

You and your friends are invited
to view the religious masterpiece

"THE REPENTANCE OF PETER"

by

JEAN CHARLES CAZIN

(1841—1900)

French School

Loaned by Dr. Frank W. Gunsaulus



april

On view until Easter
Detroit Museum of Art

HOURS OF ADMISSION

Daily 9:00 a. m. to 5:00 p. m.
Sundays 2:00 p. m. to 6:00 p. m.
Thursday Evenings 7:30 to 9:30

A Study for Holy Week

By FRANK W. GUNSAULUS

IN THIS week of Holy memories we may fix our attention upon our Human Nature in its abasement through Simon Peter's denial of his Lord, and in the sublimity to which it may attain through repentance, by following Peter to that moment in the great picture of Cazin, which reveals the nimbus of the new life just at the time when he is weeping bitterly and alone.

It is a masterpiece for the man of religion to study as he rehearses the events of Holy Week.

Let us go back from the moment of the picture to that of Simon Peter's first mistake. It is nearly Friday morning. The larger body of the disciples, who have been sleeping yonder, are concealing themselves under the olive boughs or in their little homes; or, it may be, each one of them is alone with God in prayer. Simon Peter and John, however, who rallied soon after the terrible blow fell upon their hearts, are now ready to go with Jesus into the palace of Caiaphas.

They can do little. John may crowd close enough to have his Master get the comfort of knowing that he had recovered his manhood, but Peter has come only to deny Him. The enemies of Jesus are counting upon Caiaphas, for, even though they are Pharisees, they are glad to use Caiaphas, and they remember that his hostility once demonstrated itself so far that this crafty and potent Sadducee prophesied that Jesus should die on the ground of expediency, and they reflect that doubtless he, no less than others, has influenced Annas to be bitterly opposed to Jesus.

Simon Peter is following, but he is following "*afar off.*"—*Luke xxii.*, 54. He needs to be closest to his Master. He has begun to deny his Lord. He has denied Him to himself; he will soon be denying Him to others. But he is already so heavily weighted with disappointment and doubt that he cannot keep up to events. Fear of the opposition of men's opinions ever besets him; for Peter is a lover, and he likes companionship. He who loves delightful association better than unpleasant truth cannot keep close to his Redeemer.

* * * *

The other disciple, probably John, is favorably known by Caiaphas, and he enters into the palace court. But Simon Peter, who is already beginning to totter under the storm, remains at

the door without. By and by a female slave who keeps the door bids him enter the courtyard, for John has told her that Peter is his companion. But John goes nearer to Jesus. The cold spring night is still hanging heavily over the world, and yonder is the glow of a charcoal fire, in whose light we can see the faces of those who are talking about what has occurred. Especially, in and out of the circle of that radiance, do we follow Peter. In his denial of the Lord to others we see an evolution of an earlier denial of his Lord to his own soul. It also furnishes a new element to the atmosphere in which the trial of Jesus goes on, in which the trial which they make of Him comes to be a trial for them, and it proceeds to their condemnation.

There are sounds of footsteps on the white pavement, and the curious slave-maid comes near to Simon Peter. Her words will make the skies black as thunder-clouds over the head of the "Rock-man." The holy Passover night is nearly gone. Simon Peter is in a mood for acquiescence or compromise with men, for he is standing with the servants and officers who have made the fire of coals. And he cannot get on with his own convictions as yet. The opinions of others will overawe him.

In this awful crisis Peter is sensitive to cold, and he is losing his imperial opportunity by which alone he may be saved from falling. He could be entering into alliance with the Martyr-Savior of men; but he is only warming himself. At this moment the words of the damsel shatter the very citadel of his soul. He would escape her glance, by looking up at one of the windows of the palace, which is lit up and glares with lights under which are gathered the prisoner and the officers, as well as the high priest. The fact that a damsel, rather than a male slave, opens the inner door in the court for Peter, shows that probably the menservants have been attracted also, and they push as closely as possible to the center of the critical scene.

What has the girl said? She has already defeated Peter in the presence of the cluster of men around the fire. Because he *must* warm himself—he *must* expose himself to that flaring flame which now reveals his features. She sees and says: "*Thou* wast also with Jesus of Nazareth."—*Mark xiv.*, 67. Could a damsel dare be so contemptuously intrusive? Instantly Peter makes strong denial that he has any knowledge of Jesus, and he avers that he understands not the meaning of anything she says.

* * * *

He has gone too far. He has been too vehement. He has kindled her curiosity and zeal, and she will vindicate herself before the rough soldiery. Worried as he is, fearful of the taunts of men who will remind him of the failure of Jesus, Simon Peter goes out into the porch to avoid further questioning and ridicule. This porch is the gateway that leads out of the courtyard. The dawn is coming and a cock is crowing. And to add to his

confusion here is another maid, and she also invades the soul of Simon Peter. Standing on the marble pavement she gazes long into his face, and says: "*This man was also with Jesus of Nazareth.*"—*Luke xxii.*, 56.

Now Simon Peter's despair is mingled with wrath; and he hesitates not to be profane. "He denied with an oath, I do not know the man."—*Luke xxii.*, 57. It is a terrible hour which passes. It ends with the approach of the kinsman and fellow-servant, who had not forgotten Simon Peter's behavior toward the servant of the high priest, Caiaphas.

He asks Simon Peter: "Did I not see thee in the garden with Him?"—*John xviii.*, 26. "*Of course not,*" was his reply. But it is meaningless. One and all address him, and they say: "You are one of them. You are a Galilean; your speech betrays it."—*Mark xiv.*, 70. Simon Peter now walks boldly into the very pit of disgrace, cursing and swearing as he seeks to escape detection, his Galilean provincialism exhibiting itself in the thickness of his utterance, and at last his self-confidence breaking down, as the cock crows for the second time.

* * * *

Simon Peter fell into darkness—not hopeless, but nevertheless cold and deep, just as the gray of the east was flushed with colors like blood. Jesus was near by when this most loving, brave and true-hearted man utterly failed. Jesus, the Saviour, is on His way from Annas to Caiaphas, where He succors His Simon Peter in this way. Whatever may be said of Simon Peter by men who never knew the peremptory commands of generous impulse or perilous self-confidence, Jesus attested His opinion of him at the hour when He "looked upon" His denying disciple and broke his heart with the sadness and pity which that look conveyed. The length, breadth, height and depth of God's courage with the human soul, in its embassy of love in Jesus Christ, were then and there made clear.

Jesus was probably on His way to the trial before the Sanhedrin. He had been insulted and bound, but nothing had hurt His heart so much as the sorrow of being forsaken. When His glance fell upon Simon Peter, at the instant which the disciple had polluted with his curses, there entered the soul of the disciple, not only the memory of what Jesus had said unto him: "*Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice*"; but the grace and love which buried his curses in silence and filled his eyes with tears of penitence. He was still to be established as "*Peter,*" the "*man of rock,*" and though he had denied his Master thrice, Jesus knew him. The fact that his nature and spiritual attainment were even yet worthy to be allied with the plans of the kingdom of Christ was demonstrated when "*he went out and wept bitterly.*"—*Luke xxii.*, 62.