

# My Cup Runneth Over

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*edition*

The inspiration for these Easter resources pages came to us on contemplating the photograph of the cup filled with flower petals (taken on a holiday trip in Conwy, Wales). As I looked at this picture a verse from Psalm 116 echoed in my heart: 'I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord' (v. 13).

The symbol of the cup appears in many Bible texts, including those which speak about the Passion of Christ and his work of redemption.

The cup is an object relevant in all cultures—in art, as decoration, as a kitchen utensil—and it is present in the everyday life of every woman around the world.

All this makes the cup an appropriate symbol to help us to meditate upon the Passion of Christ and Easter.

The proposed themes are not complete meditations but rather a framework, a composition of many elements from which you may choose what is appropriate in your situation. The meditations can either be used as separate units or as a series, either alone or in a group of women.

## 1. The Cup of Life

Look at the picture (or you may choose another picture of a cup or use a real cup filled with flower petals):

- Describe what you see (colours, light, shadow)
- What kind of feelings and impressions does the picture evoke in you?
- A cup can be a symbol of... make a list of possible meanings.

Cups were used originally in antiquity by the Egyptians and Phoenician cultures. We still use cups in everyday life in many different ways. You may talk about the use of cups in your cultural setting.

In the Bible, we find a variety of cups in many shapes and sizes designated by different Hebrew words: basin, bowl, pan, pot, vase ... There are different symbolic meanings:

- In the Psalms, men—the righteous and the wicked—receive from God a cup filled with happy experiences (Psalm 16:5 and 23:5) and unhappy ones (Psalm 11:6, RSV, and 75: 8).
- The notion of suffering contained in a cup refers to the Passion of Jesus (Mark 10:38 and Luke 22: 41-42).
- The Bible also mentions the 'cup of thanksgiving' used in a meal to accompany vows and sacrifices (Psalm 116: 13-17).
- Paul talks about 'the cup of blessing' (1 Corinthians 10: 16), the same term used in the Jewish ritual of Passover. This is the cup used by Christians in the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice (Mark 14: 22-25).

Upon a closer look at the picture, we realize that there are more areas with light than with shadow or darkness. The cup speaks to us about suffering (areas of shadow) and blessings (the beauty of petals reflected in the light). The cup can be a symbol for what we receive from God in our life. Take time to reflect on your own life. Ask yourself: What is in my cup? A diversity of petals: doubt, questions, gifts, joys, suffer-



Easter means victory of life over death and the promise of resurrection for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Easter is an invitation to pass from spiritual/inner death to spiritual/inner life, an invitation to live and walk today in the presence of the living Christ! 'God uses us to make the knowledge about Christ spread everywhere like a sweet fragrance (2 Corinthians 2: 14b, *TEV*). He wants us to be 'a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish' (2 Corinthians 2: 15, *AV*).

### **Action**

- Draw and cut flower petals from light and dark coloured paper.
- Each woman chooses the colours that refer to her feelings and situation.
- Each woman may want to write on her paper petals what they symbolize.
- Each woman puts her petal/petals into a cup placed at the front (play music in the background).
- This cup filled with all the petals is offered to God with a prayer: it represents our lives that we give to Christ, our living Lord and Saviour.
- We conclude with a song of thanksgiving to celebrate Easter: the passage from shadow to light.

### **2. The Cup of Living Water (John 4: 5-30)**

(Google for picture of statue: Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Chester Cathedral, England)

Meditate upon the picture:

- Observe how Jesus and the woman meet.
- What is in the cup they both carry?
- Notice where the picture seems to take you and to challenge you.
- Ask yourself what kind of relationship you share with Jesus

Read John 4: 5-30 and meditate upon the text.

'The ways of God are to bring down the powerful and to lift up the lowly; not to judge or condemn but to meet the people where they are and to give life' (Jean Vannier, *Treasures of the Heart*).

Jesus meets this woman with His own needs, His cry of thirst: 'Give me to drink.' The woman went to the well to take something back, the precious resource, water. She did not expect to be asked to give something. 'Give me to drink' means 'you can do something for me, I need your help'. She was ready to give and to receive. She received the 'cup filled with the water of life' that Jesus offered her. It became her cup of salvation. Life is a circle of giving and receiving, receiving and giving.

### **Prayer:**

'God, You are my God, I am seeking You,  
My soul is thirsting for You,  
My flesh is longing for You,  
A land parched and waterless'  
(Psalm 63: 1, *Jerusalem Bible*).

Questions for personal meditation:

- What is my thirst today?
- What is my thirst of God (Psalm 63 and 42)
- How can I respond to the request of Jesus: 'Give me to drink'?

**Song:** ‘Life is a Journey, Long is the Road’ (Albert Orsborn)

Refrain:

*The well is deep and I require  
A draught of the water of life,  
But none can quench my soul’s desire  
For a draught of the water of life;  
Till one draws near who the cry will heed,  
Helper of men in their time of need,  
And I, believing, find indeed  
That Christ is the water of life.*

### **3. The Cup of Abundance (Psalm 23)**

‘There is no limit to God’s love. It is without measure and its depth cannot be sounded. This is shown by His living and dying among us. Now turn the same picture around. There must be no limit to the love that prompts us to give ourselves to God.’ (*Mother Teresa, Prayers and Meditations for Every Day of the Year*)

In Psalm 23, after having underlined the qualities of the Good Shepherd, David focuses on the benedictions flowing from God’s care and his loving presence. God is a God of abundance and therefore the cup is overflowing! We find the same expression in Psalm 16: 5, where the overflowing cup is the symbol of our communion with God. A personal, intense and rich relationship—that is what God offers to us. There is no limit to God’s life and benediction, it is without measure and its depth cannot be sounded.

#### **Action: A thanksgiving offering**

Each woman present should bring a cup with her offering, something ‘special’ and symbolic or an offering taken from nature—fruits, flowers, seeds, rice ... These gifts can be presented in one big bowl.

This is to be followed by a time of prayers, testimonies and songs to express gratitude to God for the overflowing cup of material and spiritual benedictions.

### **4. The Cup of Suffering (Matthew 26: 36-46)**

‘My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want’ (v. 39, *TEV*). ‘My Father, if this cup of suffering cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done’ (v. 42, *TEV*).

What does Jesus want to say with His prayer, ‘take this cup from me’? It is not only an expression of the suffering in the hour of death, not just the fear of a tragic destiny, no, it means more: God’s anger and punishment will lie on Him, He will be separated from God, His Father. God’s punishment over sin pushes Him, the Son, who is without sin, into the night of separation from God: He takes our place.

#### **Action:** Prayer watch, a time of personal meditation

A) Having read the Gospel text, imagine that you accompany Jesus and His disciples to Gethsemane. If surroundings allow, go for a walk in a nearby park or garden and isolate yourself in a quiet place. You may choose one of the following Bible texts to help you understand Jesus’ feelings in this dark hour: Isaiah 51: 17-23; 52: 13-53: 12; Hebrews 4: 14-5: 10; Philippians 2: 1-8.

B) Jesus was obedient, He drank His cup of suffering. Read Matthew 26: 39, 42 and 20: 22 again and meditate on these words. Think of your own life, your own 'cup of suffering'. What does God want to accomplish through your life? In which areas of your life do you accept and accomplish God's will? In which areas of your life do you struggle with or fight God's will? Write down what your 'cup of suffering' is. Try to pray the words of Jesus for your own situation.

After this time of personal meditation, come together as a group and share your experience with each other. Some may want to read their 'Gethsemane prayer'. A suggested song to use is: "My Life Must be Christ's Broken Bread" (Albert Osborn).

Conclude with a time of prayer and consecration.

### **Prayer:**

'Teach us, good Lord to serve  
Thee as Thou deserves.  
To give and not to count the cost,  
To fight and not to heed the wounds,  
To toil and not to seek for rest,  
To labour and not to ask for any reward,  
Save that of knowing that we do thy will.'  
(Ignatius Loyola, 1491-1556)

## **5. The Cup of Salvation**

God is a God who saves. This is not only true of the time following the death of Jesus on the Cross but it is already evident throughout the Old Testament. In Psalm 116: 12-14 the psalmist expresses his gratitude and gives his answer to God's saving grace: 'How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.'

Easter is an invitation for us to 'take up the cup of salvation' and to give our answer to God in return for saving us. Like Pilate, we are all challenged to ask ourselves: 'What shall I do, then with Jesus who is called Christ?' (Matthew 27:22). He chose 'the cup of innocence', washed his hands and didn't want to get involved with Jesus. What about us?

Ignatius of Loyola, in one of his spiritual exercises, puts himself at the scene of the Cross. Looking at Christ, he imagines starting a dialogue with him: 'Why did you, Creator God, descend from eternal life and accept the limitation of death as a human being? What can I do in return for Christ?' He found the answer to his question in God's love: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3; 16). This answer changed his heart and life.

In a time of meditation, put yourself in the scene of Calvary, as though it were happening at this moment and you, yourself, are present. Close your eyes and meditate on the words of Psalm 116: 12-14. What do you want to say to Jesus, your Saviour? Give him the answer that only you can give.

(Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*)