



Ignatius Brianchaninov, The Cup of Christ

Two beloved disciples asked the Lord for thrones of glory, and He gave them His Cup ([Matthew 20.23](#)).

The Cup of Christ is suffering. But for those who drink from it on earth, the Cup of Christ grants participation in Christ's Kingdom. It prepares for them the thrones of eternal glory in heaven. We stand in silence before the Cup of Christ, nor can any man complain about it or reject it; for He, Who commanded us to taste it, first drank of it Himself.

O tree of knowledge of good and evil! You killed our ancestors in Paradise, you deceived them by the delusions of sensual pleasure and the delusions of reason. Christ, the Redeemer of the fallen, brought His Cup of Salvation into this world — to the fallen and to those who are exiled from Paradise.

The bitterness of this Cup cleanses the heart from forbidden, destructive and sinful pleasure. Through the humility that flows from it in abundance, the pride of understanding on the carnal level is mortified. To him who drinks from the Cup with faith and patience, the eternal life, which was — and still is — lost to him by his tasting of forbidden fruit, will be restored.
I will accept the Cup of Christ — the cup of salvation.

The Cup is accepted when the Christian bears earthly tribulation in the spirit of humility learnt from the Gospel. St Peter turned swiftly with a naked sword to defend the God-Man, Who was

surrounded by evil doers; but Jesus said to Peter: *Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?* ([John 18.11](#)).

So, too, when disaster surrounds you, you should comfort and strengthen your soul, saying, 'The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' The Cup is bitter: at first sight all human reasoning is confounded. Surmount reason by faith and drink courageously from the bitter Cup: it is the Father Who gives it to you, He who is all good and all wise. It is neither the Pharisees, nor Caiaphas, nor Judas who prepared the Cup; it is neither Pilate nor his soldiers who give it! *The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*

Pharisees think evil, Judas betrays, Pilate orders the unlawful killing, the soldiers of the government execute his order. Through their evil deeds all these prepared their own true perdition. Do not prepare for yourself just such a perdition by remembering evil, by longing for and dreaming of revenge, and by indignation against your enemies. The heavenly Father is almighty and all-seeing. He sees your affliction, and if He had found it necessary and profitable to withdraw the Cup from you, He would certainly have done so.

The Lord, as the Scriptures and Church history testify, has often allowed afflictions to befall His beloved, and often warded off afflictions from them, in accordance with the unfathomable ways of Providence. When you are faced with the Cup, turn your gaze from the people who gave it to you; lift up your eyes to Heaven and say: 'The Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?'

I will take the cup of salvation... (Psalm 115.4 [LXX]); I cannot reject the Cup — the promise of heavenly and eternal good. The Apostle of Christ teaches me patience when he says, *we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God* ([Acts 14.22](#)). How can we reject the Cup, which is the means of attaining this Kingdom and growing with it? I will accept the Cup — the gift of God. For the Cup of Christ is the gift of God. The great Paul writes to the Philippians, *For unto you is given in behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake* ([Philippians 1.29](#)).

You receive the Cup, which seemingly comes from the hand of man. What is it to you whether the bearer of the Cup acts righteously or unrighteously? As a follower of Jesus, your concern is: to act righteously; to receive the Cup with thanksgiving to God and with a living faith; and courageously to drink it to the dregs.

In receiving the Cup from the hand of man, remember it is the Cup of Him, Who is not only innocent but All-Holy. Thinking on this, remind yourself, and other suffering sinners, of the words that the blessed and enlightened thief spoke when he was crucified on the right hand of the crucified God-Man: *We receive the due reward of our deeds ... Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom* ([Luke 23.41-42](#)). And then, turning to the people, you will say to them: Blessed are you who are instruments of righteousness and of God's mercy, blessed are you from henceforth and for ever! (If they are not in a fit state to understand and receive your words, do not cast your precious pearls of humility under the feet of those who cannot value them, but say these words in thought and heart.) By this alone will you fulfill the commandment of the Gospel which says, *Love your enemies, bless them that curse you* ([Matthew 5.44](#)).

Pray to the Lord on behalf of those who have insulted and outraged you that what they have done for you should be repaid by a temporal blessing and the eternal reward of salvation, and that, when they stand before Christ to be judged, it should be counted to them as if it had been an act of virtue. Although your heart does not wish to act in this way, compel it to do so, because only those who do violence to their own heart, in fulfilling the commandments of the Gospel, can inherit Heaven.

If you have not the will to act in this way, then you have not the will to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Look deep within yourself and consider searchingly: have you not found another teacher, the teacher of hatred — the devil — and fallen under his power?

It is a terrible transgression to offend or to oppress one's neighbour: it is a most terrible transgression to commit murder. But whoever hates his oppressor, his slanderer, his betrayer, his murderer, and whoever thinks ill of them and takes revenge on them, commits a sin very near to their sin. In vain does he pretend to himself and others that he is righteous. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer of man, proclaimed St John, the beloved disciple of Christ (cf. [1 John 3.15](#)).

A living faith in Christ teaches one to receive the Cup of Christ, and the Cup of Christ inspires hope in the heart of him who receives it; and hope in Christ gives strength and consolation to the heart. What torment, what torment of hell, to complain or to murmur against the Cup that is pre-ordained from above! Murmuring, impatience, faintheartedness and especially despair are sins before God — they are the ugly children of sinful disbelief.

It is sinful to complain of neighbours, when they are the instruments of our suffering; still more sinful is it when we cry out against the Cup that comes down to us straight from Heaven, from the right hand of God.

But he who drinks the cup with thanksgiving to God and blessings on his neighbour achieves holy serenity — the grace of the peace of Christ. It is as if already he enjoys God's spiritual Paradise.

Temporal suffering has no importance in itself: we lend it significance because of our attachment to the earth and to all corruptible things, and through our coldness towards Christ and eternity. You are prepared to bear the bitter and repellent taste of medicines; to bear the painful amputation and cauterization of your limbs; to bear the long, drawn-out suffering of hunger and prolonged seclusion in your room. You are prepared to bear all this to restore lost health to your body, which after it is healed will certainly become ill again, and will certainly die and become corrupt. Bear, then, the bitterness of the Cup of Christ, which brings healing and eternal beatitude to your immortal soul.

If the Cup appears to you to be unbearable, deadly, then it reveals that although you bear Christ's name, you do not yet belong to Christ. For the true followers of Christ, the Cup of Christ is the Cup of joy. Thus, the holy apostles, after having been beaten before the gathering of the elders of the Jews, went out from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name of the Lord Jesus (cf. [Acts 5.40-41](#)).

Righteous Job heard bitter news. Tiding after tiding came to pierce his steadfast heart; the last of these was the hardest: all his sons and daughters had been struck down suddenly by a cruel and violent death. In his great sorrow, he rent his clothes and covered his head with ashes. And then, in submissive faith, he fell down upon the ground and worshipped the Lord saying, 'I myself came naked from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, the Lord has taken away: as it seemed good to the Lord, so has it come to pass; *blessed be the name of the Lord.*'

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