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## A Christian in the Face of Suffering in the Light of Pope Francis' Teaching

### Introduction

Among many subjects Pope Francis covers in public speaking, complex issues, such as the problem of suffering can be found. On Sunday of the Lord's Resurrection 2017, the Holy Father withdrew from the papal ceremony, which – due to the message of the Bishop of Rome for the city and the world on that day – does not provide for the Easter homily during the Holy Mass, and gave an improvised reflection. In his oration, he spoke aloud the questions that people often ask themselves, “If the Lord is risen, why do such things happen? Why are there so many misfortunes, illnesses, human trafficking, so many wars, destruction, mutilation, revenge and hatred? Where is the Lord?”<sup>2</sup> The Pope emphasized the question about suffering, giving an existential example and said,

Yesterday I called a seriously ill boy, an enlightened man, an engineer and, talking to him to give a sign of faith, I told him, “there is no explanation for what is happening to you; look at Jesus on the cross, God did it with His son and there is no excuse” –

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<sup>2</sup> Translation into Polish: *Papież o tym, dlaczego na świecie jest tyle cierpienia*, <https://deon.pl/kosciol/serwis-papieski/papiez-o-tym-dlaczego-na-swiecie-jest-tyle-cierpienia,434807> (01.03.2022). See: Francesco, *Domenica di Pasqua nella Risurrezione del Signore. Santa messa del giorno. Omelia*, Piazza San Pietro, Domenica di Pasqua, 16 aprile 2017, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco\\_20170416\\_omelia-pasqua.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2017/documents/papa-francesco_20170416_omelia-pasqua.html) [accessed: 1.3.2022].

And he answered me, “Yes, but He asked the Son who consented. And I was not asked if I wanted it”. And that touches us.<sup>3</sup>

Suffering in the teaching of Pope Francis appears to be an inseparable companion of life as “no one is free from suffering, pain and incomprehension.”<sup>4</sup> It is therefore worth asking questions about how the current pope describes the causes of suffering, what dimensions he sees and what attitude towards suffering he proposes to Christ’s disciples. In search of answers to these questions, which at the same time determine the structure of this study, all encyclicals, exhortations and apostolic letters were examined, and – to a limited extent – other apostolic statements made available by the Holy See on its official website. The limitation of the main sources to encyclicals, exhortations and apostolic letters is conditioned by the boundaries of the publication.

## 1. Reasons for suffering

Francis does not search for an answer to the question about the meaning of suffering, as if he was not interested in the problem of the origin of this phenomenon in the world, but often talks about immediate reasons for human suffering. In addressing the Christians of the Middle East, the Pope noted that the root of their suffering was lack of peace.<sup>5</sup> On other occasions, he also mentions other sources of suffering, such as malnutrition, unemployment, and social exclusion, which may lead to crime and the recruitment of terrorists.<sup>6</sup> The Pope draws attention to suffering of poor societies, whose “screams have faded and died out because of the indifference of rich nations.”<sup>7</sup> The problem of the social dimensions of suffer-

<sup>3</sup> Translation into Polish: *Papież...*

<sup>4</sup> Franciszek, *List apostolski na zakończenie nadzwyczajnego Jubileuszu Miłosierdzia „Misericordia et misera”*, Rzym, 20 listopada 2016 r., [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap\\_20161120\\_misericordia-et-misera.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco-lettera-ap_20161120_misericordia-et-misera.html) [accessed: 5.3.2022], no. 13 (later: MM).

<sup>5</sup> See: Franciszek, *List do chrześcijan na Bliskim Wschodzie z okazji świąt Bożego Narodzenia*, Watykan, 21 grudnia 2014 r., [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141221\\_lettera-cristiani-medio-oriente.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141221_lettera-cristiani-medio-oriente.html) [accessed: 28.2.2022].

<sup>6</sup> Francis, *Letter to the Prime Minister of Australia on the occasion of the G20 Summit* (Brisbane, 15–16 November 2014), Vatican, 6 November 2014, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco\\_20141106\\_lettera-abbott-g20.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20141106_lettera-abbott-g20.html) [accessed: 1.3.2022], said, “there are far too many women and men suffering from severe malnutrition, a rise in the number of the unemployed, an extremely high percentage of young people without work and an increase in social exclusion which can lead to criminal activity and even the recruitment of terrorists.”

<sup>7</sup> Franciszek, *List apostolski „Misericordiae vultus”*, Rzym, 11 kwietnia 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html#\\_ftnref7](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html#_ftnref7) [accessed: 8.3.2022] (later: MV).

ing was very clearly taken up by Francis in his reflection on the Amazon.<sup>8</sup> After Paul VI, the Pope of Argentina notes that “peoples hit by poverty suffer even greater poverty, while those who have everything grow into new riches.”<sup>9</sup> The Holy Father also points to the ‘provisional institutional system’ that functions in some countries as the source of suffering.<sup>10</sup> The document devoted to South America also presents the global dimension of suffering, the sources of which are the arming and technicization of people’s lives, as well as consumerism. In order to illustrate the essence of this suffering, Francis uses lyrical language, quoting the twentieth-century Brazilian poet Vinicius de Moraes (1913–1980),

The world suffers from turning feet into rubber, legs into skin, bodies into cloth and heads into steel [...]. The world suffers from turning a shovel into a rifle, a plow into a tank, an image of a sower, throwing grain at a robot with its flamethrower, from the sowing of which deserts are born. Only poetry, with the humility of its voice, can save this world.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear to Francis that the cause of much suffering is injustice, manifested in the fact that “many [...] watch helplessly as others alternately share the cake of life”.<sup>12</sup> The Pope also notices the emerging “new forms of slavery,”<sup>13</sup> to which children are often condemned because of illiteracy, which prevents them from getting an education.

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<sup>8</sup> See: Franciszek, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska „Querida Amazonia”*, Rzym, 2 lutego 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20200202\\_querida-amazonia.html#\\_ftnref8](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20200202_querida-amazonia.html#_ftnref8) [accessed: 8.3.2022], (later: QA).

<sup>9</sup> QA 13. See also: Paul VI, *Encyclical on the development of peoples “Populorum progressio”*, Rome, March 26, 1967, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html) [accessed: 8.3.2022], no. 57.

<sup>10</sup> Franciszek, *Encyklika poświęcona trosce o wspólny dom „Laudato si”*, Rzym, 24 maja 2015, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html) [accessed: 14.3.2022], no. 142 (later: LS); QA 23.

<sup>11</sup> QA 46. See also: V. De Moraes, *Para vivir un gran amor*, Buenos Aires 2013, p. 166.

<sup>12</sup> Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostolska o powołaniu do świętości w świecie współczesnym „Gaudete et exsultate”*, Rzym, 19 marca 2018, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20180319\\_gaudete-et-exsultate.html#\\_ftnref36](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20180319_gaudete-et-exsultate.html#_ftnref36) [accessed: 10.3.2022], no. 78 (later: GE). See also: Franciszek, *Adhortacja apostolska o głoszeniu Ewangelii we współczesnym świecie „Evangelii gaudium”*, Rzym, 24 listopada 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html) [accessed: 14.3.2022], no. 191 (later: EG); Franciszek, *Encyklika o braterstwie i przyjaźni społecznej „Fratelli tutti”*, Asyż, 3 października 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201003\\_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html) [accessed: 14.3.2022], no. 189 (later: FT).

<sup>13</sup> MM 18.

Describing the causes of suffering, Francis does not limit his reflection to the social dimension. In his letter at the end of the Jubilee of Mercy, the Pope states that “much pain can be caused by a bitter word that is the fruit of hostility, jealousy and anger! How much suffering is caused by the experience of betrayal, violence and abandonment; how much bitterness in the face of the death of loved ones!”<sup>14</sup> The cause of suffering is also the judgment of other people, accompanied by “conceited knowledge of everything”<sup>15</sup>

Suffering affects people of all ages. Addressing his words to the youth, the Pope noted that among young people there are those who “suffer from the consequences of exclusion and rejection”,<sup>16</sup> which occur “for religious, ethnic or economic reasons”.<sup>17</sup> The Pope also pointed out that the breakdown of family life is very painful for young people, and that separations, divorces, other relationships and single-parent families may “cause great suffering and identity crises in young people. Sometimes they have to take on responsibilities that are not proportional to their age and force them to become adults prematurely”.<sup>18</sup> In the context of the suffering of young people, the Pope also speaks of the scourge of abortion, HIV, drug addiction, gambling and pornography.<sup>19</sup> He also touched upon the problem of suffering caused by the abuse of some clergy and laity. Francis noted that suffering of those who have been wronged “can last a lifetime”.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, in our time – as Francis notes – there are still hunger and thirst, lack of work and peace,<sup>21</sup> human trafficking, a prostitution network and the use of children for begging.<sup>22</sup> It is these specific shortcomings that cause migration to a foreign country.<sup>23</sup> Many people also suffer from disease.<sup>24</sup> Prisoners often suffer from “inhumane living conditions”.<sup>25</sup> Spouses often suffer as their source

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<sup>14</sup> MM 13. See also: Franciszek, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska o miłości w rodzinie „Amoris laetitia”*, Rzym, 19 marca 2016, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia.html) [accessed: 13.3.2022], no. 253 (later: AL).

<sup>15</sup> MV.

<sup>16</sup> Franciszek, *Posynodalna adhortacja apostolska do młodych i całego ludu Bożego „Christus vivit”*, Loreto, 25 marca 2019, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20190325\\_christus-vivit.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) [accessed: 8.3.2022], no. 69 (later: ChV).

<sup>17</sup> ChV 74.

<sup>18</sup> ChV 262. See also: AL 242, 246.

<sup>19</sup> Zob. ChV 74. See also: AL 51.

<sup>20</sup> ChV 95.

<sup>21</sup> See: EG 53; FT 189; MM 18; LS 28.

<sup>22</sup> See: FT 38; EG 211.

<sup>23</sup> See: FT 38; MM 18; AL 25, 44; EG 210.

<sup>24</sup> See: MM 18; AL 44.

<sup>25</sup> MM 18.

of difficult experiences is their sexuality<sup>26</sup> or the inability to conceive.<sup>27</sup> Nature, destroyed by man, also suffers.<sup>28</sup>

The Bishop of Rome, reflecting on the cause of many human sufferings, sees their source primarily in man himself. It is man who causes suffering for himself and for others.

## 2. The multidimensionality of suffering

Human suffering allows us to see that man is not only a corporeal but also a spiritual being. Man suffers in his body, but he also suffers in his soul no less. The Holy Father repeatedly shows human misfortunes and physical suffering in order to touch the consciences of those who can help their suffering neighbors. However, Francis sees very clearly the spiritual value of suffering connected with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, thanks to which it can bear “the fruits of good”.<sup>29</sup>

Experience shows that the prospect of suffering can make a person fearful. The Pope notices this by pointing to Jesus who Himself “experienced fear in the face of suffering”.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the Holy Father proposes to look at this kind of fear first of all in the Gospel key. Since Jesus accepts this experience, man can go through it with him. Experiencing fear without God deepens the drama of human suffering. Therefore, according to Francis, the greatest human poverty and dimension of suffering is the situation in which God “remains a stranger”.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the postulate of evangelization is still valid, although suffering has also been written into its process as both the hearers and the chaplains “suffer many times, some when listening, others proclaiming the word”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See: AL 154. Recalling the teachings of Paul VI, Pope Francis notes that “in marriage, sexuality can become a source of suffering and manipulation. Therefore, it must be clearly emphasized that «sexual intercourse imposed on a spouse without taking into account his/her condition and with his/her well-founded wishes, is not a true act of love and therefore, goes against what the moral order rightly demands in the mutual relationship between spouses»” (ibid.). See also: Paul VI, *Encyclical Letter on the Regulation of Birth “Humanae vitae”*, Rome, July 25, 1968, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_25071968\\_humanae-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_25071968_humanae-vitae.html) [accessed: 14.3.2022], no. 13.

<sup>27</sup> See: AL 178.

<sup>28</sup> See: AL 26. Pope Francis talks extensively about the dangers looming on our planet in LS.

<sup>29</sup> Franciszek, *List do chrześcijan...*, states outright, “I am asking God that so much suffering, connected with the Lord’s cross, may bring fruit of good for the Church and for the peoples of the Middle East.”

<sup>30</sup> ChV 31.

<sup>31</sup> MM 18. See also: EG 200.

<sup>32</sup> EG 135.

A significant manifestation of suffering is – as the Bishop of Rome notes – persecution for the faith. The Pope recalls that “when the New Testament speaks of the sufferings to be made for the Gospel, it is precisely persecution (cf. Acts 5:41; Phil 1:29; Col 1:24; 2 Tim 1:12; 1 Pt 2:20; 4:14–16; Rev 2:10)”.<sup>33</sup> However, Francis makes an important distinction between suffering that cannot be avoided and the one which becomes the reaction of other people to being mistreated by Christ’s disciples who succumb to vanity, have a negative attitude towards others, cultivate resentment, are eccentric and distant from others.<sup>34</sup> The apostles – as the Pope notes – were not like that, “The Book of Acts tells us emphatically that they enjoyed the sympathy of a l l p e o p l e (Acts 2:47, cf. 4:21.33, 5:13), while some authorities harassed and persecuted them (cf. 4:1–3; 5:17–18)”.<sup>35</sup> Suffering caused by persecution can have many faces, from bloody persecution to slander, mockery and falsehood aimed at deprecating Christians and their faith.<sup>36</sup> In his Christmas letter to Christians living in the Middle East, Pope Francis noted that suffering endured for believing in Christ is a special element that unites the faithful of the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Holy Father called their sacrifice “the ecumenism of blood”.<sup>37</sup> Enduring persecution because of faith in Christ shows not only the physical and spiritual dimensions of suffering, but also its soteriological dimension, in line with the words of St. Paul, “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and for my part, in my body, I complete the deficiencies of Christ’s sufferings for the good of His Body, which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24).

### 3. The Christian’s answer to the problem of suffering

The Pope points out that the way to reduce suffering in places where innocent blood is shed is to conduct humanitarian actions, negotiations and diplomatic work.<sup>38</sup> He loudly calls for an end to deadly wars.<sup>39</sup> He also calls for Christians not to succumb to indifference and cynicism, but to promote an attitude of friendship

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<sup>33</sup> GE 92.

<sup>34</sup> See: GE 93.

<sup>35</sup> GE no. 93.

<sup>36</sup> See: GE 94.

<sup>37</sup> Franciszek, *List do chrześcijan...*

<sup>38</sup> See: *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> See for example: Franciszek, *Anioli Pański*, 27 lutego 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/angelus/2022/documents/20220227-angelus.html> [accessed: 14.3.2022]; Franciszek, *Anioli Pański*, 6 marca 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/angelus/2022/documents/20220306-angelus.html> [accessed: 14.3.2022]; Francesco, *Angelus*, 13 marzo 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/angelus/2022/documents/20220313-angelus.html> [accessed: 14.3.2022].

and brotherhood with the poor, whose cry they should undertake themselves.<sup>40</sup> The Pope also sensitizes politicians to the presence of “preferential love for the smallest”,<sup>41</sup> that is, those who suffer from poverty and other limitations. However, the most important thing for a suffering man is to open up to God, who “is where we thought that He had left us and that there is no salvation of any kind. It is a paradox, but suffering and darkness have become for many Christians [...] a place of meeting with God”.<sup>42</sup> For the Holy Father, it is extremely important to help people discover the spiritual value of suffering, which is experienced in communion with the suffering Christ. By humbly accepting difficult experiences, a person can follow the path of holiness.<sup>43</sup> Suffering can become “an act of love, putting oneself in the hands of God who does not abandon us, and thus it can be a stage in the growth of faith and love”.<sup>44</sup>

In a letter to consecrated persons, Pope Bergoglio recalled the need to experience suffering together with Jesus who, out of love for us, accepted the cross. Such orientation in the life of the religious protects them from sadness, which is something undesirable in the way of following Christ since “following a sad imitation is a pitiful imitation”.<sup>45</sup> Such a bold expression might seem to be devoid of empathy towards consecrated persons who are suffering, for example, because of a somatic or mental illness. The Pope, however, seems to be far from stigmatizing those who suffer and reveal their suffering, despite following the path of the evangelical counsels. Indeed, he asks bishops to accompany suffering consecrated persons in their dioceses “with tenderness and love”.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>40</sup> MV. See also: EG 187–199.

<sup>41</sup> FT 187.

<sup>42</sup> ChV 149.

<sup>43</sup> Francis states that “humility can take root in the heart only through humiliation. Without them, there is neither humility nor holiness. If you are unable to bear and offer up some humiliation, you are not humble and you are not following the path of holiness. The holiness that God bestows on His Church comes through the humiliation of His Son: this is the way. Humiliation leads you to become like Jesus, it is an inevitable part of following Jesus Christ: Christ also suffered for you and left you an example to follow in His footsteps” (1 Pt 2:21). He, in turn, shows the humility of the Father who humbles Himself to go with His people, enduring their infidelity and murmuring (cf. Ex 34:6–9; Wis 11:23–12:2; Lk 6:36). For this reason the Apostles, after humiliation, “withdrew from before the Sanhedrin and rejoiced that they had become worthy to suffer for [Jesus’ name] (Acts 5:41)” (GE 118).

<sup>44</sup> Franciszek, *Encyklika o wierze „Lumen fidei”*, Rzym, 29 czerwca 2013, [https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130629\\_enciclica-lumen-fidei\\_pl.pdf](https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20130629_enciclica-lumen-fidei_pl.pdf) [accessed: 10.3.2022], no. 56.

<sup>45</sup> Franciszek, *Świadkowie radości. List apostolski do zakonnic i zakonników na rozpoczęcie Roku Życia Konsekrowanego*, Watykan, 21 listopada 2014 r., II, 1, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_lettera-ap\\_20141121\\_lettera-consacрати.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacрати.html) [accessed: 8.3.2022].

<sup>46</sup> Franciszek, *Świadkowie radości...*

The Pope from Argentina, speaking of suffering of those who – like biblical Israel in the past – are immersed in pain, indicates a special way of overcoming suffering and exclaims, “Let us never allow ourselves to be robbed of the hope that comes from faith in the risen Lord. It is true that we are often put to the test, but we can never fail to be sure that the Lord loves us”.<sup>47</sup> Francis points out that Jesus’ mercy is manifested through closeness and tenderness of other people, especially when we are living in times of sorrow. In this reflection of the Pope, the therapeutic dimension of community life is very clearly marked, which allows a person suffering from spiritual suffering to emerge from the “circle of loneliness” as soon as someone else stands nearby to “wipe their tears”.<sup>48</sup> As an example of standing close to a suffering person, the Pope indicated the wanderer in Jesus’ parable of the Merciful Samaritan<sup>49</sup> and Mary, who “was able to accompany her Son in pain, [...] support Him with her gaze and protect Him with her heart. In pain which she suffered but which did not break her. She was a strong woman who said «yes», who supports and accompanies, protects and welcomes”.<sup>50</sup> It is thanks to this attitude that Mary, who – as the Pope vividly says – “did not take out life insurance”,<sup>51</sup> became “God’s influencer”.<sup>52</sup> The Pope also perceives this maternal closeness in the Church itself, which, as a mother, suffers seeing the children suffer. Mother Church cannot adopt a different attitude because ‘who cannot cry is not a mother’.<sup>53</sup> Francis even states that “the ability to cry with others is holiness”.<sup>54</sup> This emotional stopping in the face of the tragedy of another human being is necessary in life. Jesus Himself adopts this attitude – as Francesco teaches – in the face of human suffering.<sup>55</sup> The Pope expresses his earnest desire that young people also do not become indifferent, but that they know how to weep over the misfortune of their neighbours.<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, however, as the Bishop of Rome argues, not everything ends in this life. After all, we are going to the feast

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<sup>47</sup> MM 13.

<sup>48</sup> MM 1.

<sup>49</sup> FT 56–83.

<sup>50</sup> ChV 45.

<sup>51</sup> ChV 44.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> ChV 75.

<sup>54</sup> GE 76.

<sup>55</sup> See: AL 144.

<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis addresses young people directly, “I encourage everyone to ask themselves the question: have I learned to cry – when I see a hungry child, a child stunned by drugs in the street, a homeless child, an abandoned child, a child abused, a child slave to society? Or am I crying like a capricious person who would like more? Try to learn to cry for young people who are worse off than you. Mercy and compassion are also expressed by crying. If you are not concerned, pray to the Lord to give you the ability to shed tears over the suffering of others. When you learn to cry, only then will you be able to do something for others from the bottom of your heart” (ChV 76).



in heaven, where God Himself will wipe our tears (cf. Rev 21:4) and “reap what we have done for those who suffer”.<sup>57</sup> God’s attitude is completely different from that of the modern world, which “does not want to cry: prefers to ignore painful situations, mask them, hide them”.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, suffering cannot be overlooked, just as it cannot be avoided. It is an inseparable companion of human life.

Francis uses a very pictorial language to emphasize the importance of standing next to the suffering person and, as it were, to touch “the suffering body of Christ in people”.<sup>59</sup> The mere presence of another person seems to have a soothing effect on the one who suffers. In this way, it is God Himself who proves that “it is never far away when we experience [...] tragedies. A reassuring word, a hug that makes you feel understood, tenderness to see love, prayer to be stronger [...] – all this is an expression of God’s closeness through the comfort of the brothers”.<sup>60</sup> It is not always necessary to look for words of comfort. Sometimes you will not find them. They are not needed in every situation since “silence belongs to our comforting language as it turns into practical work of sharing and participating in the suffering of our brother”.<sup>61</sup> It might seem that silence in the face of suffering is an expression of resignation, surrender, inability to come even with a word of consolation. Meanwhile – as Franciszek notices – in such a silent presence in front of the suffering person, strength and love are revealed.<sup>62</sup>

A special challenge for man is suffering caused by awareness of the necessity of death. It is obvious for the Pope that one cannot look at the drama of dying except through the prism of Jesus’ Resurrection.<sup>63</sup> The Pope rightly notices that contemporary culture cannot cope with the problem of death, and therefore makes it taboo or downplays it to the point of making death a mere fiction. However, the avoidant attitude does not bring relief even for a moment. Francis is a promoter of a realistic approach to the issue of dying, therefore he postulates, “Death must be faced [...] and prepared for as a painful and inevitable but meaningful passage: this final act of love towards people we leave and towards God who we are going to meet”.<sup>64</sup> The Holy Father therefore proposes a return to renewal among Catholics *ars bene moriendi* as a way to face the prospect of one’s own death in a good, mature and peaceful manner. However, death is a painful experience not only for those who leave the world, but also for those who remain in the world

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<sup>57</sup> QA 109. See also: AL 22.

<sup>58</sup> GE 75.

<sup>59</sup> EG 24. See also: EG 270; Franciszek, *Aniol Pański*, 20 lutego 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/pl/angelus/2022/documents/20220220-angelus.html> [accessed: 14.3.2022].

<sup>60</sup> MM 13.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> See: *ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> See: MM 15.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

feeling abandoned by a loved one.<sup>65</sup> According to the Pope, it is the task of pastors to show those who are mourning how much God reveals His mercy through liturgical signs and prayers.<sup>66</sup>

The Pope also draws attention to the importance of works of mercy in looking for a Christian answer to the problem of suffering. All believers are called to promote the “culture of mercy”. It can be described as culture where no one is indifferent to the suffering of others.<sup>67</sup> It is formed “in persevering prayer, in obedient openness to the action of the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge of the lives of the saints and in concrete closeness to the poor”.<sup>68</sup> Mercy should be practiced in a spirit of faith since Jesus Christ chose to identify Himself with every suffering person: the hungry, the naked, the sick and the prisoners (see Mt 25:35–40). The Pope recalls this gospel principle, among others in his reflection at the end of the Year of Mercy.<sup>69</sup> It also shows Jesus’ relationship to suffering people as imbued with compassion and mercy.<sup>70</sup> In his teaching on mercy, the Pope refers to the encyclical of John Paul II *Dives in Misericordia* and recalls, following his holy predecessor, that “the Church lives its authentic life when it confesses and proclaims mercy – the greatest quality of the Creator and Redeemer – and when it brings people closer to the Savior’s fountains of mercy, of which it is the depositary and minister”.<sup>71</sup> Ultimately, therefore, the attitude that a Christian should adopt towards suffering of his/her fellow man is the attitude of mercy.

## Chrześcijanin wobec cierpienia w świetle nauczania papieża Franciszka

### Streszczenie

W artykule zostało postawione pytanie o nauczanie papieża Franciszka na temat cierpienia i postaw, jakie powinien wobec niego przyjąć uczeń Chrystusa. Głównymi źródłami, które zostały przebadane, są encykliki, adhortacje i listy apostolskie Franciszka. Dokumenty papieskie nie tyle podejmują temat sensu cierpienia, ile raczej ukazują różne jego wymiary i sposoby zaradzania konkretnym jego przejawom.

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<sup>65</sup> See: AL 255.

<sup>66</sup> See: MM 15.

<sup>67</sup> See: MM 20.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> See: *ibid.* See also: ChV 299.

<sup>70</sup> See: MV.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. See also: Jan Paweł II, *Encyklika o Bożym Miłosierdziu „Dives in misericordia”*, Rzym, 30 listopada 1980, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_30111980\\_dives-in-misericordia.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/pl/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30111980_dives-in-misericordia.html) [accessed: 8.3.2022], no. 2.

**Słowa kluczowe**

papież Franciszek, cierpienie, chrześcijanin wobec cierpienia

**Keywords**

Pope Francis, suffering, a Christian in the face of suffering

**Abbreviations**

AL	<i>Amoris laetitia</i>
ChV	<i>Christus vivit</i>
EG	<i>Evangelii gaudium</i>
FT	<i>Fratelli tutti</i>
GE	<i>Gaudete et exsultate</i>
LS	<i>Laudato si'</i>
MM	<i>Misericordia et misera</i>
MV	<i>Misericordiae vultus</i>
QA	<i>Querida Amazonia</i>

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