

May 16, 1980

- *Viewing suffering as a blessing*
- *The failed rescue of hostages in Iran*

The light of God penetrates each of your souls, washing them with God's purity and cleansing all that in any way tarnishes their existence. All of us rejoice at being together again to work with you, also formed as a group.

There is a matter which is a part of each of your lives at this time. For some it is nearly concluded, for others you are in its midst, and for others you find yourselves only becoming more aware of its impact. That matter, that substance, is suffering. Each of you has been touched in some way recently by suffering, either your own or the suffering of others who are close to you. There is very little understanding in your world of suffering. There is much awareness but little understanding. What God wishes us to deal with at this time is to impart some knowledge to the application of suffering at all levels in human life.

You have heard it said that pain is a part of life, and many are they who have asked, "Why suffer?" Great effort and expense and time are exerted to eliminate or alleviate the reality of pain, whether it be emotional or physical. It is in God's design that pain will never be totally removed from human life. This may seem harsh or cruel or in some manner evil, but in reality it is a measure of God's love, and when viewed properly may even be considered a blessing. We do not expect for you to fully accept this statement without question. It is difficult to accept the fact that pain is a blessing, but it is true. If it were evil, God would eventually banish it from existence.

If you accept that pain, that suffering is indeed inevitable, then you can more readily turn your attention to how you can approach suffering. There is an agony which is not experienced within but which is shared with another. An example in which each of you felt some pain or remorse, a hurting, was your first experiencing of the unsuccessful rescue attempt in Iran. This was not a physical pain for you, but each felt a loss and difficulty in accepting the finality of what happened. In some ways, this kind of suffering is less difficult to tolerate than the physical suffering which each of you experiences from time to time.

How was the disappointment in Iran a blessing, for men were killed and much ground was lost to all appearances? It was a blessing for a number of reasons. To a significant degree, although there was much disagreement concerning the wisdom of the effort, it tended to unify many who share disparate viewpoints. It focused attention on the need for courage in living, the need for being decisive, the need for risking oneself for the benefit of another. Isn't this what love is: putting another before oneself? Certainly the leaders responsible for the rescue effort were thinking of other objectives besides simply the rescue of their countrymen, but were it not for the hostage situation and an understanding of the severity of the matter, the effort, though risky, would never

May 16, 1980

have been made. The fact is that the suffering of others prompted in many the urgency for action and sacrifice.

It was also a blessing because it graphically illustrated the interrelationships which exist throughout the world, even between peoples whose government, whose religion, whose lives are totally dissimilar. The tragedy was certainly poignant in the loss of those in the mission and was spread to the families of all involved, including the families of the hostages. Their loss is great and their grief a tremendous burden. It is difficult for them to see God's hand in the events which took place. It is easier for others more distant to accept God as a partner in the crisis.

Each of you, when you experience a personal loss or physical suffering, feels as removed from God's presence as the families of those who were lost in Iran. In order to re-establish your sensitivity to God's guidance and protection, you must try to remove yourself, to elevate yourself from the situation. You must center on the knowledge that what you are experiencing, the remorse you feel, is not insignificant but is in God's plan. As a result of your experience you do grow spiritually. You have the capacity to strengthen your faith. You have the capacity to view God in terms of God's potential and not merely view the present situation.

We have often stated that prayer is of the highest importance in reaching out to help another in agony, but prayer should not merely be for an immediate cessation of suffering but rather for the capacity for growth out of the experience. This growth may feed on increasing tolerance, on a developing sense of patience, on the ability to remove oneself from the situation. All of these are steps in the process of growth.

The suffering of others, the suffering which you experience, need not be a road block or weight which pulls you steadily down. It can be an opportunity for encouraging you to look upward and see God. The suffering, the pain of others, therefore, is a blessing. It is a blessing in its challenge and potential for others to grow, and it is a blessing in its challenge and its potential for your growth. Such growth is necessary to your souls and can only be achieved in your lives on earth. It cannot be taught in principle, but can only be experienced again and again. The repetition of this experience is essential, for growth does not occur after a single experience of distress or suffering. It grows in small steps by being led through such trials as are part of your lives.

Certainly, we do not expect you to rejoice at your suffering or another's. That is not practical and it belittles its importance to your lives, but God instructs you to accept suffering because of its potential for growth, because of its challenge for prayer, for reaching out to others in need and to God. Be sensitive to the feelings of others, for their suffering is often not visible but is every bit as real. Be sensitive to their needs. Be aware of changes in the behavior of others which may be an indication of needs to be met. Explore your capacity to reach out to help others and explore your willingness to seek God's purpose in your own experience. This is a life-long process and it is

May 16, 1980

important. Suffering is a blessing and therefore, accept it and recognize God's presence in it. It is not God who causes suffering, but it is God who permits it, and it is God who gives each of you the strength, the commitment, and the ability to grow.

Surround all whom you know are suffering with your prayers for their strength and their acceptance by asking God to give them a peace of mind. You will be in a very real way providing the comfort which they so desperately need.

God blesses each of you. God is with you in your rejoicing. God is with you in your agonies, and God calls for each of you to look up and to find God throughout your life. God's light is all around. Open your eyes, open your souls and let God's light continue to wash through you and refresh you and give you courage to persevere.

Amen.