

## ***When we have known suffering***

When we have known suffering in all shades of its most frightful forms, in the most varied kinds of anguish, and have stretched out our arms to God in mute, heart-rending supplication, uttering subdued cries for help; when we have drunk the chalice to the last drop and have offered to God, for days and years, our own cross mingled with his, which gives it divine value, then God has pity on us and welcomes us into union with him.

This is the moment in which, having experienced the unique value of suffering, having believed in the economy of the cross and seen its beneficial effects, God shows us in a new and higher way something that is worth even more than suffering. *It is love for others in the form of mercy*, the love that stretches our hearts and arms to embrace the wretched, the poor, those whom life has ravaged, repentant sinners.

It is a love that knows how to welcome back our neighbour who went astray, our friend, brother or a stranger, and pardons an infinite number of times. It is a love that rejoices more over one sinner who comes back than over a thousand of the just, and that puts intelligence and possessions at the service of God, so as to enable him to show the prodigal son the happiness caused by his return.

It is a love that does not measure and will not be measured.

It is charity in bloom, which is more abundant, more universal, and more down to earth than the charity the soul had before. Indeed, it senses within itself the birth of feelings similar to those of Jesus, and it notices coming to its lips with reference to all those it meets, the divine words: "I have compassion for the crowd" (Mt 15:32). It starts conversations with sinners who draw near, because it has a certain likeness to Christ, such as those conversations Jesus once had with Mary Magdalene, with the Samaritan woman, or with the adulteress.

Mercy is the ultimate expression of charity, and is that which fulfils it. Charity surpasses suffering, for suffering belongs to this life alone, whereas love continues also to the next. God prefers mercy to sacrifice.