickness, wealth rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one and so in all other matters. Rather, we ought to desire and choose only that which is more conducive to the end for which we are created.*

* George E. Ganss, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 32.

Ignatius makes several points: we are created for eternal life with God, and everything else that is created is meant to be considered as way to achieve that end. Our choices should not be based on what seems good or bad to us, but how we will best fulfill our destiny. Thus the things of life—health or sickness, wealth or poverty, a good reputation or dishonor, a long life or a short one—are not to be sought, but we should choose only what allows us to be filled with God’s life.

Spend some time in prayer thinking about this perspective. John Paul II presents suffering as a central part of the mystery of being human. Have a prayerful conversation with Jesus about your own suffering or your questions about suffering. Although no one would deliberately choose suffering, at times it cannot be avoided. Can you understand that this might be a path to God?

ACT

Pick up your Bible and read the first chapter of the Letter to the Colossians. Consider the context of Paul’s statements about “rejoicing in suffering,” which John Paul II uses to introduce this letter.

PART II

The World of Human Suffering

5. Even though in its subjective dimension, as a personal fact contained within man's concrete and unrepeatable interior, suffering seems almost inexpressible and not transferable, perhaps at the same time nothing else requires as much as does suffering, in *its "objective reality,"* to be dealt with, meditated upon, and conceived as an explicit problem; and that therefore basic questions be asked about it and the answers sought. It is evident that it is not a question here merely of giving a description of suffering. There are other criteria which go beyond the sphere of description, and which we must introduce when we wish to penetrate the world of human suffering.

Medicine, as the science and also the art of healing, discovers in the vast field of human sufferings *the best known area*, the one identified with greater precision and relatively more counterbalanced by the methods of "reaction" (that is, the methods of therapy). Nonetheless, this is only one area. The field of human suffering is much wider, more varied, and multi-dimensional. Man suffers in different ways, ways not

always considered by medicine, not even in *its* most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is *still wider* than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself. A certain idea of this problem comes to us from the distinction between physical suffering and moral suffering. This distinction is based upon the double dimension of the human being and indicates the bodily and spiritual element as the immediate or direct subject of suffering. 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, whereas *moral suffering* is “pain of the soul.” In fact, it is a *question of pain* of a spiritual nature, and not only of the “psychological” dimension of pain which accompanies both moral and physical suffering. The vastness and the many forms of moral suffering are certainly no less in number than the forms of physical suffering. But at the same time, moral suffering seems as it were less identified and less reachable by therapy.

6. Sacred Scripture is a *great book about suffering*. Let us quote from the books of the Old Testament a few examples of situations which bear the signs of suffering, and above all moral suffering: the danger of death,⁵ the death of one’s own children,⁶ and especially the death of the firstborn and only son;⁷ and then too, the lack of offspring,⁸ nostalgia for the homeland,⁹ persecution and hostility of the environment,¹⁰ mockery and scorn of the one who suffers,¹¹ loneliness and abandonment;¹² and again, the remorse of conscience,¹³ the difficulty of understanding why the wicked prosper and the

just suffer,¹⁴ the unfaithfulness and ingratitude of friends and neighbors;¹⁵ and finally, the misfortunes of one's own nation.¹⁶

In treating the human person as a *psychological and physical "whole,"* the Old Testament often links "moral" sufferings with the pain of specific parts of the body: the bones,¹⁷ kidneys,¹⁸ liver,¹⁹ viscera,²⁰ heart.²¹ In fact one cannot deny that moral sufferings have a "physical" or somatic element, and that they are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.

7. As we see from the examples quoted, we find in Sacred Scripture an extensive list of variously painful situations for man. This varied list certainly does not exhaust all that has been said and constantly repeated on the theme of suffering by *the book of the history of man* (this is rather an "unwritten book"), and even more by the book of the history of humanity, read through the history of every human individual.

It can be said that man suffers whenever *he experiences any kind of evil.* In *the vocabulary* of the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other. In fact, that vocabulary did not have a specific word to indicate "suffering." Thus it defined as "evil" everything that was suffering.²² Only the Greek language, and together with it the New Testament (and the Greek translations of the Old Testament), use the verb *πασχω* = "I am affected by . . . I experience a feeling, I suffer"; and, thanks to this verb, suffering is no longer directly identifiable with (objective) evil, but expresses a situation in which man experiences evil and in doing so becomes the subject of suffering. Suffering has indeed both *a subjective and a passive character* (from "*patior*"). Even when man brings suffering on

himself, when he is its cause, this suffering remains something passive in its metaphysical essence.

This does not, however, mean that suffering in the psychological sense is not marked by a *specific* “activity.” This is in fact that multiple and subjectively differentiated “activity” of pain, sadness, disappointment, discouragement, or even despair, according to the intensity of the suffering subject and his or her specific sensitivity. In the midst of what constitutes the psychological form of suffering there is always *an experience of evil*, which causes the individual to suffer.

Thus the reality of suffering prompts the question about the essence of evil: what is evil?

This question seems, in a certain sense, inseparable from the theme of suffering. The Christian response to it is different, for example, from the one given by certain cultural and religious traditions which hold that existence is an evil from which one needs to be liberated. Christianity proclaims the essential *good of existence* and the good of that which exists, acknowledges the goodness of the Creator and proclaims the good of creatures. Man suffers on account of evil, which is a certain lack, limitation or distortion of good. We could say that man suffers *because of a good* in which he does not share, from which in a certain sense he is cut off, or of which he has deprived himself. He particularly suffers when he “ought”—in the normal order of things—to have a share in this good and does not have it.

Thus, in the Christian view, the reality of suffering is explained through evil, which always, in some way, refers to a good.

8. In itself human suffering constitutes as it were a specific “world” which exists together with man, which appears in him and passes, and sometimes does not pass, but which consolidates itself and becomes deeply rooted in him. This world of suffering, divided into many, very many subjects, exists *as it were* “in dispersion.” Every individual, through personal suffering, constitutes not only a small part of that world,” but at the same time “that world” is present in him as a finite and unrepeatable entity. Parallel with this, however, is the interhuman and social dimension. 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*. We shall also try to follow this appeal in the present reflection.

Considering the world of suffering in its personal and at the same time collective meaning, one cannot fail to notice the fact that this world, at some periods of time and in some eras of human existence, *as it were becomes particularly concentrated*. This happens, for example, in cases of natural disasters, epidemics, catastrophes, upheavals and various social scourges: one thinks, for example, of a bad harvest and connected with it—or with various other causes—the scourge of famine.

One thinks, finally, of war. I speak of this in a particular way. I speak of the last two World Wars, the second of which brought with it a much greater harvest of death and a much

heavier burden of human sufferings. The second half of our century, in its turn, brings with it—as *though in proportion to the mistakes and transgressions* of our contemporary civilization—such a horrible threat of nuclear war that we cannot think of this period except in terms of *an incomparable accumulation of sufferings*, even to the possible self-destruction of humanity. In this way, that world of suffering which in brief has its subject in each human being, seems in our age to be transformed—perhaps more than at any other moment—into a special “world”: the world which as never before has been transformed by progress through man’s work and, at the same time, is as never before in danger because of man’s mistakes and offenses.



PONDER

Suffering is an experience that needs to be expressed, but the person suffering may find it impossible to describe. John Paul II notes how medicine seeks to alleviate the physical pain associated with suffering. In my medical practice, I would work hard to treat pain, but I found that my patients still suffered in ways that went beyond their physical problems. Suffering can be psychological, such as when people experience anxiety or depression. Suffering can have a social dimension when individuals find they are cut off from others, cannot find employment, or experience loneliness and isolation. A moral component can be part of suffering, when a person experiences anguish over actions that have caused others pain or left the person feeling ashamed and guilty. Closely related is spiritual suffering, when the person feels distant from God. In caring for patients, one of the hardest things I had to confront, both as a physician and as a priest, is the question “Why me?” This suffering of the spirit is at the core of human suffering when a person asks such questions as “Why has God allowed me to become ill?” “Am I being punished?” “Why has my life been turned upside down?” Throughout Scripture the theme of suffering is vividly expressed in visceral, even graphic terms. Human beings experience suffering as something that afflicts them. They are passive victims of their distress, even when they may have brought suffering upon themselves. And even in the passivity

of suffering, an active component of despair, depression, or disbelief brings persons to feel they are confronted with evil.

The nature and extent of suffering is an experience of evil, understood in its most basic form as an absence of some good we can reasonably expect from life. It might be the loss of a child to disease, the loss of security and income from unemployment, the loss of proper food and housing that can come from violence, famine, or social forces. All these human experiences can happen to any person. They make all of us susceptible to suffering and also call us to attend to the suffering of others. In our day, we face the prospect that suffering can be extended to all humanity whether through war or environmental catastrophe. In the face of this universal suffering, such as the pain of starving children, victims of violence, and other catastrophes, one can question the existence of God or find baffling the idea that God is good.

Although people suffer individually, it is also an experience shared by many. A bond forms among those who wait for chemotherapy or radiation, those who are displaced by a flood or other natural disaster, or those who are in the midst of war and conflict. A community of suffering links the refugee in Africa with the child in the midst of war, the person who battles a deep depression, and the man or woman who deals with a very difficult illness. Individual and collective suffering challenges all of us to respond in a way that shows our care for the person and for the world of those who suffer.

1. Thinking about your own experience of suffering, or your involvement in the suffering of a friend or family member, how would you describe the nature of that

person's suffering? Is it physical pain, psychological illness, addiction, or the effect of a natural disaster or war? Why does John Paul II describe suffering as an evil, something that turns us away from the good, found fully in God?

2. People who suffer often ask "Why me?" How have you faced this question or what would you say if someone posed this question to you?
3. Suffering evokes a response on the part of most all good people. What do you think are effective and ineffective responses, and why?

PRAY

Take a minute and make a list of the suffering that is present around you today. It might be in your own life or it might be a variety of events you heard about from various news sources. Now go to a quiet place and look at Christ on the cross. Bring to him the suffering you find in your own world and consider his suffering. How do you feel in this reflective prayer? Is there an emotion you experience? Share these feelings and emotions with Christ on the cross, and finish your prayer with the Anima Christi:

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

Good Jesus, hear me.

Within your wounds, hide me.
Separated from you, let me never be.
From the malignant enemy, defend me.
At the hour of death, call me.
And close to you, call me,
that with your saints I may praise you
for all eternity.

ACT

What are some concrete ways in which you can relieve the suffering of others?