2nd Wednesday in Lent
West Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 26: 34,35 Jesus said unto Him, Verily I say unto thee, That this nigh before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. Peter sai unto Him, Though I should die with Thee, yet will I not deny Thee.

I, SIMON PETER

I, Simon Peter, am a man who would fit in very well in your 20th Centur In your day you put a premium on self-confidence. You praise the man who is able to stand alone in any situation, the man who asks favors of no one. You are encouraged to get this kind of education, to take these vitamins, to ~~use~~ do these exercises, to follow this diet, and to use this kind of hairdressing in order to build up the self-confidence which will help you win the battle of life. You have a philosophy which says that all things are possible for man, if only he puts his mi to it. Doctors and even your clergymen have written numerous books on self-improvement which recommend that you believe in yourself.

I was such a man who believed in myself. I had every confidence in my own ability and strength. Born on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, I was brought up on the Sea and taught to take care of myself. From my father, Jonas, I learned all the ins and outs of the fishing business. We were men of rough hands and crude manners, but it's not that we weren't religious, mind you, but the ways of the Sea made us at times most profane and vulgar. When the going got rough, I could curse and swear with the best of them.

It was John the Baptist who first showed me the damnable nature of my vile tongue and what an offense it was to God. I'll never forget the first time I hea him. He spoke straight from the shoulder - straight to my heart. He was sternly warning everyone to repent because the long-expected Messiah was soon to appear. Everywhere his sermons were the subject of conversation. My brother, Andrew, and I were so impressed that we became his disciples.

Then one memorable day Andrew came running home and called to me excited ly: We have found the Messiah! I followed him eagerly as he led me to Jesus. As the Savior looked at me, He seemed to read my inmost thoughts! It was as if God Himself were looking into my soul. Then He startled me by saying: Thou art Simon the son of Jona; thou shalt be called Cephas. He knew my name without an intro-

duction. He gave me a new name, Peter, which meahs rock. At the time I thought i was an excellent name for me. It was my pride talking. If the Messiah needed a friend with rock-like devotion and loyalty, he could certainly count on me. Only later did I learn that this name, Peter - Rock, was given to me by Christ not because of what I was, but because of what God in His grace was going to make me. I was wise old Solomon who said, Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spi before a fall. Would to God I had listened to him. If I had, my story might have been written differently.

My over-confidence and false pride were my undoing. Take for example th night we were walking out to Gethsemane. The hour was late. We walked in darknes and silence until Jesus told us we would desert Him that night. Of course, we all denied it; but I had to stand out in my denial. I did not trust the others, not even my good friends James and John. But in one man I had absolute confidence. That man was myself, Peter. I would stand in any storm. I would stay with my Lor when to do so meant death. With all the bravado at my command, I protested that even if the whole world should walk out on Him, I would not! Don't think it was a promise lightly-given. I meant it. I can still remember it; and how I regret it.

When we reached the garden, Christ asked us to watch and pray with Him. He prayed to His Father in an agony of bloody sweat. And in so praying He receive power from on High for the terrible crisis ahead. But what did I do? I slept. I my over-confidence I felt no need for preparation. Besides, I felt that if Christ were really in danger, He would need all the strength and stamina I could muster. What I needed was physical strength, not spiritual strength!

I was sure I could not fall. You know what happened. Christ even gave me the details of my fall in advance. Still I boasted it could not happen. But i did! My swaggering nature took me into the palace of Caiaphas. I joined my enemi around ~~a coal of fire~~ the warm fire, where a question caught me off balance. Are not you also one of this man's disciples? Because I had always acted on the impulse of the moment, this question frightened me into a quick denial. It seemed to be a wise way

of avoiding needless danger. But then the temptation came back. This time it was not a question, but a statement of fact addressed not to me, but to those standing around me: This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. Merely to lie about it again would have been useless. I denied it with an oath. But even that did not convince them. A third time I was charged with being a follower of Christ, and this time the accusation was supported by evidence. My Galilean brogue betrayed me. I vehemently denied it with all the horrid oaths and curses I had once learned out on the sea. In more than two years I had not forgotten them. Old habits of sin have a distressing way of coming back to life suddenly and unexpectedly. Not only must you bury them; you must stand guard at the grave for the rest of your life.

I will always be remembered for my shameless denial. But I would also have you understand that the same temptation will likewise come to you at one time or another in your lifetime. Suddenly, unexpectedly, the same question is there for you to answer with a yes or no: Are you not also one of His disciples? When tragedy strikes in the form of sickness, disappointment, or bereavement, the question is there: Are you going to stand with Christ or not? Is your faith for sunny days only? Or will it weather the storm? Someone suddenly accuses you. Anger flares up, or you feel suspicious and irritated. Again the question arises: Are you really one of His disciples? Do you really love your neighbor? Are you ready to forgive? Are you willing to turn the other cheek? Like me, all of you are tempted to run out on Him when the going gets tough. You are tempted, because you think everything depends on you - on your abilities - that God counts for nothing.

Your history books tell about a man named Napoleon. He is said to have made the cynical remark: God is on the side of those who have the most cannons. His point was that God does not really count. History and destiny are determined by logistics, marching armies, and political strategy. So people think in your day. But remember what happened to Napoleon? With his splendid army which had conquered all of Europe, he marched against Moscow. What chance did these wild,

undisciplined Russians have against his battle-trained troops? As he reached the city, a white snowflake fell, soft and harmless. Then another, then a thousand, then a million, and then billions. His military machines stuck in the snow. Napoleon barely escaped with his own life and with a few tattered remnants of his army..... Later on there was Waterloo. The night before the battle Napoleon ate an onion. During the night there was a shower. In the morning the commander did not feel too well because of the onion he had eaten the night before. The shower had softened the earth. Not feeling too well, and not thinking too well, Napoleon sent his artillery, the finest in the world, through a deep, water-filled ditch. And there it remained, stuck solidly in the mud. The battle was lost, and an empire was lost -- all because of a flake of snow, an onion, and a rain shower.... So God upsets the calculations of the self-confident. It can happen to you, too, if you think that your safety rests in rockets, hydrogen bombs, space ships and jet planes. The ultimate decisions shaping the course of history are all made by God. Never forget that!

I certainly pray that Christ will break through your self-confidence and pride as He did mine. I pray that you will find the wonder of His forgiveness as I did. That ~~night~~ morning, when I heard the cock crowing, I suddenly remembered what Christ told me: Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. I looked up, and there on the protico of the palace, the Lord turned and looked at me. Those eyes! They were the eyes of God. They searched the innermost depths of my heart. They pierced through my self-confidence and exposed my cowardly fear. But there was also love and understanding in the look Christ gave me, as if to say: Peter I still love you; and I forgive you. When I saw my Savior standing there and recognized my sin - strong man that I was, I had to cry..... You of the 20th Century weep so little over sin. You cry at the movies or while you watch T.V. or over the consequences of sin; but how many of you have shed tears over your sins? Your hearts are so dry, they never want to relieve themselves by tears. I do not mean that you should pretend sorrow. God does not want that. But God does want you to

recognize the damnable difference between what He in His mercy wants you to be, ar what you actually are. When you understand that, your eyes too will be wet with tears.

I'll never forget the joy I felt when Jesus rose from the dead. I saw Him many times, and I understood then that it was for men like me - proud, boastfu over-confident - that the Savior had to become so humble, so shamed, and so deride I took hold of His forgiveness and put the shattered pieces of my life back togeth again. Now my self-confidence was replaced by God-confidence. Now I became a real Rock for Christ. With God-given courage I worked for Him, and witnessed for Him, and spoke of His love until the only way they could silence my mouth was to crucify me too. Because I felt unworthy to die as my Lord had die, I asked to be crucified with my head downward. Remember me, Peter, not as the man who was afraid of a maiden and who denied Christ with a blasphemous, I do not even know the man, but instead as the man who gazed calmly at a martyr's death and said confidently, We cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard.

Amen.