

Our Lady of Lourdes and the Conversion of Dr. Felix Leseur

by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen

JUST AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY, there was a woman married in Paris, just a good, ordinary Catholic girl, to an atheist doctor, Dr. Felix Leseur. He attempted to break down the faith of his wife and she reacted and began studying her faith. In 1905, she was taken ill and tossed on a bed of constant pain until August 1914. When she was dying, she said to her husband, "Felix, when I am dead, you will become a Catholic and a Dominican priest."

"Elizabeth, you know my sentiments. I've sworn hatred of God, I shall live in the hatred and I shall die in it."

She repeated her words and passed away. She died in her husband's arms at the early age of 47.

Rummaging through her papers, Felix found her will. She wrote: "In 1905, I asked almighty God to send me sufficient sufferings to purchase your soul. On the day that I die, the price will have been paid. Greater love than this no woman has than she who lay down her life for her husband."

Dr. Leseur, the atheist, dismissed her will as the fancies of a pious woman. He decided to write a book against Lourdes. He went down to Lourdes to write against Our Lady.

However, as he looked up into the face of the statue of Mary, he received the great gift of faith. So total, so complete was it, that he never had to go through the process of juxtaposition and say, "how will I answer this or that difficulty?"

He saw it all. At once.

The then reigning pontiff was Benedict XV. Then came World War I. Hearing of the conversion of Dr. Leseur, Pope Benedict XV sent for him. Dr. Leseur went in the company of Fr. Jon Vinnea, orator of Notre Dame. Dr. Leseur recounted his conversion and said that he wanted to become a Dominican priest. Holy Father said, "I forbid you. You must remain in the world and repair the harm which you have done."

The Holy Father then talked to Fr. Vinnea and then again to Dr. Leseur and said: "I revoke my decision. Whatever Fr. Vinnea tells you to do, you may do."

In the year 1924, during Lent, I, Fulton J. Sheen, made my retreat in the Dominican monastery in Belgium. Four times each day, and 45 minutes in length, I made my retreat under the spiritual guidance of Father Felix Leseur of the Order of Preachers, Catholic Dominican priest, who told me this story. ♣

Note: The cause of Elisabeth Leseur's canonization is proceeding in Rome. Fr. Leseur died a priest in 1950. You can read her inspiring diary printed by Sophia Institute Press under the title of "My Spirit Rejoices – The Diary of a Christian Soul in an Age of Unbelief."



BLESSED ARE YOU, most pure Virgin, who deigned to appear eighteen times, resplendent with light, sweetness and beauty, in the Grotto of Lourdes, and say to the Humble child who contemplated you in her ecstasy: "I am the Immaculate Conception."

OH EVER IMMACULATE VIRGIN, Mother of Mercy, health of the infirm, refuge of sinners, comfortess of the afflicted, you know my wants, my pains, my sufferings. Deign to cast a favorable look upon me. By appearing in the Grotto of Lourdes, you wished to make that spot a privileged place where you would dispense your favors. Already many of the unfortunate have found there a remedy for their spiritual and corporal infirmities. I come, therefore, full of confidence to implore your maternal favors. Hear, O tender Mother, my humble prayer. Blessed with your benefits I shall endeavor to imitate your virtues, in order that I may one day share in your glory. Amen

