

# *Action versus Suffering*

All our experiences, without exception, can be divided into two modes: the active mode, which we experience by doing things, and the passive mode, in which we endure or enjoy things that are done to us by others.

We can become unbalanced in our experience, by neglecting one or other of these modes of being. Our usual fault is that we become obsessed with activity. We don't believe we are really alive unless we are bustling about, changing things, causing things to happen, using power, making noise, setting the world on fire, and making other people jump, take pictures of us, and talk about us.

When we do this, we can create a lot of damage for others. What happens to us is also very regrettable. We lose touch with reality, being obsessed with controlling and changing it. We forget what we really are, lose touch with our limitations, and begin to distort the truth. We get delusions about what is due to us and what we can achieve. Then we lose touch with others, seeing them merely as tools of our policies and pawns in our game. We even lose touch with God, and start to talk about "besieging heaven" with our prayers, using language of manipulation and control even towards the Almighty.

We should never forget the enormous significance of *suffering* in our faith; and I don't mean just *pain*. I mean suffering in the old original English sense of *allowing*. Letting things happen. Letting others do things. Letting things be done to us. Letting others be. Letting others live. Letting people be who they are. Letting God be God. John's first letter talks about love: *This is the love I mean: not our love for God (that's the active mode) but God's love for us, when he sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.* This coming of a Saviour involved the performance of an action - the Incarnation is an historical action which relates to the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father; the sacrifice of Jesus is an historical action which relates to the eternal self-gift of the Son to the Father. That this second action should appear in the human annals as a piece of pure *suffering* is significant for us.