

Characters
OF THE
Passion

LESSONS

on

F A I T H

and

T R U S T



FULTON J. SHEEN



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Dedicated to
MARY IMMACULATE,
Gracious Mother
of
Divine Grace,
in Token
of
Love and Gratitude



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There is no unbelief;
Whoever plants a seed beneath the sod
And waits to see it push away the clod,
He trusts in God.

Whoever says when clouds are in the sky,
Be patient, heart, light breaketh by and by,
Trusts the Most High.

Whoever sees neath the field of winter snow,
The silent harvest of the future grow
God's power must know.

—EDWARD BULWER-LYTON

CHAPTER ONE



Peter: A Lesson on Falling and Rising

The most interesting drama in all the world is the drama of the human soul. Were it not endowed with freedom, it might go out to war and enterprise alone and unheeded; but master of its choice, unlike the sun and stones, it can use time and things to decide its destiny, its eternity, and its judgment. Though there are many phases to these dramas, perhaps the most interesting of them all is the psychology of a fall and resurrection.

More concretely, how do some souls lose their faith, and by what steps do they later on recover it? The answer to such questions is to be found in the story of the apostle

Peter, whose name appears first in the gospel narrative, and who might appropriately be called “The Fisherman Philosopher,” for he asked Divine Wisdom more questions than any other of His followers. For example, “To whom shall we go?” “Where are you going?” “Why cannot I follow you?” “What shall this man do?”

To this searching intellectualist of Galilee, who was born Simon and whose name was changed to Peter, and who from the bitterness of his spirit cried out, “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a sinful man,” we go to study the steps by which he fell and the stages by which he returned. There seem to have been five stages in Peter’s fall.

1. Neglect of prayer
2. Substitution of action for prayer
3. Lukewarmness
4. The satisfaction of material wants,
feelings, and emotions.
5. Human respect

Neglect of Prayer. No soul ever fell away from God without giving up prayer. Prayer is that which establishes contact with Divine Power and opens the invisible resources of heaven. However dark the way, when we pray, temptation can never master us. The first step downward in the average soul is the giving up of the practice of prayer, the breaking of the circuit with divinity, and the proclamation of one’s own self-sufficiency.

The night that Our Blessed Lord went out under the light of a full moon into the Garden of Gethsemani to crimson the olive roots with His own blood for our redemption, He turned to His disciples and said, “Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). Withdrawing from these three disciples about as far as a man could throw a stone—how significant a way to measure distance the night one goes to death—He prayed to His Heavenly Father, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will” (Matthew 26:39).

When Our Blessed Lord came back the last time to visit His disciples, He found them asleep. A woman will watch not one hour or one night, but, rather, day after day and night after night in the presence of a peril threatening her child. These men slept. If they could sleep on such an occasion, it was due to the fact that they had no adequate conception of the crisis through which Our Savior was passing, no consciousness of the tragedy that was already upon them. Finding them asleep, Our Blessed Lord spoke to Peter and said, “...What? Could you not watch one hour with me?” (Matthew 26:40). Peter had given up both watching and praying.

The Substitution of Action for Prayer. Most souls still feeling the necessity of doing something for God and the Church turn to the solace of activity. Instead of going from