

The Chalice of Christ

By Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninoff

Two of his beloved disciples asked the Lord for thrones of glory. He gave them His Chalice. Christ's Chalice is suffering. For those who partake of it Christ's Chalice procures on earth a part in Christ's kingdom of grace, and it prepares for them in Heaven thrones of eternal glory.

Before Christ's Chalice we are all speechless. No one can complain of it or refuse it, because He Who has ordered us to drink it, drank it to the bitter end first of all Himself.

O tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou didst kill our first parents in Paradise by alluring them with the charms of sensuous pleasure and with the charms of knowledge. To failures and exiles Christ the Redeemer of the lost brought to earth His saving Chalice. By the bitterness of this Chalice the criminal, deadly pleasure of sin is eradicated from the heart. By humility - which flows from the Chalice abundantly - proud, carnal knowledge is mortified. He who drinks the, Chalice with faith and patience regains eternal life which was taken and continues to be taken from us through eating the forbidden fruit.

I will take the cup of salvation, (1) the Chalice of Christ! The Chalice is taken when a Christian bears earthly troubles with humility derived from the Gospel.

Saint Peter rushed with a drawn sword to the defence of the God-Man when He was surrounded with malefactors. But the most gentle Lord Jesus said to Peter: ***Put thy sword into its sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given Me?*** (John 18, 11).

And when trials beset you, comfort and fortify your soul by saying to it: *Shall I not drink the cue which the father has given me?* The Chalice is bitter. One has merely to glance at it, and all human calculations vanish. Substitute faith for calculation, and courageously drink the bitter cup. It is the all-good and all-wise Father Who gives it to you. It was not Pharisees, of Caiaphas, or Judas who prepared it. It is not Pilate and his soldiers who give it. Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given Me?

The Pharisees plot, Judas betrays, Pilate orders the iniquitous murder, the governor's soldiers perform it. By their evildoings they all prepared for themselves certain perdition. Do not prepare for yourself perdition equally certain by animosity and resentment, by desiring and planning revenge, by being indignant and angry with your enemies.

Our heavenly Father is all-seeing, all-knowing. He sees your troubles and afflictions, and if He should find it necessary and profitable to remove the Chalice from you, He would certainly do so. Scripture and Church History bear witness to the fact that in many cases the Lord permitted afflictions to His beloved servants, and that in many cases He averted afflictions from His beloved servants, in accordance with His incomprehensible judgments.

When the Chalice appears before you, do not look at the men who give it to you, but raise your gaze to Heaven and say: **Shall I not drink the cup which the Father has given me?**

I will take the cup of salvation. I cannot refuse the Chalice which is a pledge of heavenly, eternal blessings. Christ's apostle teaches me patience: *By many tribulations, he says, we must enter the Kingdom of God* (Acts 14, 22). Shall I refuse the Chalice which is a means of acquiring and developing within me that Kingdom? **I will take the cup** - God's gift.

Christ's Chalice is the gift of God. *It has been granted to you*, wrote the great Paul to the Philippians, *that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake* (Phil. 1, 29).

You receive the Chalice apparently from the hands of men. What business is it of yours whether those men are acting rightly or wrongly? Your business is to act rightly. It is your duty as a follower of Jesus to take the Chalice with faith and thanksgiving to God, and bravely drink it to the dregs.

In receiving the Chalice from human hands, remember that it is not only the Chalice of the Innocent but also of the All-Holy One. Having remembered that, repeat for yourself and for sufferers who are sinners like yourself the words of blessed and prudent thief. This thief who was nailed to the cross on the right side of the crucified God-Man said: *We are receiving the due reward for our deeds ... Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom* (Luke 23, 41).

Then turn to the people and say to them (if they are not in a position to understand and accept your words do not cast the precious pearls of humility under the feet of those who cannot appreciate them, but say it with your mind and heart): *Blessed are you, instruments of the justice and mercy of God! God bless you, now and for ever!* In this way only you will be carrying out the commandment of the Gospel which says, *Love your enemies, bless those who curse you* (Mat. 5,44).

Pray to the Lord for them that for the insults and offenses heaped upon you by them they may be given in return temporal and eternal rewards, so that what was done to you may be imputed to those who did it as virtue in the judgment of Christ. Though your heart may not wish to act in this way, force it to do so; for only those who compel their heart to carry out the commandments of the Gospel can inherit Heaven (Mat. 11,12). If you do not wish to do that, you do not wish to be a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Carefully look into yourself and see whether you cannot find another teacher - perhaps you have capitulated to him? The teacher of hatred is the devil.

To offend, to wrong, to persecute one's neighbours is a terrible crime. A still more terrible crime is murder. But he who hates his persecutor, slanderer, betrayer or murderer and who cherishes resentment against them and has his revenge on them his sin is very near theirs. It is futile then for him to pretend, to himself or to others, that he is a

righteous man. *Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer*, proclaimed Christ's beloved disciple (1 John 3, 15).

A living faith in Christ leads us to accept Christ's Chalice. Christ's Chalice fills the hearts of its partakers with hope in Christ. Hope in Christ gives the heart strength and consolation.

What torture, what hellish torture, to complain, to, murmur against the predetermined Chalice assigned us from above! How sinful in God's sight are the vices of murmuring, impatience, cowardice, and especially despair - the monstrous offspring of criminal unbelief! It is sinful to murmur against our neighbours when they are the instrumental cause of our sufferings. How much more sinful is it to murmur when the Chalice comes down to us straight from Heaven, direct from the hand of God!

He who thanks God and blesses his neighbours as he drinks the Chalice has attained holy rest and the peace of Christ. Henceforth he enjoys the spiritual paradise of God.

Temporal sufferings in themselves are of no weight.(2) We give them weight by our attachment to earth and to everything perishable, by our coldness to Christ and eternity. You bear the bitterness and disgusting taste of medicines. You bear the painful amputation and cauterization of your limbs. You bear long fatigue and hunger, or being shut in a room for a long time. You bear all that in order to restore lost health to your body which, when healed, will again inevitably get ill, will inevitably die and decay. So bear the bitterness of Christ's Chalice which will procure healing and eternal beatitude for your immortal soul.

If the Chalice seems to you deadly poison and unbearable, it thereby exposes and convicts. Though you are called Christ's, you are not Christ's (Gal. 5,24)). To Christ's true followers Christ's Chalice is a cup of joys. Thus the holy Apostles, after being publicly flogged before a gathering of the Jewish elders, *left the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of the Lord Jesus* (Acts 5, 41).

Righteous Job heard, the bitter news. Blow after blow struck his firm heart. The last news was the hardest blow the loss of all his sons and daughters by a sudden, cruel and violent death. In bitter anguish righteous Job tore his clothes, sprinkled ashes on his head and, moved by his submissive faith, he fell on the ground and worshipped the Lord, saying: *Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart hence. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. As it pleased the Lord, so it has come to pass. Blessed be the name of the Lord!* (Job 1,21).,

Entrust yourself in simplicity of heart to Him with Whom even the hairs of your head are numbered. He knows in what measure the healing Chalice must be given you. Look often at Jesus. Before His murderers He was like a lamb that in the hands of its shearers is dumb. He was delivered to death like senseless sheep to the slaughter. Do not take your

eyes off Him -- and your sufferings will dissolve into heavenly, spiritual sweetness. By the wounds of Jesus the wounds of your heart will be healed (1 Peter 2,24).

"Stop!" cried the Lord to those who wanted to defend Him in the Garden of Gethsemane; not only that, He even healed the amputated ear of one who had come to bind Him. And to the man who tried to avert the Chalice from Him by means of arms, He said: ***Do you think that I cannot pray to My Father, and He will at once send Me more than twelve legions of Angels?*** (Mat. 26,53).

In time of temptation do not seek human help. Do not waste precious time, do not squander your spiritual strength on a search for that powerless support. Expect help from God. At a nod from Him people will come and help you at the right time.

The Lord was silent before Pilate and Herod; He did not utter a single word in self-defense. Imitate that wise and holy silence when you see that your enemies are judging you. If they judge you with a view of condemning you then inevitably they are only doing so in order to cover their malice with a mask of justice.

Whether the Chalice is preceded by gradually gathering clouds that give warning of its approach, or whether the Chalice appears before you suddenly as if borne on the wings of a furious cyclone, say of it to God: "Thy will be done."

You are a disciple, follower and servant of Jesus. He said ***If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me: and where I am, there shall My servant be also*** (Jh. 12,26). But Jesus spent His earthly life in sufferings. He was persecuted from the cradle to the grave; from His very infancy wickedness prepared for Him a violent death. Having achieved its aim, it was not satisfied; it did its utmost to wipe the very memory of Him from the face of the earth.

By the path of temporal sufferings all His elect have followed the Lord to a blessed eternity. It is impossible for us to remain in the pleasures of the flesh and at the same time to remain in a spiritual state. Therefore the Lord constantly gives His beloved His Chalice, by which He maintains in them deadness to the world and skill in living the life of the Spirit. Said St. Isaac the Syrian: *A person for whom God specially cares is known from his constantly having sorrows sent him.* (3)

Pray that God may remove from you every trial, every temptation. We must not audaciously hurl ourselves into the abyss of affliction, for that would indicate proud self-confidence. But when troubles come of themselves, do not fear them and do not think, that they have come accidentally by a concurrence of circumstances. No, they are permitted by the ineffable Providence of God. Filled with faith and the virtues of courage and generosity that spring from faith, sail fearlessly through the darkness and raging storm to the quiet harbor of eternity. Jesus Himself is invisibly guiding you.

By pious and deep meditation study the prayer which the Lord offered to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane at the hour of His agony which preceded His Passion and Death

on the Cross. With that prayer meet and conquer every affliction. My Father, prayed the Saviour, *if it is possible, let this Chalice pass from me. Yet not as I will, but as Thou wilt* (Mat. 26,39).

Pray to God for the removal of trials from you, and at the same time renounce your own will, as a sinful and blind will. Surrender yourself, your soul and body, and your circumstances both present and future, and surrender your neighbours who are nearest and dearest to your heart to the all-holy and wise will of God.

Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit is willing enough, but the flesh is weak (Mat. 26,41). When troubles surround you, repeat the prayer frequently so as to draw to yourself the special grace of God. Only with the help of special grace can we be victorious over all temporal troubles.

Having received from on high the gift of patience, keep attentive, watching over yourself so as to maintain and retain the grace of God. Otherwise sin will be sure to steal into your soul (or body) and drive out of you the grace of God.

But if owing to negligence and distraction you let sin get into you, especially that to which our weak flesh is so prone; the kind that defiles both body and soul, then grace will abandon you, will leave you lonely and naked. Then affliction sent for your salvation and perfection will set upon you savagely and will crush you with sorrow, despondency, and despair for having held the gift of God without due respect for the gift. Hasten with sincere and unflinching repentance to restore purity to your heart, and purity having been restored, the gift that comes with it - patience.

For since patience is gift of the Holy Spirit, it reposes only in the pure.

The holy martyrs were filled with joy in fiery furnaces, walking on nails or sharp swords, or sat in caldrons of boiling water or oil. So, too, when your heart has drawn to itself grace and power by prayer, and keeps them by vigilance over itself, it will sing amid miseries and cruel misfortunes a joyful song of praise and thanksgiving to God.

The mind, when purified by Christ's Chalice is enabled to see spiritual visions. It begins to see the all-embracing Providence of God which is invisible to carnal minds, to see the law of corruption in everything corruptible, to see close to everyone a vast eternity, to see God in His great acts - in the creation and re-creation of the world. Earthly life seems to it a brief pilgrimage; the passing events of earthly life seem like dreams, and its blessings seem to be a fleeting illusion of the eyes, a short-lived fatal allurements of the mind and heart.

What fruit do temporal sufferings bear for eternity? When Heaven was shown to the holy Apostle John, one of the inhabitants of Heaven pointed to the countless gathering of radiant whiterobed saints celebrating their salvation and beatitude before the throne of God and said: ***These who are clothed in the white robes - who are they, and where have they come from? And I said to him,*** says St John the Theologian, ***My Lord, Thou knowest.*** Then the inhabitant of Heaven said to St John: ***These are they who have come***

out of great tribulation,(4) and have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the Throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He Who sits on the Throne will dwell in them. Never again will they hunger, never again will they thirst, never shall the sun beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.. For the Lamb in the midst of the Throne will be their Shepherd, and will guide them to living fountains of water; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (Rev. 7, 9-17).

Estrangement from God, eternal torment in hell, to be eternally with the devil and diabolic people, the flame, coldness, darkness, gloom, Gehenna - that is what deserves to be called suffering! That is indeed great, terrible, unendurable agony. Earthly pleasures lead to great, eternal suffering.

The Chalice of Christ preserves and saves us from this suffering when we drink it with thanksgiving to God, glorifying in the bitter Cup of temporal sufferings the all-gracious and good God-Man for His infinite, eternal kindness and mercy.

1. Psalm 115, 4 (116, 13).
2. Weight - importance; significance.
3. Ch. 35 (Russ. trans).
4. The word translated *tribulation* means affliction, distress, persecution, sorrow, suffering.