

# Carrying My Cross

## **Christ Calls Us To Carry Our Cross**

*from "Carrying the Cross" by His Grace Bishop Serapion*

1. Carrying the cross is bearing suffering for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Carrying the Cross is partaking in Christ's suffering. St. Peter considered that bearing suffering for the sake of Christ is the same as partaking in Christ's sufferings; he wrote, "Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy." (1 Pet. 4:12) Those believers, who bear sufferings for the sake of Christ, partake of His sufferings. Therefore, St. Peter called them to rejoice and added, "If you are reproached for the Name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." (1 Pet. 4:14) But St. Peter also warns the believers not to consider all sufferings as a partaking in Christ's sufferings. The person, who bears suffering as a result of his own mistakes, is not considered to be suffering for the sake of Christ or partaking in His sufferings; he wrote, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter." (1 Pet. 4:15-16)
2. Carrying the Cross in the form of spiritual struggles and self-control. The person, who strives in his spiritual life to control his thoughts and senses, as well as struggle in the ascetic life of prayer, fasting, and prostrations (metanoias), is carrying the cross of spiritual struggle. The early Church, especially in the first few centuries, experienced persecutions and presented thousands of martyrs. Then the life of monasticism appeared and thousands raced to struggle in the ascetic life by living in the wilderness and deserted places, because of their great love for Christ our King. These ascetics, as they struggled in their spiritual life, presented a new and renewed form of martyrdom without shedding of blood.
3. Struggling in the service and seeking the salvation of all souls is another form of carrying the Cross.
4. Enduring with thanks the trials of illness and poverty is yet another form of carrying the Cross.

## **Abraham's Cross to Bear**

*from the homilies of St. Mark the Ascetic*

God tested Abraham. That is, he sent him afflictions for his benefit, not so that he could find out what sort of man he was, for God knows everything, but so that He give him the means to perfect his faith.

## **Everyone Carries Their Own Cross**

*from a homily on "Carrying Your Cross" by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov)*

What does it mean to take up our cross, and take up specifically *our own* cross? It means that every Christian should patiently bear those very insults and persecutions from the world that come to *him*, and not any others. This means that every Christian should manfully and constantly war with those very passions and sinful thoughts that arise in

him. It means that every Christian should with obedience and dedication to God's will, with confession of God's justice and mercy, with thankfulness to God, endure those very sorrows and deprivations that Divine Providence allows to come upon him, and not some other things painted and presented to him by his proud dreams. This means being satisfied with those bodily labors that correspond to our physical strength, the ones that our flesh require in order to keep it in order, and not to seek after increased fasting and vigil, or all other ascetic feats beyond our measure, which destroy our physical health and direct our spirit towards high self-opinion and self deceit, as St. John Climacus describes [The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Homily 26]. All mankind labors and suffers upon the earth, but these sufferings differ; the passions differ that war against us, the sorrows and temptations differ that God sends us for our healing, for the cleansing away of our sins. What differences there are in people's physical strength, in their very health! Precisely: every person has his own cross. And each Christian is commanded to accept this cross of *his own* with self-denial, and to follow Christ. He who has denied himself and taken up his own cross has made peace with himself and with his own circumstances, with his own position both internal and external; and only he can reasonably and correctly follow Christ.

### **Carrying the Cross With Joy**

*from "Carrying the Cross" by His Grace Bishop Serapion*

It is not sufficient that we carry the cross, but we must follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who carried the Cross with pleasure, as St. Paul wrote, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) St. Paul himself endured the cross in all its forms and wrote, "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9-10)

We ask our Lord, Who joyfully carried the Cross for our sakes, to grant us the endurance to carry, with pleasure, the Cross behind Him that we may have fellowship with Him and can say with St. Paul, "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." (Phil. 3:10)

### **A Christian's Duty is To Carry His External and Internal Crosses**

*from "Take Up Your Cross and Follow Christ" by Metropolitan Innocent of Alaska*

The first duty of a Christian, of a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, is to deny oneself. To deny oneself means: to give up one's bad habits, to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world...to be dead to sin and the world, but alive to God.

A Christian's second duty is to take up one's cross. The word "cross" means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. To "take up one's cross" means to accept without complaint everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in life. In other words, to bear all laughter, scorn, weariness, sorrow and annoyance from others; to bear all poverty, misfortune, illness, without regarding yourself as offended. And if, when you are bearing your cross according to the will of God, a proud thought suggests to you that you are not weak like others,

but that you are firm, pious and better, root out such thoughts as far as you can for they ruin all your virtues.

Now there are “external” crosses and “interior” crosses. All the above mentioned “crosses” are external and the Lord will not let the man perish who struggles to bear them wisely. The Holy Spirit will strengthen and guide him and lead him further. But in order to become holy and be like Jesus Christ, merely external crosses are not enough. Outward crosses without interior ones are of no more use than exterior prayer without interior prayer. Outward crosses are borne not only by Christians, but by everyone! There is not a man on earth who hasn’t suffered in some way or another. But whoever wants to follow Jesus must bear interior crosses as well.

Interior crosses can be found at all times, and more easily than exterior ones. Direct your attention to yourself with a sense of penitence, and a thousand interior crosses will spring up! For instance, consider: How did you come to be in this world? Do you live as you ought to? Ask yourself these questions sincerely and you will see that you are the creation and work of God and that you exist solely in order to glorify Him with all your acts, your life, your whole being. But not only do you not glorify Him, but you anger and dishonor Him by your sinful life! Then consider: What awaits you on the other side of your grave? On which side will you stand at the time of Christ’s judgement, on the left or the right? Have you even thought of the eternal separation from God that is Hell? Have you scarcely given one thought to Paradise which the Lord has prepared for you? Have you ever thought that you are depriving yourself of its eternal blessings through carelessness and stupidity? If you begin to reflect in this way, you will undoubtedly begin to be alarmed and disquieted. Don’t try to drive away such thoughts through empty worldly diversions and entertainments for they are profitable for you. In fact, you will find still more crosses!

### **How God Views Our Afflictions**

*from the homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*

Afflictions for God's sake are dearer to Him than any prayer or sacrifice.

### **A Blind and Hardened Sinner is He Who Writhes and Thrashes Upon His Cross**

*from a homily on “Carrying Your Cross” by Bishop Ignatius (Brianchaninov)*

Through the cross we open paradise to ourselves. Let us not allow ourselves any evil murmuring, and especially not any soul-destroying blasphemy, which is often heard from the lips of the blind and hardened sinner, who writhes and thrashes upon his cross, vainly endeavoring to escape from it. With murmuring and blasphemy the cross becomes unbearably heavy, dragging to hell the one crucified upon it. “What have I done?” cries the sinner in denial of his sinfulness, accusing the just and merciful God of injustice and mercilessness, blaming and rejecting God’s Providence.

### **Sorrows Allow Us to Draw Near to God**

*from the homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*

It is impossible to draw near to God without sorrows, without which human righteousness cannot remain unchanged... If you desire virtue, then give yourself to every affliction, for afflictions produce humility. If someone abides in virtue without afflictions, the door of pride is opened to him.

### **The Cross is the Door to Mysteries**

*from the homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*

The cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door the intellect makes entrance into the knowledge of heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the cross is concealed in the sufferings of the cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the cross. For, as the Apostle says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

### **Salvation is By Our Crucifixion on Our Own Cross**

*from the sayings of St. Theophan the Recluse*

Remember that each of us has his own cross. The Golgotha of this cross is our heart: it is being lifted or implanted through a zealous determination to live according to the Spirit of God. Just as salvation of the world is by the Cross of God, so our salvation is by our crucifixion on our own cross.

### **The Kingdom is Attained by Enduring Many Troubles**

*from the sayings of Elder Anthony of Optina*

Of course, it would be easier to get to paradise with a full stomach, all snuggled up in a soft feather-bed, but what is required is to carry one's cross along the way, for the kingdom of God is not attained by enduring one or two troubles, but many!**The Cross of Maltreatment and Dishonor**

*from the sayings of St. Mark the Ascetic in the Philokalia*

He who chooses maltreatment and dishonor for the sake of truth is walking on the apostolic path; he has taken up the cross and is bound in chains (Mt. 16:24; Acts 28:20). But when he tries to concentrate his attention on the heart without accepting these two, his intellect wanders from the path and he falls into the temptations and snares of the devil.

### **The Cross of Sickness**

*from "My Life in Christ" by Fr. John of Kronstadt*

Bear any illness bravely, and do not merely not become despondent, but on the contrary, rejoice, if you can, in your illness. You would ask me what there is for you to rejoice at when you are racked all over with pain? Rejoice that the Lord has sent you this temporary chastisement in order to cleanse your soul from sins. 'For whom the Lord loves He chastens' (Heb. 12:6). Rejoice in the fact that now you are not gratifying those passions which you would have gratified had you been in good health; rejoice that you are bearing the cross of sickness, and that therefore you are treading the narrow and sorrowful way leading to the kingdom of heaven. Maladies in our eyes only appear painful, unpleasant and terrible. It is seldom that any one of us during the time of sickness represents to himself the profit which his illness brings to his soul; but in God's all wise and most merciful Providence, not a single malady remains without some profit to our soul. Sicknesses in the hands of Providence are the same as bitter medicines for our soul, curing its passions, its bad habits and inclinations. Not a single malady sent to us shall

return void. Therefore, we must keep in view the utility of sicknesses, in order that we may bear them more easily and more calmly.

**“For My Yoke Is Sweet and My Burden Is Light” (Mathew 11:30)**

*from a homily by Bishop Luke of Crimea*

You ask: ‘O, Lord, our Lord, is it really easy to be persecuted? Is it really easy to go through the narrow door and down the stony path?’ You ask with confusion, perhaps doubt sneaks into your hearts: ‘*Is Christ’s yoke really easy?*’ And I am telling you: *Yes, yes! It is easy, extremely easy.* But why easy? Why is it easy to follow Him upon the thorny path? Because you will not be alone, exhausted, but Christ Himself will be accompanying you; because His endless Grace will strengthen your force when you struggle under His yoke, under His burden, because He Himself will support you, will help you to carry this burden, this cross.