Donna Marie F. Kaminsky, S.F.O.



God Is My Only Love

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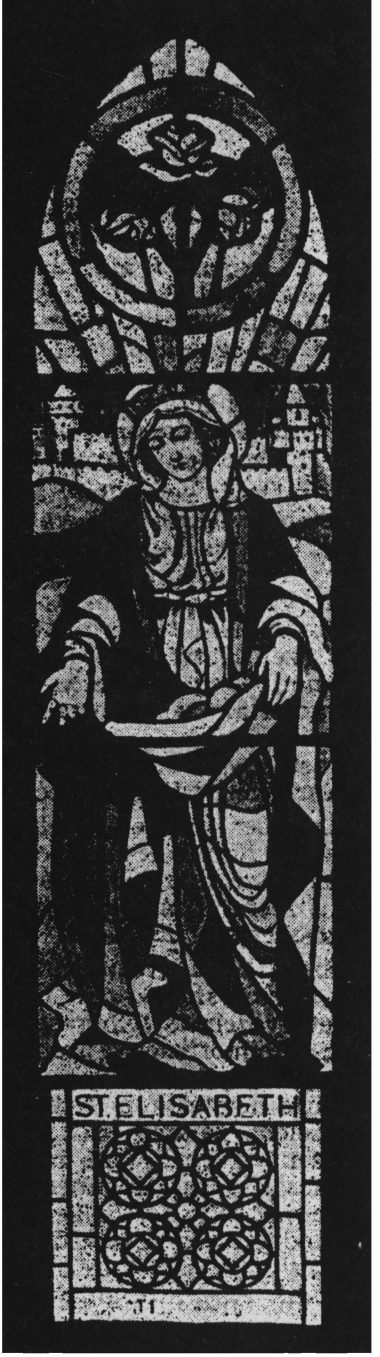

Donna Marie F. Kaminsky, S.F.O.

God Is My Only Love

Commemorating 750th Anniversary of the death

of

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary 1231 — 1981

Franciscan Fathers Catholic Publishing Company

To Father Nicholas Dengl, O.F.M.
Spiritual Assistant,
St. Stephen of Hungary Province;
to my brothers and sisters of the Province
and the Order.

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PREFACE

When I started the research on the life of Saint Elizabeth, I knew only three things about her: she was the Patroness of the Secular Franciscan Order; she was a Queen who helped the poor; and she had been quite happily married and the mother of three children. The deeper I moved into her life story, my own heart burned within me. Here truly was a Christian woman with whom all women can identify and from whom we can learn much.

There is a vast amount of resource materials concerning Elizabeth's life. My own intention was to tell Elizabeth's story very simply and to use the actual words of original sources whenever possible. Elizabeth is one of the few saints for whom we have authentic documents concerning her life and canonization dating from shortly after her death.

Nesta De Robeck and Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, two excellent biographers of Elizabeth provide in-depth historical background in their books. Readers or scholars who desire such detail are referred to these authors. The bulk of my own research is derived from these women.

A special word of thanks to the staff at Friedsam Library at St. Bonaventure University, New York, for their assistance in obtaining the references; and to Father Cyprian Lynch, O.F.M. of the Franciscan Institute at St. Bonaventure for directing me to specific sources.

Thank you, too, Franciscan Sisters of Allegany who warmly welcomed me into their home while I completed my research at St. Bonaventure's.

I am especially grateful to my husband, David, and to our children, Jim, Christine, Michael and Joy, who gave me the space, quiet and time to work on this project.

I am very grateful to my daughter, Donna Marie who drew the illustrations for each chapter.

To all, and to each, may I extend Francis' own greeting,

Peace and Every Good



A BEAUTIFUL GIFT

The birth of every child is a wondrous miracle of love, a celebration of the love of the husband and wife for each other, and also an awareness that life itself is a gift — a gift from God our Father who is Life. Birth is also a promise, a promise given to man and woman that this life given at birth is not, nor will be, all there is to life. No, each of us is loved by a magnificently generous and affectionate God Who calls us to share in an eternal wedding banquet. We need only respond "Yes", Yes to Life; Yes to Love.

This God-given promise was visibly enfleshed in the life of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. "In twenty-four years she passed through all the major phases of a woman's experience; she was the princess and the pauper; brought up in a palace she chose finally the poorest of dwellings and to tend to lepers; she was the child of the castle, the court fiancee, the bride, the deeply loved and loving wife, the mother, the widow and the saint."[1]

Elizabeth, a beautiful, olive-complexioned, dark-curled, dark-eyed baby princess, was born in the year 1207 in the royal castle of Pozsony. She was the third child of Queen Gertrude and King Andrew II of Hungary. The two older children were Mary who married Asen II, the King of Bulgaria in 1220, and Bela, later to be king of Hungary.[2]

A legend surrounds the story of Elizabeth's birth. According to the legend, in 1206, six Minnesingers came to the Wartburg, the castle of the Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia. Three of the more famous among the six were: Wolfram of Eschenbach, Walter von der Vogelweide and Henry of Ofterdingen. They were minstrels or troubadors, lyric poets and their favorite theme was love. As was the custom, these poets and minstrels recited or sang their poems and songs before the Landgrave and his guests. On this particular occasion, five of the poets sang the praises of

[1]Nesta De Robeck, *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954), P. 13.

[2]Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Gold Tried by Fire,* trans. P. J. Oligny and V. O'Donnell (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963), p. 3.

Hermann and applauded his deeds. One, however, Henry of Ofterdingen unwisely sang the praises of the Duke of Austria, comparing him to the sun. Because of his brazeness, Henry was almost hanged. The Landgravine Sophie, however, interceded for Henry. She proposed that this poetry contest be continued until the following year. The Landgrave Hermann agreed to this on the condition that the loser would pay the penalty of death.[3]

Henry was permitted to leave Thuringia to go to Hungary to seek the advice of the famous magician and seer, Klingsor. However, he must return within the year. Henry stayed so long in Hungary with Klingsor learning how to escape the sentence of death that Klingsor had to use magic to enable Henry and himself to arrive in Thuringia on time. They stayed at the Hellgref Inn on the market place. One evening, while sitting in the courtyard of the inn, Klingsor looked up at the stars. He was renowned as a prophet, and he exclaimed:

> Know, this very night a daughter has been
> born to the King of Hungary; she will be
> called Elizabeth, and will be a saint;
> she will marry the son of the Landgrave
> Hermann, and the whole world will glorify
> her and be glorified by her.[4]

As history would have it, Elizabeth was indeed betrothed to Louis IV of Thuringia.

* * * *

Into what kind of world was Elizabeth born? It was a "difficult and troublesome age."[5] Emperors, kings, princes and their troops were fighting each other in almost every corner of Europe and the Middle East. Two hundred years before, Benedict VIII

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[3]Anne Seesholtz, *Saint Elizabeth* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), p. 13.

[4]De Robeck, p. 12.

[5]Theodore A. Zaremba, O.F.M., *The Franciscan Reform* (Wisconsin: The Franciscan Printery, 1947), p. 254.

appealed for universal peace and the settling of disputes by arbitration rather than by force; however, what followed this appeal was 200 years of war. In spite of this, Urban II imposed the Truce of God on Christendom at the Council of Clermont-Ferrand. The Truce of God meant that hostilities would cease for six weeks in Advent and Christmastide, and again during fourteen weeks from the Sunday before Lent to Pentecost, as well as on certain feast days.[6]

It was a time, not unlike our own, when the wealthy lords and vassals were carried away by the love of self and an insatiable desire for possessions; when the serfs were "oppressed and harassed with impunity by the more powerful." Poverty and the poor were held in contempt. The lepers were loathed and neglected. "Thus it became customary that everyone took and secured large and rich profits from everything possible: not only, therefore by extorting money by force or demanding an unjust interest, but also by the sale of offices and honors, the administration of justice, and even the impunity of criminals, many increased and accumulated their fortunes."[7]

It was a time, called by later generations as "the most Christian of ages;" and yet, "heresies had crept stealthily into the territory of the Lord and slowly spread, propagated either by well known heretics or by obscure circulators, who displaying an austerity of life and a counterfeit appearance of virtue and discipline easily deceived the simple and weak, and as a result several troublesome sparks of rebellion were set among the people."[8]

It was a time of religious, moral, political, social and economic upheavals.[9] A time of continual warfare, of great wealth and unendurable poverty; of rich and deep faith in Jesus Crucified, and cold and inhuman indifference to one's neighbor, of sooty darkness and brilliant light. Brilliant light because it was also an

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[6]De Robeck, p. 12.
[7]Zaremba, p. 255.
[8]Ibid., p. 254.
[9]Ibid., p. 256.

age into which were born Francis of Assisi who pierced the darkness by preaching the light of the Gospel with his very being; Clare, clara, light who proclaimed the luminosity of poverty and contemplative prayer; and Elizabeth who radiantly embodied Christian love by serving the poorest of the poor.

* * * *

Shortly after her birth, Elizabeth was betrothed to Louis IV of Thuringia. In 1211, when Elizabeth was just four years old, the Hungarian court was preparing for the departure of Elizabeth from Hungary. Solemn betrothal of young children by their parents was a common custom of the time. Unfortunately, often the primary factor in such marriages was an advantageous political alliance with a neighboring country. Such was the circumstance of the betrothal of Elizabeth and Louis. Both Thuringia and Hungary would benefit by this marriage.[10]

Another custom of the period was that the baby princess engaged to the succeeding ruling prince would be brought to the court of her future husband to familiarize her with his home, his people, his language and his government. Therefore, in 1211, the Landgrave Hermann I sent an envoy to escort Elizabeth to the Wartburg. The retinue was led by some of Thuringia's highest nobility, including Meinhart of Muhlberg and Walter of Vargila. Walter of Vargila would remain one of Elizabeth's most loyal friends. With them was Dame Bertha, the widow of Egilolf of Bendeleiben. The chronicles tell us that the escort was well-equipped and well-armed. Nor did the Thuringian ambassadors come empty-handed. With them were two wagons full of gifts for Elizabeth, for Queen Gertrude her mother and for King Andrew her father.

Meanwhile, the royal court of Pozsony prepared gifts for the Landgrave Hermann and his family. Thirteen wagons were laden with gold and silver treasures, magnificent vases, beautifully

[10]For a detailed explanation of the historical and political considerations regarding the betrothal of Elizabeth to Louis, cf. Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 1-34.

embroidered linens, skillfully carved boxes with inlaid jewels, oriental rugs, quantities of costly silk, coverlets, bed hangings and furs and the best Hungarian wines. The Hungarians were noted as excellent horsemen and six finely bred horses were also selected to belong to the princess in her new home.[11]

Princess Elizabeth would be accompanied by several maids and ladies-in-waiting. Two chaplains. Arkasius and David, would be responsible for teaching Elizabeth about her Hungarian heritage.

To all this, Queen Gertrude added 1000 silver marks and a silver bathtub for her daughter's use. She then presented the Thuringian knights with a silver cradle in which lay Princess Elizabeth dressed in silken clothes interwoven with gold and silver.[12]

Another version of the parting is related by Nesta De Robeck who quotes a German biographer who asserts that King Andrew placed his daughter in Walter of Vargila's arms saying:

I trust your honor as a knight with my greatest treasure.
Walter replied:
I will protect her and always be faithful to her.[13]

The journey back to the Wartburg was long and arduous. The convoy would travel during good weather and spend the nights in friendly castles, inns or monasteries along the way. When the cavalcade finally reached Thuringia, flags flew in the breeze, trumpets sounded, cheers resounded; everyone wanted to see the beautiful Hungarian princess. When the messengers reached the castle to announce the arrival of the distinguished guests, propriety required that the nobles and their court go to welcome them. Ancelet-Hustache relates that the original sources confirm that present in the welcoming party were the Landgravine Sophie together with Prince Louis and his youngest sister, Agnes. What was Louis thinking and feeling when Elizabeth arrived?

"Then the little girl was put to bed beside the young prince, symbolic of the marriage to be later celebrated at the proper time."[14]

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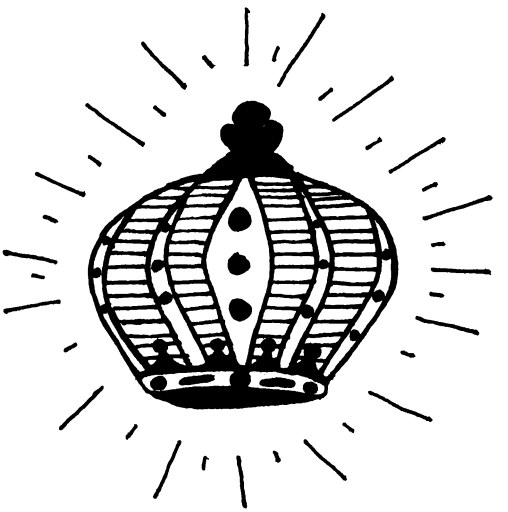
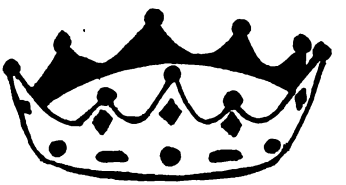
[11]Seesholtz, p. 15.
[12]De Robeck, p. 19.
[13]Ibid.
[14]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 33.

When all the wagons were unpacked, it was said that "no one in Thuringia had ever seen so many beautiful and precious objects as those that the Queen of Hungary had sent with her daughter."[15]

So many beautiful and precious objects! Ah yes, but the most beautiful and precious gift which the Queen of Hungary sent was Elizabeth herself. Elizabeth — her life indeed was a gift from God and God continued to "gift" her as she so wholeheartedly responded to His Life and to His Love. Elizabeth became "gift" — a beautiful gift to Louis, to Thuringia and Hesse, to Hungary, to Franciscans, to women the world over!

[15]De Robeck, p. 21.







OF ROYAL LINEAGE

"Blessed Elizabeth of royal lineage and the gracious Landgravine of Thuringia gave herself to earnest meditation on the mystery of our Redemption; and this continued from her earliest years to the end of her life. Above all else, she desired to become worthy of eternal glory and devoted herself to the consistent practice of virtue following the path traced by our Lord Jesus Christ, and she never ceased to find joy in the embrace of charity."
—Gloriosus in Majestate

The Wartburg was one of the chief castles located in central Germany. One writer described it as "on the summit of a mountain, surrounded by vast forests which frame it with the fresh green of beech trees and the darker hues of firs, the tawny fleece of autumn or the soft snow.[1]

Originally it had been a small fortress built in 1080, but in 1180, with the annexation of Hesse to Thuringia, the landgrave Louis III decided that it would be best suited as the chief dwelling place of the family, and he employed an architect to enlarge and beautify the Wartburg.[2]

When Elizabeth arrived at the Wartburg in 1211, the buildings were not yet completed; in fact, work continued on the castle during the remaining years of Hermann's reign as well as during Louis' reign.[3]

The former fortress contained a chapel, a banqueting hall, state apartments, and a "kemenate" for the women and children. "Water was supplied from a well in the courtyard; there were huge cellars, kitchens, ample rooms for guests, ample stabling, and the castle was a self-contained little world of its own."[4]

The "kemenate" or "room with a hearth" was a room set aside for the use of the family. When the Landgrave was present

[1]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 34.
[2]De Robeck, p. 21.
[3]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 36.
[4]De Robeck, p. 21.

at the castle, and if there were no guests, he and the family ate their meals together in this room.[5]

Hermann was an important and powerful German prince. Often he was visited by his vassals and friends, by ecclesiastical prelates and preachers and by poets and musicians and story-tellers. Everyone was welcomed and treated graciously.

One famous poet, Walter von der Vogelweide declared:

> ...if a barrell of good wine should cost
> one thousand livres, none of Hermann's
> guests would have an empty cup.

And again:

> Anyone who is of sensitive hearing had
> better avoid the court of Thuringia, for
> if he goes there he will be deafened.
> I have taken part in that roistering
> and I was completely exhausted; night
> and day one troop follows another.[6]

Hermann's first wife Sophia, the daughter of Count Palatine Frederick of Sommerschenburg had died in 1189. Before her death, she bore him two daughtes — Jutta and Hedwig. Both were married, Jutta to Deitrich of Meissen and Hedwig to Albert I of Orlamünde. In 1195, Hermann married Sophia of the family of Wittelsbachs, daughter of Otto I, count Palatine, and later duke of Bavaria. Sophia and Hermann had six children: Irmingard was born about 1196 and was probably already married by the time Elizabeth arrived at the Wartburg.[7] Next was Louis, Hermann, Henry Raspe, Conrad and Agnes. At the time of Elizabeth's arrival, Louis was 11 years old; Hermann about 10 years old, Henry Raspe about seven or eight; Conrad about five or six and Agnes four, the same age as Elizabeth.[8] Elizabeth had other playmates and companions as well. Nesta De Robeck informs us that there were "six other children of the Thuringian nobility who were assigned to Elizabeth as playmates."[9] Two of Elizabeth's dearest friends were Guda and Isentrude. Guda recorded the only authentic details we have of Elizabeth's childhood. Isentrude joined the household some years later, but she and

[5]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 36.
[6]De Robeck, p. 24.
[7]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 39.
[8]Ibid., p. 40.
[9]De Robeck, p. 25.

Guda "shared all the vicissitudes of Elizabeth's life and also her spiritual orientation."[10]

* * * *

Education was an essential and integral part of Elizabeth's life at the Thuringian castle. The chronicles related: "She was brought up with great care, as was fitting."[11] Probably Arkasius and David, the Hungarian chaplains, continued to speak Hungarian to Elizabeth and taught her about her own Hungarian heritage. Landgravine Sophie was responsible for the education of the girls. The first things to be learned were the Our Father, the Hail Mary (which in the Middle Ages concluded with the angel's salutation), and the Salve Regina. Every Christian was also supposed to know the Creed.

Before going to bed, every German child recited this prayer:

> Now I lay me down to sleep, twelve angels
> will come with me: two at my head, two at my side;
> two at my feet, and two to cover me; two to
> awaken me, and two to lead me to paradise.
> Amen.[12]

Daughters of the nobility were also taught to read and to write and to sing, especially the divine office. Elizabeth and the other young girls would be taught the languages of Latin, German and possibly French; the history of Thuringia and of the ruling family; European history, the history of the Crusades; how to play a musical instrument such as a lute and viola; how to dance; the rudiments of first aid; how to sew and spin and embroider; the proper care of linens and tapestries and personal wardrobes; how to ride and hawk. Most important, however, the princess must know how to be a lady at all times.[13]

What was Elizabeth's attitude and disposition toward all this? Guda, Elizabeth's dear friend, explains:

> Elizabeth was given to the study and practice
> of religion from her childhood, directing all
> her will and activity to God, both when occupied
> with serious matters and when at play.

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[10]Ibid.

[11]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 40.

[12]Ibid., p. 41.

[13]De Robeck, p. 27 and Seesholtz, p. 35.

> While she was still ignorant of letters, at about five years old, she frequently knelt down before the altar and opened the Psalter as though she were praying from it, and she gave prophetic signs of her good disposition in many secret genuflections, and cautiously seized any opportunity for entering the chapel. If she thought that any of the servant maids were watching, she would play at catching the other little girls and being caught, and thus run toward the chapel; she would jump over the threshold, kneel down with hands joined and pray and prostrate herself before the altar.
>
> In the same way, she used a hopping game as a means to approach the chapel in order at least to be able to kiss the threshold and walls.
>
> In a game played with rings, she placed all her hope of winning in God, promising that should she win she would make a certain number of genuflections and Hail Mary's. If it proved impossible to fulfill this promise, she would suggest to the other little girls:
>
> "Let us all lie down side by side and measure who is the tallest."
>
> This enabled her to make repeated genuflections as she herself later acknowledged.
>
> In the ring and other games, she gave a tenth part of her earnings to girls poorer than herself with whom she played, and to whom she also made small presents, making each of them promise to say an Our Father and a Hail Mary.[14]

It is apparent that Elizabeth's young heart was so drawn to God, that at this very tender age she had already learned how to "be with" God in every endeavor, how to "pray without ceasing,"

[14]De Robeck, pp. 155-157.

that her every activity, including her games, was prayer. That Elizabeth so loved prayer, Guda tells us:

> When she was obliged to go to bed with her prayers incompleted, she would continue them in bed.[15]

Elizabeth also showed evidence of a true understanding of penance, metanoia — a turning away from self *toward* God with an open heart. Again we look to Guda as our source:

> Every day and in all things she studied to go against her own will for love of God. If she were winning a game, she would break it off saying:
>
> "That is enough success; I want to stop for love of God."
>
> So, too, when dancing, she would say:
>
> "One turn is enough; let me give up the others too, for love of God."[16]
>
> She wished to be poor, and to offer God many small mortifications, and she would not put on gloves or buttons on her sleeves before midday on Sundays.[17]

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[15]Ibid., p. 156.

[16]Ibid.

[17]For an understanding of the significance of the passage, the following description is taken from Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 54-55: "Let us then look at her clothed in a long gown tightened at the waist with a belt and forming a light train, like those seen in all their graciousness on the portals of Bourges, Rheims, Naumburg, and Bamber. Sometimes over the gown she draped a cloak which also covered her head; more often, she wore a mantle over her shoulders, fastened about the neck by a cord and clasp. In the thirteenth century, the headdress for women consisted generally of a headcovering of linen, lawn, or gauze which passed under the chin and concealed most of the hair. The hair was parted in the middle and worn high in the back. Over the headdress was a flat, round cap of starched linen rippled and slightly widened at the top. But young girls and princesses frequently wore a veil over their flowing hair.

...we likewise need to know that the women of those times, like the men, wore a shirt of tunic with sleeves under the outside robe or surcoat. The sleeves of the surcoat were often detachable. Narrow at the wrist and drawn together by cord or button, or lightly sewed together, wide at the shoulder, they were held in place at the armhole by pins or a thread that could easily be pulled out. Ladies often gave a sleeve of their dress to a knight as a sovenir. When the sleeves of the surcoat were pulled up or when the style required surcoats without sleeves, the

> In these and other ways too, she denied her body any indulgence and kept herself from the vanities of the world out of reverence for God; while still so young, she had God always before her eyes, lovingly invoked Him in all things, and directed all her life toward Him.[18]

Elizabeth's personality was already evolving in a specific direction. Here was a cheerful child, fun-loving and gay who enjoyed games and dancing. Elizabeth was also a generous and warm child, with a sensitivity and prayerfulness beyond her years.

Elizabeth was of royal lineage. She knew herself to be the daugher of a king, and as such she would marry a prince. Deep within her being, however, Elizabeth already mysteriously experienced herself as the daughter of the King of Kings, and it was to His Son that her spirit was already espoused.

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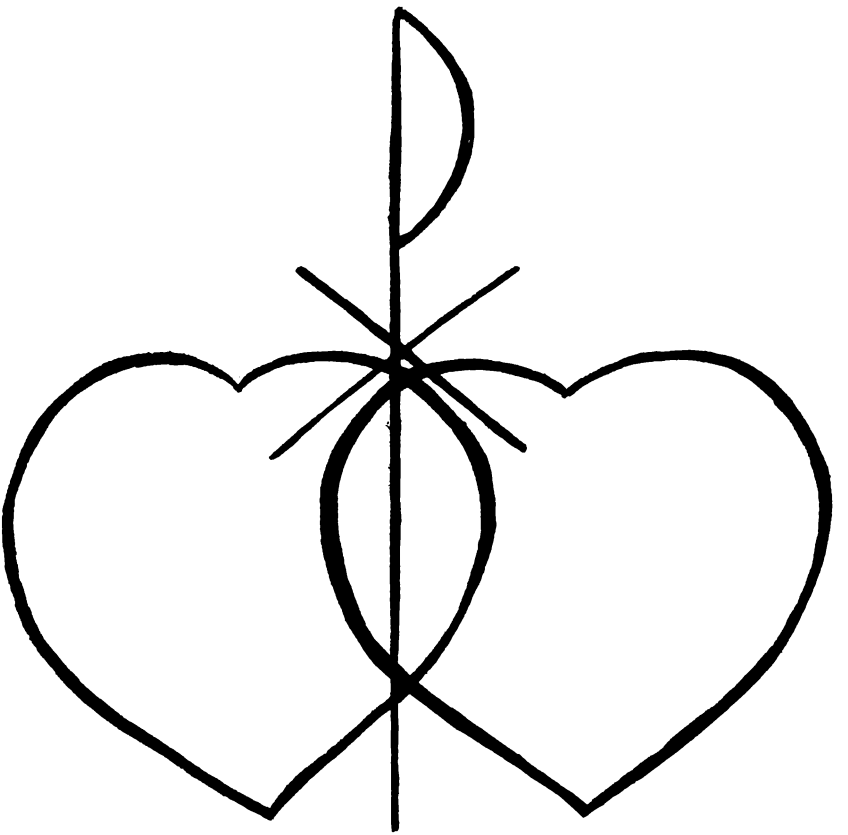
sleeves of the tunic could be seen. Quite nautrally the sleeves of the surcoat were much more ornate than those of the short tunic. This was all the more true of a princess like Elizabeth whose garments for state occasions, with their various accessories, were made of costly materials — velvet, samite, silk, gold or silver brocade-ornamented with all kinds of embroidery and orphrey."

[18]De Robeck, p. 157.



A HUSBAND'S LOVE

O blessed wife! O marvelous woman! O sweet Elizabeth, whose very name signifies one filled and satisfied with God, and who by feeding the poor has merited the bread of Angels!
—Gloriosus in Majestate

Louis also prepared himself for his future role as the Landgrave of Thuringia. According to medieval tradition, children were subjected to rigid discipline at the age of seven. Louis and his brothers, future knights, had to be trained "according to the very demanding standards of chivalry."[1] In addition to the languages of Latin and French, the young princes had to know the "family history and its relationships with the neighboring princes, the alliances among the reigning dynasties, the hidden inner workings of politics in the different nations of Europe and the Empire," and specifically for Louis,... "that he exactly understand what goals he must set for himself to maintain and increase his power."[2] Louis's own father, Hermann, was the best qualified teacher.

In addition to the political expertise, Louis and his brothers would also develop their physical prowess by mastering horsemanship, swimming, archery, fighting in single combat, hunting, chess-playing, and verse-writing. Madame Ancelet-Hustache refers to these talents as "the seven liberal arts of the clerics."[3]

As important as the intellectual and physical disciplines were, more important still were the development of the moral qualities — "observance of discipline and good manners, modesty and self-control,...dignified posture and deportment...."[4] These young men not only exemplified their own country, but as the ceremony of knighthood indicated, they represented their God as well.

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[1]De Robeck, p. 26.
[2]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 43.
[3]Ibid.
[4]Ibid.

By Thuringian law, a prince came of age at twelve. Knighthood was generally bestowed at the age of 21. However, Louis's father, the Landgrave Hermann, died April 25, 1217 and Louis acceded to power at the age of 17. There is some question as to the actual date of the ceremony of knighthood for Louis[5], but biographers confirm that there cannot be any doubt that Louis was prepared in every way to assume the rule of Thuringia.

The ceremony of Knighthood was quite beautiful and provides a wonderful insight into the character and motivating influences of Louis.

"Dubbing was a solemn ceremony, all the more so because a prince of high rank was usually accompanied by other young nobles who were knighted at the same time as he, thus adding to the splendor of the ceremony.

Louis donned the white robe, the sign of purity, and the red mantle, the symbol of blood he must be ready to shed in defense of all just causes. A white cincture was fastened about his waist. After the Gospel of the solemn Mass, the bishop reminded him of his new obligations. He was to hear Mass every day, protect widows and orphans, avoid unjust wars, take up arms to free the innocent whoever they might be, obey the emperor,[6] and lead a sinless life before God and man.

'If you humbly observe the commandments of knighthood,' the bishop said, 'know that you will receive honor in this world and the eternal honor of heaven in the life to come.'

Whereupon the bishop enclosed the joined hands of Louis in the missal at the page of the Gospel of the day, and Louis pronounced the words of his vow:

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[5]Cf. De Robeck, p. 43; Ancelet-Hustache, p. 68; Seesholtz, p. 41. De Robeck cites sources which officially recognize Louis as Landgrave "in the very year of his father's death" which would be 1217. Ancelet-Hustache however, places the ceremony sometime after May 18, 1218, the death of Otto IV. She says: "Several months later, Louis, who had now reached his eighteenth year, was knighted in his beloved city of Eisenach." Ancelet-Hustache's assertion would substantiate Seesholtz's report: "Louis, just eighteen, was knighted in St. George's Church on the 6th of July, 1218.

[6]Cf. De Robeck, p. 44. The translation of this part of the exhortation is rendered: "He must obey his sovereign Lord and lead an exemplary life free from sin in the eyes of God and man."

'I swear, by the Holy Gospel I now touch, to observe the rule.'
Then the bishop struck him a light blow on the neck...saying:
'In honor of almight God, I dub you knight.'
Louis then girded himself with the sword and put on the golden spurs."[7]

The evening prior to the ceremony, Louis and the other princes to be knighted, spent the entire night in church in a vigil of prayer to prepare for this momentous occasion. Louis' response is revealed in his prayer:

'My soul belongs to God,
my life to my sovereign Lord,
my heart to my Lady,
my honor to me.'[8]

* * * *

Louis and Elizabeth shared a deep and intense love based on a special and tender friendship. From early childhood each called the other "dear brother," "dear sister." Madame Ancelet-Hustache is correct to note that these terms of endearment were not expressions of "fraternal affection."[9] Rather, they were expressions of an attitude each had toward the other, a way of being toward and with the other. Louis and Elizabeth seemed to be saying with all their being that it was indeed "good for us to be here" (cf. Mt 17:4) with each other. They shared important spiritual values.

"Louis' ideal (as was Elizabeth's) was the service of God, and he would never tolerate any blasphemy in his hearing; he was tenderhearted and generous to those in need; he was afraid of misusing his power and, his biographer says, was very severe with himself. He had an enviable reputation for truth and reliability, and set a high standard of chivalry to his court."[10]

He assisted at the daily recitation of the divine office with its chants and readings, and respectfully prayed to God.[11]

Both biographers Ancelet-Hustache and De Robeck relate two anecdotes that confirm Louis' high moral standards:

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[7]Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 68-70.
[8]De Robeck, p. 44.
[9]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 76.
[10]De Robeck, p. 45.
[11]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 68.

One day while Louis was watching some people dance, someone pointed to a young woman and suggested that she be brought to him. Louis responded that the courtier be quiet if he wished to remain in good favor.

Another time, when Louis was staying at a different court, after the banquet he found a beautiful young woman in his room. Louis called Walter of Vargila and told him to send the woman away and to give her a silver mark saying: "Even if I did not hate the sin of adultery, I would never insult my sister Elizabeth by such disloyalty."[12]

That Louis cherished Elizabeth is probably best illustrated with the anecdote of the mirror:

It was Louis' custom upon returning from a trip to bring her a present and to tenderly embrace her. When the trumpets announced Louis' arrival, Elizabeth would run to meet him "covering his mouth with a thousand kisses."[13]

One day, however, Louis had returned with two guests and had forgotten her present. At around the same time, certain persons in the Thuringian court wanted to send Elizabeth back to Hungary. Elizabeth, who knew the rumors were circulating, misinterpreted Louis' oversight as perhaps an indication that he, too, was thinking of sending her back to Hungary.

Nesta de Robeck suggests that Walter of Vargila, the knight who had received Elizabeth from her father's arms, may have comforted her in this episode. In any event, one day while riding alone with Louis, Walter begged if he might ask a question and receive an answer.

"Go on," said Louis; "if I can, I will answer."

"My Lord, do you wish to keep the daughter of the King of Hungary and marry her, or do you wish to send her back to her own country?"

Inselberg, the highest mountain in Thuringia, stood before them. Louis pointed to it:

"Do you see that mountain? If it were full of red gold and belonged to me, I would more willingly renounce it than my dear friend Elizabeth. Let people talk. I love her, and she is dearer to me than anything."

"May I tell her this, my Lord?"

"Yes, and give this to her as a token."

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[12]De Robeck, pp. 45-46; Ancelet-Hustache, p. 67.

[13]De Robeck, p. 49.

Louis then took a small mirror from his pocket; on one side it was plainly polished; on the other was an engraving of the passion of Christ. He sent it to Elizabeth as a sign of his deep love for her. When she received the mirror, she smiled with great joy and thanked the good Sir Walter.[14]

Dietrich of Apolda said of their love: "They had an inexpressible love for each other in God. An angel was frequently the messenger between them."[15]

Thus, the betrothal which originally had been arranged for political expediency blossomed into a deep and tender love that was "fully human," "a very special form of personal friendship," "faithful and exclusive until death," "a source of profound and lasting happiness," and "fruitful" (Humanae Vitae, 9).

Early in the summer of 1221, Louis and Elizabeth were united in Holy Matrimony. Louis was 21; Elizabeth 14.

* * * *

The wedding festivities lasted three days! Elizabeth, attired in a rich damask gown with a magnificent velvet mantle, a crown and lovely Hungarian jewels enjoyed being a beautiful bride.[16] Now Elizabeth was officially the Landgravine of Thuringia.

Elizabeth and Louis enjoyed each other's company. Often they would ride together, and many times Elizabeth accompanied Louis to important meetings and affairs of state. Contrary to the custom of the time, Elizabeth even sat beside Louis in the great hall.

As her love for Louis expanded, so too did her devotion to God increase and her acts of self-denial multiplied. Isentrude, Elizabeth's servant and friend, affirmed on oath "that during her husband's life, Elizabeth was always very religious, humble, most charitable, and intent on many prayers.[17]

Louis liked to see Elizabeth wearing beautiful clothes. While he was at the castle, she wore them. However, when Louis had to be away, she dressed as a widow and spent the night in prayer. When Louis returned, Elizabeth would once again don her beautiful garments. It is important to go directly to the sources

[14]De Robeck, pp. 42-43; Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 62-63.
[15]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 64.
[16]De Robeck, p. 48.
[17]Ibid., p. 158.

which were used at Elizabeth's canonization. In the words of Isentrude:

"When her husband was absent, blessed Elizabeth would pass whole nights in vigils, genuflections, scourgings and prayer; she also put off her rich clothes and ornaments and dressed herself as a widow with a nun's veil on her head. She would wear harsh wool or haircloth next to her skin, even when she was outwardly dressed in magnificent apparel. When her husband was about to return, she adorned herself sumptuously, not, she said, to gratify the body's pride, but for the honor of God, and in order to prevent any temptation to sin in her husband should he be displeased with her appearance. 'It is in God,' she said, 'that I love my husband, and may He who sanctified marriage grant us eternal life.'[18]

Isentrude also relates Louis' tenderness toward Elizabeth and concern for her welfare because of her long prayers. Often he held her hand while she was praying.[19]

That Louis was patient and supportive of Elizabeth's prayers is illustrated by the following humorous and very human story, again told by Isentrude:

"Blessed Elizabeth often enjoined on her attendants that they should wake her at night in order to pray, and she was in the habit of rising every night when her husband slept or seemed to sleep. Her attendants, fearing to disturb their lord and master, asked how she wished to be roused, and she told them to pull her foot. And it happened that the said Isentrude, meaning to wake Elizabeth, pulled the Landgrave's foot by mistake, he having crossed his leg with that of his wife. When it was explained to him what had happened unintentionally, he bore it with patience."[20]

It is easy enough to imagine that this episode probably continued to be a source of good-natured banter between themselves.

Elizabeth really had integrated her "spiritual life" with her "everyday life." This is especially evident when her servants relate her wonderfully warm and human love for Louis and at the same time her continual faithfulness to prayer. Elizabeth often prayed so long in the night that she would fall asleep on the floor. When her attendants asked her why she did not get back into bed, she answered:

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[18]Ibid., pp. 160-161.

[19]Ibid., p. 51.

[20]Ibid., p. 160.

"Even though I cannot always pray, I can always mortify my flesh be depriving it of the pleasure of being beside my beloved husband."[21]

The Lord blessed Elizabeth and Louis with three children. On March 28, 1222, Elizabeth's and Louis' first child was born, a son, baptized Hermann after his grandfather. Their second child was born on March 24, 1224, a daughter, baptized Sophie after her grandmother. Hermann was born at the Kreuzberg castle on the Werra where Elizabeth had spent many happy hours as a child. Louis was away at the time of Hermann's birth. However, when Elizabeth gave birth to Sophie at the Wartburg castle, the Landgrave was at home.[22]

Sadly, their third child, a daughter, baptized Gertrude after Elizabeth's mother, was born September 29, 1227 just a few weeks after Louis' death.

After the birth of each of the children, Elizabeth carried the baby in her arms to the church and offered the infant to the Blessed Virgin. On the altar she placed the child together with a candle and a lamb. Unlike other women who went to church "richly adorned," Elizabeth approached the church barefooted and dressed in a plain woolen garment. After the ceremony, she would give the cloak and dress she had worn to some poor woman.[23]

Certainly Isentrude's vivid description of their marriage and love rings true:

> "They loved each other with a marvelous love, gently exhorting and fortifying each other in praising and serving God."[24]

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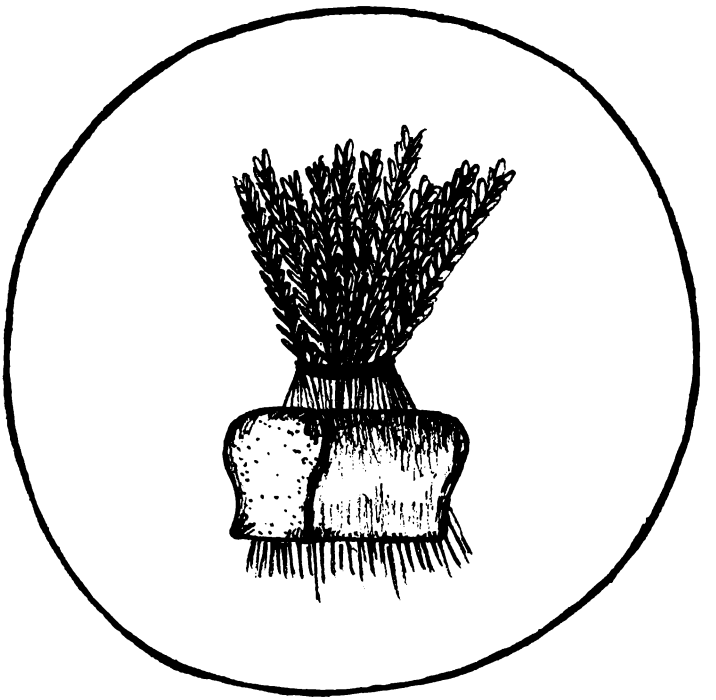
[21]Ibid.
[22]Seesholtz, p. 61.
[23]De Robeck, p. 161.
[24]Ibid., p. 77.



PURE, HOLY SIMPLICITY

"She became voluntarily poor in many things in order to be rich toward those in need; from her earliest age she always wished to be their protector and friend knowing that the reward of eternal life is to be acquired by the merits of God's friends the poor. She came so to love this condition which is despised by worldly pride that she repeatedly showed her contempt for even those legitimate pleasures open to her through the exalted rank of her husband, and mortifying her delicate body by the constant practice of renunciation, she progressed in virtue to the point where a spontaneous action of self-denial is rewarded by more abundant grace."
—Gloriosus in Majestate

From earliest childhood, Elizabeth's entire disposition was inclined toward serving God, expressing her love for Him in fervent prayers and acts of mortification. Her marriage to Louis and her position as Landgravine enabled Elizabeth to be even more generous and kind. "She gave with both hands, and had she possessed eight, they would still have been insufficient. As lady of the castle, she could do more for the poor who flocked to the gate without overstepping the conventions, and when these got in her way, she just paid no attention to them. It is only too likely that conservative vassals and servants shook their heads, well knowing what to expect with Elizabeth as mistress."[1]

The poor and sick who came to the castle were helped personally by Elizabeth. Even more significant is that the poor and sick *did come,* confident that Elizabeth would not only help them, but do so graciously and warmly. What love, admiration and gratitude must they have felt for her! Certainly Elizabeth could have, as others probably had, thrown them a few coins as alms and sent them on their way. Or, she could have ordered her maidservants and attendants to provide for their needs. After all, Elizabeth herself had maids whose sole purpose was to look after her every desire and need. Rather, it seems that the Gospel passage, "I

[1]De Robeck, p. 49.

solemnly tell you; in so far as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (cf. Mt 25:40), was seared in her heart. Elizabeth tenderly and joyfully ministered to the poor and sick.

"Elizabeth was still living in the pomp of the world," Isentrude explains; "but secretly, she took in ill beggars of dreadful aspect suffering from sores in their heads, and she cut off their hair and dressed their dreadful wounds with her own hands, tenderly embracing them. She did this in a space under the castle wall, and there she secretly washed and anointed them, always avoiding being seen; and when the serving maids discovered her, they would laugh."[2]

Her biographers picture Elizabeth as a warm, cheerful, compassionate, kind, spontaneous, impulsive woman and lavishly generous. A simple legend tells how one day on her way to Eisenach, Elizabeth was besieged by a crowd of beggars. After she gave away all that she had with her, another beggar pleaded for her charity. Rather than turn the man away, she gave him one of her jewel-embroidered gloves. Nearby, a young knight who witnessed this promptly bought the glove and placed it on his helmet as a sign of divine protection. Later, as an old man, he told stories of how he became a famous Crusader and was safely brought through many battles because of Elizabeth's glove.[3]

The extent of Elizabeth's charity is incredible. Not only did she help the poor who came to the castle, she also frequently visited them in their own houses to console them. If the poor and sick whom she visited could not pay their creditors, Elizabeth paid their debts.

She helped to lay out the dead, clothed them and accompanied them to the tomb. Elizabeth would not, however, allow the dead to be buried in new clothing. She insisted that the new clothing be given to the poor.

During Louis' lifetime, Elizabeth and her attendants spun wool and from the cloth made the habits for the Friars Minor as well as clothes for the poor. They also prepared clothes for the children to be baptized. Often Elizabeth herself carried the children to church and held them over the baptismal font. If she acted as their godmother, she became their benefactress.[4]

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[2]Ibid., p. 158.

[3]Ibid., p. 50.

[4]Ibid., p. 161.

A severe famine gripped all of Germany during the years 1223 through 1226. The winter of 1225-1226 was exceptionally hard and long. People were dying of starvation and cattle were also dying from disease. Louis was away from the castle to attend the Diet in Cremona. Against all criticism from Louis' advisors, Elizabeth organized a daily distribution of bread which was prepared in the Wartburg kitchen. Each day she fed the poor with corn and grains from the royal granaries.[5] The servants and advisors complained. They feared that Elizabeth would give everything away and then, they too would starve.

When Louis returned, several officials immediately complained to Louis about Elizabeth's reckless and irresponsible distribution of food and alms to the poor. Not only were the granaries empty, but Elizabeth had also sold her jewels!

Louis' response quieted the protestors: "Let her give for the love of God and do good for the poor as she will, provided that the Wartburg and Neuenberg remain in our possession."[6]

Elizabeth was not satisfied, however, with just feeding the starving poor; she also converted a huge building at the bottom of the Wartburg hill into a hospital. She visited these sick at least twice a day, and personally nursed them, cleaning their heads and faces, noses and ears. In the Depostion of Witnesses[7] one amazing story follows another, each illustrating Elizabeth's concern and relating how affectionately she cared for each person.

"At one time there were in this building a number of poor children for whom she provided everything and with much gentleness and kindness kept them near her, and as many as came in, all ran to her calling her 'mother.' She paid the most loving care to the worst cases among these children, the deformed, the dirtiest, the weakest, those suffering from the most repulsive illnesses, and would take them tenderly into her arms. In order to keep these children amused, she would send and buy glass rings and other playthings; once when she was carrying these things in her cloak, they fell over a rock onto stones below, but nothing was broken; and they were all distributed to amuse the children."[8]

A colorful legend is related that on one day after the usual distribution of food and alms to the poor, Elizabeth gave every-

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[5]Ibid., p. 68.

[6]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 125.

[7]De Robeck, p. 163f.

[8]Ibid.

one some beer. There was only a little beer left, and she gave this to everyone who was present; and yet, there remained in the jug as much as there had been before.[9]

After everyone had been fed, Elizabeth would give shirts and shoes to all who could work — shoes to protect their feet from the stubble in the fields, and sickles so that they could support themselves.[10]

To those individuals too weak to work, Elizabeth gave clothes which they could sell in the market. If Elizabeth did not have money to give, then she gave the poor women cloaks and dresses and silk garments, with this warning:

"Do not use these things to satisfy your own vanity, but rather sell them and buy what is necessary and work hard."[11]

One particular Holy Thursday, Elizabeth summoned many lepers and washed their hands and feet herself. She knelt before them and kissed their wounds. When and wherever she found lepers, she would sit down at their side and comfort them and encourage them to patience. "She had as little fear of these sufferers as of a healthy person, and gave them copious alms."[12]

"Elizabeth avoided all superfluous clothes and long and richly embroidered gowns. She performed all works of charity with cheerful friendliness, and had the grace of shedding many tears in secret, but they flowed lightly down her face without ever distorting it.

These and many other wonderful things she accomplished which are now passed for they were done during the lifetime of her husband with whom she lived in holy matrimony, for they wonderfully loved each other, and each gently comforted and encouraged the other in the love and service of God."[13]

Guda and Isentrude both are quick to note that even though Louis was concerned about smoothly and peacefully governing Thuringia, that he did "keep the fear of God before his eyes and allowed the utmost freedom to Blessed Elizabeth in all that she did to the honor of God and the welfare of her own soul."[14]

Elizabeth's personal ministry to the poor was a direct challenge to the nobility of the feudal society. Most of the feudal lords

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[9]Ibid.
[10]Ibid.
[11]Ibid., p. 164.
[12]Ibid.
[13]Ibid.
[14]Ibid., p. 165.

and ladies were concerned with politics and amassing a fortune. Their greed blinded them to the plight of the poor. It was one thing to give alms to the poor. Many feudal lords and ladies were quite generous. Perhaps almsgiving was a salve for their conscience. "None but Elizabeth," however, "gave herself in the most natural, direct and spontaneous way possible."[15]

Francis composed a beautiful canticle called: "The Salutation of the Virtues."[16] Truly, God our Father filled Elizabeth with these virtues, and she in turn poured them out on everyone with whom she came in contact.

Hail, Queen Wisdom, may the Lord protect you with your sister, holy pure Simplicity.

Lady, holy Poverty, may the Lord protect you with your sister, holy Humility.

Lady, holy Charity, may the Lord protect you with your sister, holy Obedience.

O most holy virtues, may the Lord protect all of you, from Whom you come and proceed.

There is surely no one in the entire world who can possess any one of you unless she dies first.

Whoever possesses one of you and does not offend the others, possesses all.

And whoever offends one of you does not possess any and offends all.

And each one destroys vices and sins.

Holy Wisdom destroys Satan and all his subtlety.

Pure holy Simplicity destroys all the wisdom of this world and the wisdom of the body.

Holy Poverty destroys the desire of riches and avarice and the cares of this world.

Holy Humility destroys pride and all the people who are in the world and all things that belong to the world.

Holy Charity destroys every temptation of the devil and of the flesh and every carnal fear.

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[15]Ibid., p. 50.

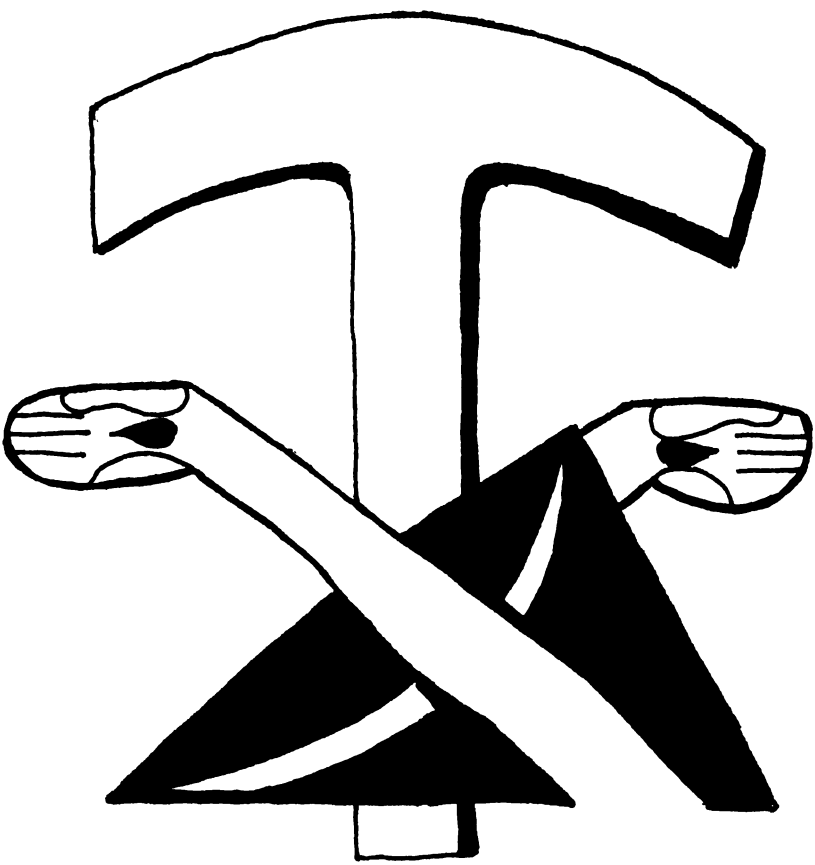
[16]Translation by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., St. Bonaventure University, Summer, 1981.

Holy Obedience destroys every wish of the body and of the flesh and binds its mortified body to obedience of the Spirit and to obedience of one's brother.

And the person who possesses her is subject and submissive to all persons in the world, and not to man only, but even to beasts and wild animals, so that they may do whatever they want with him inasmuch as it has been given to them from above by the Lord.

Wisdom, simplicity, humility, charity and deep love for poverty — Elizabeth's life certainly shone with the brilliance of these virtues. And soon she would embrace holy Obedience.

The crucified Jesus was the unifying force of all Elizabeth's affections and aspirations. Indeed, Elizabeth as Francis and Clare, experienced a grace-filled life rooted in the imitation of the life and teachings of Jesus.



SECULAR FRANCISCAN

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and center of his life with God and people.

Rule, #4

The first Franciscan friars arrived in Germany in 1217 led by John of Penna. None of the friars, however, understood the German language. They answered *Ja* to every question they were asked. The friars managed well enough until one day somebody, who had heard reports that there were heretics in Italy and France who professed poverty, asked the friars if they too were heretics. Not understanding the question, and with beaming faces, the friars answered *Ja.* Immediately the people beat the friars, stripped them of their rags and forced them to return to Italy.[1]

Four years later a second mission returned to Germany, and soon "Germany was covered with Franciscan houses from which the friars radiated to the central and eastern parts of Europe."[2] Among the friars who came into Thuringia was Brother Rodeger. At some point, he became Elizabeth's spiritual director and "taught the Saint chastity, humility, and patience, how to apply herself to prayer and to works of mercy."[3]

At the time of the friars arrival, Elizabeth and Louis would have been married about two years. Already they had one son and Elizabeth was pregnant with their second child. She would have been about sixteen.

Certainly she and Louis welcomed the friars because later Conrad of Marburg refers to the chapel at Eisenach "where Elizabeth had established some Friars Minor."[4]

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[1]De Robeck, p. 56; Ancelet-Hustache, p. 84.

[2]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 83.

[3]Ibid., p. 84. This same Rodeger is numbered among the friars who together with John of Piano di Carpine, approached Bishop Conrad of Hildesheim in 1223. He gave them the right to preach and to hear confessions in his diocese. Rodeger probably arrived at the Wartburg about this time.

[4]Ibid.

What message did Elizabeth hear from Brother Rodeger and the friars? Already Francis had received oral approval from Pope Innocent III in 1209 for his "Propositum vitae." Many persons were attracted to Francis and wanted to follow his radical gospel manner of living. Brother Rodeger would also have told Elizabeth about Clare and the Ladies who became totally poor to follow Christ and spent their days in prayer for Francis and the world. Important, too, to Louis would be the fact that Francis had not only visited the Sultan and spoke with him at great length, but also that the Sultan had been so impressed with Francis' gentleness and sincerity that he arranged for Francis' safe return. Too, so extensive was Francis' influence that even married men and women joyfully embraced the life of penance which Francis preached. Certainly, Brother Rodeger would have shared with them that on Christmas Eve 1223 Francis had set up the Christmas Crib in Greccio; and would the Brother have neglected to mention that in September, 1224, while Francis was enraptured in mystical prayer that he had received the Stigmata?

Not only would the friars have shared what happened to Francis, but also who he was — how joyful Francis was, how he loved every created thing and every person; how he cared for the lepers; how he reverenced priests as holy men of God; his profound devotion for the Holy Eucharist; his respect and love for Holy Mother Church and especially Francis' greeting of peace — Pax et Bonum — Peace and Every Good Blessing.

It is generally accepted now by most scholars that the Secular Franciscan Order[5] was started sometime between 1209 and 1212[6] and that the Rule of 1221, orally approved by Pope Honorius III was probably Francis' original short rule set in more legal form by his friend Cardinal Ugolino.[7] It is also probable that the

[5]The original name for this branch of the Franciscan Family was: The Brothers and Sisters of Penance, or simply, "The Penitents" (cf Callaey, p. 13). The term "Third Order of St. Francis" was used for the first time by Gregory IX in the Bull "Cum dilecti" of June 7, 1230 (cf Callaey, p. 96). Fredegand Callaey, O.F.M. Cap., *The Third Order of St. Francis* (Pittsburgh: St. Augustine Monastery, 1926). In 1978, Paul VI approved the new rule by means of the Apostolic Letter "Seraphicus Patriarca" dated June 24, 1978, and the official name was changed to Secular Franciscan Order (S.F.O.).

[6]Alexandre Masseron and Marion A. Habig, O.F.M., *The Franciscans* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), pp. 401-403.

John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 42.

[7]Omnibus, p. 167.

friars would have shared with Elizabeth Francis' Letter to the Faithful[8] and even some aspects of the Rule of 1221. Francis had never really conceived a "rule" as a list of regulations. His Letter to the Faithful exhorted the penitents to allow the Spirit of God to penetrate and transform them.

To what did the first Brothers and Sisters of Penance commit themselves? Masseron and Habig note that by 1221 there were "definite rules for the investiture of new members and their profession after a year of probation. The profession or promise to observe the rule was made in writing." There were regulations regarding external and internal means of attaining to holiness. "The external means are poverty and simplicity of dress, avoidance of unbecoming amusements, and the mortification of the palate; the internal means are prayer and the sacraments of confession and Holy Communion, as well as a nightly examination of conscience and hearing the word of God.[9]

The early penitents were also required to abstain from meat on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays; to fast from after the feast of St. Martin of Tours (November 11) till Christmas. If they could read, they had to recite the divine office; otherwise, they substituted an office of 54 Our Fathers and Glory Be's.[10]

A special emphasis was also stressed on the social virtues of charity, justice and peacefulness. Everyone contributed to a common fund to help the needy members; the sick were given special care and visited; and finally, each penitent was required to make a will within three months after profession.[11]

Tertiaries also wore a "distinctive habit publicly and at all times. In the beginning it was a long woolen tunic reaching to the ankles and held together at the waist by a knotted cord, together with a cloak or mantle. The women's dress was black or white, and included a black veil. The men's garment, which was grey, was soon shortened to just below the knees. Originally this habit was not really different from the clothes other people wore except in its simplicity, common quality, and the fact that the tunic was not open at the neck..."[12]

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[8]See Appendix for a translation of this letter.

[9]Masseron and Habig, *The Franciscans,* p. 405. For a more detailed explanation of the historical development of the rule and the Third Order Secular, cf Chapter XII, pp. 399-430.

[10]Ibid., p. 406.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid., pp. 413-14.

Assuredly, all this resonated within Elizabeth's heart. After all, hadn't she already embarked on this holy manner of living since early childhood? Isentrude, in her deposition for the canonization, says:

"From her childhood, blessed Elizabeth was in the habit of wearing neither sleeves nor rings or any other bodily ornament during the time of the Gospel and the Canon of the Mass; and she appeared in the most humble posture, especially when the priest held the Host in his hands."

"When other ladies came to visit her (after her marriage to Louis), she spoke to them of God, urgently persuading them to a vow of abstinence and to avoiding all worldly vanities; if they could not give up the world entirely, at least she asked that they should restrain themselves in dancing and reduce the magnificence of their sleeves, which should be modest and decent. They might also give up the excessive adornment of their heads and the elaborate dressing of their hair. She would also plead with them that they should make a vow of continence in the event of their husband's death."[13]

"While blessed Elizabeth was still living amidst the honors of her worldly rank, her heart was already inclined to poverty, and she spoke of it with her maids. In their presence in her own palace she would put on an old cloak, and cover her head with an old linen cloth saying:

'This is how I shall look when I go begging and suffer misery and need for the love of God.'[14]

* * * *

According to Nesta De Robeck, the period of 1225-1226 was a crucial time in Elizabeth's life: it included the worst stage of the famine and perhaps, most significantly, her meeting of Master Conrad of Marburg.[15]

Master Conrad of Marburg[16] was a secular priest belonging to the diocese of Mainz. He was called "Master" in the broad sense of the title by reason of his education, as was the custom of

[13]De Robeck, p. 161.

[14]Ibid., p. 164.

[15]Ibid., p. 73.

[16]For complete details re: Master Conrad's credentials as a preacher of the Crusades and his involvement in the Inquisition, cf De Robeck, pp. 73-76 and Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 103-111.

the time. Probably, he had been educated at the University of Paris.[17] He became Elizabeth's spiritual director in the autumn of 1225 and remained so for five years until her death in 1231.[18]

What happened to Brother Rodeger? History is not clear. We do know that he became guardian of the friars in Halberstadt.[19] Perhaps his responsibilities as guardian increased or perhaps he was given another assignment. Neither is it clear why another Franciscan was not chosen instead of Master Conrad.

Conrad of Marburg was a pious man, learned and scholarly, knew Sacred Scripture well, was devoted to the Christian faith, and worked zealously to weed out heresy. "He absolutely despised riches, temporal possessions, and the benefices of the Church. He was content with one simple and modest ecclesiastical garb; his manners were dignified and serious, his face and expression austere. Toward good Christians he was kind, but, toward unbelievers, hard and severe in his vengeance and justice."[20] According to Caesar of Heisterbach, Conrad mortified his body by severe penances.[21] And we know for certain that three successive popes had confidence in Conrad's preaching of doctrine and his own personal morals.[22] Each of the popes, Innocent III in 1213 and Honorius III in 1216 called upon Conrad to propagate the crusade, and Gregory IX in 1227 asked him to remedy abuses among the religious and secular clergy which had been denounced by the synod of Mainz in November, 1225.[23]

The main criticisms of Conrad resulted from his severe and arbitrary treatment of persons accused of heresy. It was said that many innocent and pious Christians were condemned to die.[24] In addition, Guda and Isentrude testify to Conrad's harsh treatment of Elizabeth on several occasions.

It was Louis, Elizabeth's husband, who proposed Conrad to Elizabeth as her spiritual director. Yet it is quite clear that Elizabeth could have chosen someone other than Conrad. According to Irmingarde, one of Elizabeth's maids, Elizabeth once said:

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[17]Ancelet-Hustache, pp. 103-104.
[18]Ibid., p. 111.
[19]De Robeck, p. 60.
[20]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 103.
[21]Ibid., p. 104.
[22]Ibid.
[23]Ibid.
[24]Ibid., p. 109.

> "I could have made a vow to some bishop or abbot possessing goods, but I thought it better to make the vow of obedience to Master Conrad who has nothing and is as poor as any beggar because thereby in this life I find no consolation."[25]

Again, Elizabeth's total disposition was towards poverty, not only of material possessions, but she even was willing to embrace an emotional poverty — doing without consolation, and in a very important aspect of her life, in her choice of a spiritual director. Elizabeth feared Conrad:

> If I am in such dread and awe of a mortal man, how much more should I fear almighty God who is the Lord and Judge of all.[26]

In any event, Conrad of Marburg did become Elizabeth's spiritual director. Shortly afterwards (c. 1225-1226), Elizabeth vowed obedience to God through Conrad; she also took a vow of perpetual chastity should she become a widow.

> "Isentrude then said that blessed Elizabeth, with the consent of her husband, made a vow of obedience to Master Conrad in everything except what concerned her husband's rights. She promised perpetual continence, and should she outlive her husband, she would live in chastity. She made this vow in the monastery of Saint Catherine in Eisenach.[27]

Guda and Isentrude also made a vow of perpetual continence at this time as well.

Although the sources are not explicit, it is my opinion that it was at this time that Elizabeth officially became associated with the Secular Franciscans, entering the period known as the novitiate. Elizabeth's vow of obedience was made with Louis' consent. At this time, too, it was only with Louis' consent that she could have joined the Third Order.[28] Also, it seems very likely that the close association Elizabeth maintained with the friars would have sparked Elizabeth's desire to follow Francis more closely.

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[25]De Robeck, p. 177.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Ibid., p. 158.

[28]Masseron and Habig, *The Franciscans,* p. 406.

It is significant, too, that the vow was made in the Cistercian monastery at Eisenach rather than at the private castle chapel. Obviously, it was an important and solemn occasion. Biographers believe that the Landgravine Sophie, who had retired to that monastery after the death of her husband Hermann, was probably present as well as some of the nuns.[29] The later event in March of 1228 should be regarded as her final profession.

To see what transpired between Conrad and Elizabeth, it is important to go to Isentrude's testimony under oath:

"Master Conrad admonished Elizabeth that she must not make use of her husband's goods unless she was sure that they were honestly come by. This she strictly observed so that even as she sat beside her husband at table, she abstained from all food obtained through extortion, and she never touched anything that she did not know to be lawfully obtained. Thus, when she was being served, she often pretended to eat the bread and other items of food by crumbling them and otherwise disposing of them.

With three companions who were in agreement with her, blessed Elizabeth begged the Landgrave not to be indignant if she behaved differently from the other persons at table. Louis answered:

> Let her do as she will. If I did not fear the reproaches of those about me, I would hasten to offer more of my substance to God and do the same; please God, I shall soon dispose differently of what concerns me.

With the money assigned to her, blessed Elizabeth provided for her own needs and those of her maids. When they were in a place where nothing could be bought, she would send messengers to beg provisions from neighboring houses as though she preferred their food to that served in the castle. She did this hoping to respect Master Conrad's order. He, however, forbade her to touch food from any source whose origin might offend her conscience. Thus it often happened, that Elizabeth suffered real hunger with only a few small honey cakes as her food. Of all the dishes she served at the court table, she would content herself with a little bread when this was legitimate. Louis, however, distressed at seeing her hunger, would secretly warn her of what she might eat with a good conscience.

[29]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 113.

At table, she abstained from all the numerous delicacies, so much so that once five small birds were brought to her. She kept one for herself and sent the others to her followers. She suffered far more from her maids' deprivations than from her own when she could not conscientiously give them all they needed. Very often she inquired from the servants wht food was legitimate, and then she would say:

'Today we can eat.' Or, regarding her husband's wine:

'Today we can drink,' And when she knew that everything was legitimate, she would clap her hands in delight exclaiming:

'Today we can both eat and drink.'

On a journey with her husband who had to attend an important Diet, there was no food which she could touch without offending her conscience. Elizabeth therefore contented herself with coarse black bread which she soaked in water; this was her whole dinner, for she was accustomed to fast every Saturday. Elizabeth did this although on that day they rode eight German miles which are the equal of forty Italian miles. She kept up this singular and unusual way of living even though she suffered much obloquy on the subject, as did Louis for allowing it. But she bore it all with patience. She touched nothing obtained from illicit means, but as far as she could she did all in her power to provide for those, who through her, suffered deprivation."[30]

"...She suffered much obloquy on the subject, as did Louis for allowing it." What conversations must have Louis and Elizabeth shared in the privacy of their chambers! Louis probably listened intently and gently as Elizabeth poured out the love and inspirations which she felt within her, how she must continue to strive with every ounce of energy to dispose herself toward God's magnanimous love so that she could be transformed into whatever He wished her to be. Envision Louis as he tenderly embraced her and kissed her gently, promising to always be her support!

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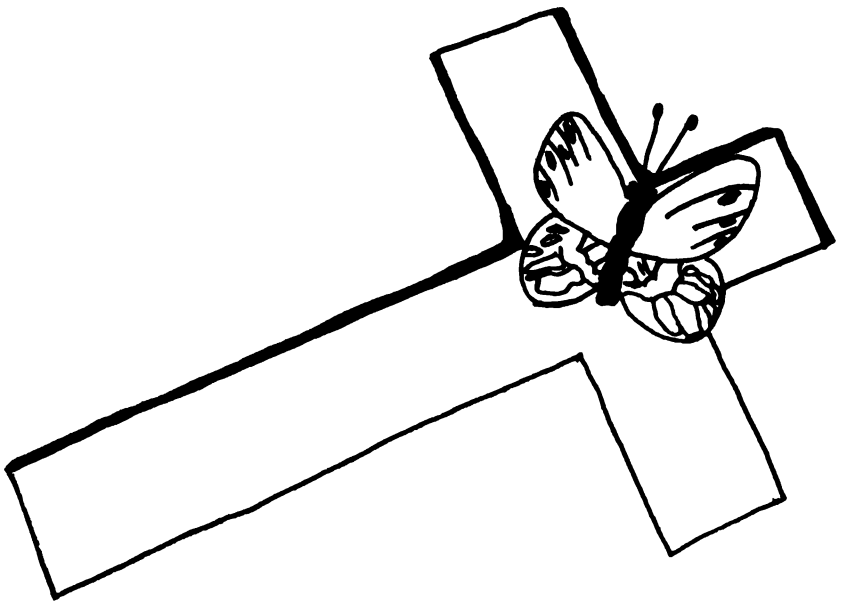
[30]De Robeck, pp. 158-160.



O GLORIOUS WIDOW!

O glorious widow, rich in virtues, who sought to obtain through grace what nature cannot give; you did triumph over the soul's cruel enemies by the shield of faith, the armour of justice, the sword of the Spirit, the helmet of salvation, and the spear of perseverance!

—Gloriosus in Majestate

Lest it seem that Elizabeth and Louis stoicly went about the castle and their daily affairs, it should be noted that they did share many joyful occasions. Each time Louis returned after an extended trip, the whole castle celebrated jubilant homecomings.

In November of 1225, the Austrian and Thuringian royal families gathered in Nuremberg for the splendid weddings of King Henry to Margaret of Austria; and Henry of Austria to Louis' sister, Agnes of Thuringia. A beautiful story is told of how Louis arranged a great banquet in honor of this marriage. The guests were already assembling, but Elizabeth had not yet appeared. Louis went to find her, and saw her beautifully dressed but without her long court mantle. The Landgravine could not appear in public without it.

When Louis asked Elizabeth where her mantle was, she confessed that she had given it to a beggar. At that very moment, one of the ladies came to say that after all, her mantle was hanging in its accustomed place. When she put it around her, everyone commented that they had never seen a more exquisite mantle![1]

In March of 1227, the Landgrave and the Landgravine travelled to Aix-la-Chapelle for the coronation of King Henry's young wife, Margaret of Austria. She was to be crowned by the Archbishop of Cologne amid great festivities. Louis had been one of the principal negotiators of the marriage.[2]

The year 1227, however, held other things for Louis and Elizabeth. Early in 1227, Louis had secretly taken the cross of the crusaders from Bishop Conrad of Hildesheim. He did not tell

[1]De Robeck, p. 55.

[2]Ibid., p. 82.

Elizabeth because she was pregnant with their third child, and he wanted to wait for an appropriate time to break the news to her gently.

Thierry of Apolda says that Elizabeth found the crusader's cross in Louis' almspurse one evening. She fainted from the shock. Louis gently consoled her and quoted Scripture passages to dispel her grief.[3]

Certainly Elizabeth suspected that Louis would one day have to leave for the crusades. Perhaps she was hoping against hope, however, that something would occur that he would not have to leave her again, and for such a long time. As always, the long separations grieved her tremendously. And there was always the horrible possibility that Louis might not return.

The crusaders would leave in June, on the feast of St. John. Preparations had to be made. Henry Raspe, Louis' brother, would assume guardianship of young Hermann and the administration of Thuringia. Louis and Elizabeth also discussed the future of their expected child. If a boy, the child would be raised by the monks at the Premonstratensian monastery of Rumersdorf; if a girl, by the sisters of the same order at the convent of Altenberg. To Master Conrad of Marburg was left the choice of priests for various benefices controlled by the Landgrave. It was Conrad's opinion that "the appointment of an unworthy priest was worse than the slaying of sixty men."[4]

Louis then summoned his vassals to the Kreuzburg and exhorted them to keep peace and to administer justice.

> Now for love of God and the Christian faith,
> I am leaving these great goods, the honors and
> dignities that are mine, and my beloved brothers.
> I am leaving the wife and children who are
> so dear to me, all whom I love, and all the
> consolations of this world in order to cross
> the sea as a pilgrim. Pray to God that it may
> be His holy will to bring me back safe and
> sound to my lands, and that all of you may
> thereby be consoled. I commend to God
> myself, my lands and my people.[5]

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[3]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 129.
[4]De Robeck, p. 84.
[5]Ibid., p. 85.

Next Louis visited all the monasteries of men and women in his territory to ask for their blessings and prayers. The monastery at Reinhardsbrunn was Louis' favorite. He arrived there in the evening for Compline. After the Office had been chanted, Louis stood beside the priest who blessed each monk with holy water as he left the church. Louis greeted each one warmly. Then, he embraced and kissed the young children of the cloister school.[6]

Louis and his retinue met other crusaders at the city of Smalkald. Louis' whole family was present to say good-bye. Once again, he blessed all present, commended Elizabeth and his children to his brothers' care and kissed his mother good-bye. "His emotion was so great that he could not speak to her and they embraced in silence, his heart breaking."[7]

As typical, Elizabeth could not bear to be parted from Louis. She mounted her horse and rode beside him. She had begged to be allowed to accompany him at leat for the first part of the journey. They rode together for two whole days. When they reached the Thuringian border, Rudolph of Vargila, the royal cupbearer and faithful friend, turned to Louis:

> The time has come, My Lord, for our gracious
> Lady to go back since thus it has to be.

Louis then withdrew his almspurse and took from it a sapphire ring engraved with the Lamb of God and his standard. This ring was used to seal his important documents. He showed Elizabeth the ring and told her she must believe any message brought to her sealed by that ring.

> May the God of heaven bless you and keep you,
> my beloved sister. May God bless also the child
> you bear. With his help, faithfully do with him
> or her what we have mutually promised.

Elizabeth's only recorded words: "Woe to me, miserable woman."[8]

Elizabeth sadly returned to the Wartburg. She put away her lovely court clothes and again put on the widow's dress.

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[6]Ancelet-Hustache, p. 131.
[7]Ibid.
[8]Ibid.

Henceforth she knew no more joy; in solitude
and sadness she recommended herself
completely to God's keeping, advancing
steadily in virtue and sanctity.[9]

Louis continued his journey southward. He had been a successful ruler in Thuringia. He thought about his father's reign — it had been a time of war, misfortune and misery, but Hermann's courage and daring made him feared by kings and princes. Louis' reign, however, had been characterized by peace. Life had been good to him — he had known riches, health, power, honor and a beautiful woman's love. Surely, he could look forward to still greater things, especially since the Emperor favored him. Together, what could he and Frederick not accomplish?

When the troops reached Brindisi, they discovered bad camping conditions, a shortage of food and an epidemic of fever. Many died and part of the army melted away.[10]

The emperor himself became ill, and he and Louis went to the little island of St. Andrew in the hope that the fresh air would speed Frederick's recovery. However, Louis became ill with the fever. Because Frederick had not allowed his illness to slow him down, neither would Louis. On September 9, they sailed to Otranto, Italy. Here Frederick and Louis (who was still ill) left the ship to say good-bye to 15 year old Empress Isabelle, Frederick's wife. Louis' condition had so worsened that it was later rumored that he had been given a poison drink while he had been on shore.

Louis called for a priest, and received the sacraments. His last words were recorded by Bertold:

"Do you see all those white doves? I shall go at the same moment as they do." Louis died September 11, 1227 on the feast of Saints Protase and Hyacinth. He was 27 years old and had ruled Thuringia for eleven years.[11]

Some of the Thuringian nobles had already set sail for the Holy Land. When they learned of Louis' death, they returned to Otranto and held the solemn funeral. Louis' body was clad in royal attire and then wrapped in two linen cloths dipped in wax. After the solemn funeral Mass, the Thuringian nobles continued on their way to Palestine to fulfill their vow.

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[9]Ibid., p. 133.
[10]Ibid., p. 134.
[11]Ibid., p. 135.

Messengers sent to carry the news to Thuringia would have reached the Wartburg late in November. The news was first broken to Landgravine Sophie, Louis' two younger brothers, Henry Raspe and Conrad, and to Guda and Isentrude. Landgravine Sophie would tell Elizabeth.

> Dearest daughter, do not grieve over what,
> according to the divine plan, has happened
> to my dear son, your spouse...."

Elizabeth thought her husband was a prisoner, and she responded:

> If my dear brother is a prisoner, with the
> help of God and the advice of our good
> friends, he can be freed.

My dear daughter, he is dead.

Dead! Dead! All happiness and worldly honor are henceforth dead to me![12]

Elizabeth clenched her fists above her head, got up and ran about the room weeping and crying, "like a mad woman." No one could calm her. At last, broken and sobbing, she fell against a wall.

Such overwhelming grief! Years before, Jesus openly wept over the death of his good friend, Lazarus. Mary and John stood grief-stricken below the cross of Jesus. Now Elizabeth was crushed with sorrow by the death of her beloved Louis, her dear brother. Each, on their journey to Easter, had to experience suffering love.

* * * *

A short time after Louis' death, Elizabeth left the Wartburg. Hermann, her son, was heir to the throne. However, he was only five years old and could not accede to power until the age of 12. During the time of his minority, Henry Raspe would be regent. From the moment of her husband's death, the widow ceased to be a coproprietor of the property. She did, however, receive a maintenance and whatever jewels and precious objects she happened to possess.[13]

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[12]Ibid., p. 137.

[13]De Robeck, p. 94.

Elizabeth was offered her legal maintenance. This meant that she must eat whatever was served at the family table. Conrad of Marburg's prohibition was still in force. Louis had helped and supported Elizabeth's decision to abstain from ill-gotten food. Henry Raspe, however, did not respect her position. "She had lost Louis, she had no money to give away, legal discussions and documents took the place of Louis' kind understanding, and at every meal she was asked to eat what was against her conscience. She was alone against them all, and everyday her determination grew that she would live in the way of penance which was that of Francis, and to live, too, for the poor."[14]

Elizabeth was faced with a terrible choice. The Wartburg had been her home and it was here that she recalled many happy memories of her life with Louis. Even now, their children were running through the halls and enjoying the castle even as she and Louis had done! Either Elizabeth must go against her conscience or leave. But where could the mother of three children go? What would she do?

Elizabeth made her decision. Irmingarde says: "She could have enjoyed her own maintenance at the table of her husband's brother, but she refused to eat what had been stolen from the poor, as happens in many princely houses, and preferred to be an outcast and to earn her food by the work of her own hands."[15] Elizabeth's refusal of Henry Raspe's maintenance was another direct attack on the feudal system, "an active assertion that the serfs had as much right to the food that they produced as those who sat at the Landgrave's table."[16] Her decision should not really be a surprise. Elizabeth was a woman of principle. If she had adhered to this standard during Louis' lifetime, why not now?

Isentrude relates what happened once Elizabeth decided to leave. "She went down into the city that lies at the foot of the castle hill, and lodged in a poor dwelling adjoining a tavern, which had formerly been used as a pigsty. She spent the night in great gladness. About midnight she went to the church of the Friars Minor and begged them to sing the Te Deum of Matins as her song of praise and joy for her tribulations.

During the next day, none of the rich citizens dared to take her in, and she and her maids entered a church and sat there for a

[14]Ibid., p. 96.
[15]Ibid., p. 171.
[16]Ibid., p. 97.

long time. When the children were brought down from the castle, Elizabeth did not know where she could find shelter for them against the icy cold of winter, even though the children as heirs of their father were master of the place."[17]

The rich of the city did not help Elizabeth for several reasons. For one, they were the very ones who felt the "tacit reproach of Elizabeth's example." She had constantly urged the women to simplicity. Secondly, many of the men held official positions in Henry Raspe's administration. It would not due to incur his displeasure by helping Elizabeth. Thirdly, women followed men's direction: and those in the castle as well as in the city thought that Elizabeth should go back to the castle with her children and cease this foolishness.

Elizabeth continued to wander through the streets of Eisenach. The children were with her as well as her good friends Guda and Isentrude. Although Elizabeth had become "really poor" still she saved some of her scanty food for the poor.

On one occasion, an old woman who had often been helped by Elizabeth, met her on a narrow, muddy path. Some stepping-stones had been carefully placed to help facilitate crossing. As Elizabeth carefully picked her way across, she met the woman. The woman refused to let Elizabeth pass, and pushed her into the muddy water. Elizabeth picked herself up, muddy and wet, but laughing and went off to wash her clothes.

One day during Lent, 1228, Elizabeth was kneeling in church, her eyes fixed on the altar. After she returned to her shack, she felt weak, began to perspire and to tremble. Isentrude took Elizabeth into her arms and sent everyone else from the room. For a long time, Elizabeth stared at the window, and then she started to laugh merrily. After about an hour, Elizabeth shut her eyes and wept bitterly. She continued this alternation of joy and grief until Compline. After a long silence, Elizabeth exclaimed:

> If you, O Lord, will remain with me, I will
> always be Yours, and nothing will ever
> separate me from You.

Isentrude asked Elizabeth to tell her to whom she had spoken. At first Elizabeth refused. Finally, at Isentrude's insistence, she said:

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[17]Ibid., p. 165.

I saw heaven open and my dear Lord Jesus
bent down to me, comforting me in my various
troubles and anxieties. When I saw Him,
I was overjoyed and laughed. When He
turned away His Face as though to leave me,
then I cried. Jesus turned to me and said:
'If you will be with Me, I will be with you.'
So I answered Him as you heard.

Isentrude then pleaded with Elizabeth to describe the vision she had in church during the consecration of the Host. But Elizabeth responded:

What I saw then cannot be repeated, but
believe me, I was in the utmost joy and
saw the marvelous secrets of God.[18]

When Master Conrad returned to Eisenach, Elizabeth asked for his advice. Should she become a recluse, or enter the convent, or lie in some other state? She pleaded with Conrad to give her permission to beg from door to door. He, however, refused her. Elizabeth's fiery response:

"I will do what you cannot prevent me from
doing."

Subsequently on Good Friday, March 24, 1228, Elizabeth embraced Lady Poverty more fully.

"On Good Friday, when the altars were
stripped, she placed her hands on the altar
in one of the chapels of her city where she
had established the Friars Minor, and in the
presence of some of the brothers she
renounced her parents, her children, her own
will, all the pomps of the world and all those
things which Our Lord in the Gospel
counsels us to give up.[19]

Elizabeth wanted to possess nothing, but again Conrad forbade her. He wished her to keep control of her dowry to pay her husband's debts and to assist the poor.

That same spring, Elizabeth's aunt Mathilda, the abbess of

[18]Ibid., p. 166.
[19]Ibid., p. 105.

Kitzingen, (her mother's youngest sister), sent for Elizabeth. Naturally she was aware of Louis' death and what had transpired between Elizabeth and Henry Raspe. The abbess arranged a meeting between her brother Eckbert, the Bishop of Bamberg and Elizabeth. The Bishop was kind and hospitable. He offered Elizabeth the castle of Pottenstein for her residence. The Bishop also urged Elizabeth to consider marriage to Emperor Frederick II. Although Elizabeth had made a vow of chastity, the Bishop argued that it could be set aside by a Papal dispensation. He disapproved of her manner of living at Eisenach, and sent her to the castle at Pottenstein to think about his suggestion. Pottenstein would be Elizabeth's home until she married.

Elizabeth's response was firm. She told Guda and Isentrude:

> I have complete trust in God; He knows that
> when I made the vow of chastity during my
> husband's lifetime I did it in all purity and
> sincerity of heart, and trusting in His mercy,
> I hold it impossible that He should fail to
> protect my chastity against all human attack
> and human power — all the more because I
> made that vow unconditionally with no
> stipulation that it should please my friends,
> or that God should show me something else.
> I made an absolute unconditional vow to
> observe chastity should my husband die.
> If my uncle insists on my marriage against
> my will, I would defend myself in every way,
> even to cutting off my nose, so that no man
> would even look at such a mutilated fright.[20]

Shortly thereafter, a message was sent to Bishop Eckbert that the Thuringian nobles had returned from Otranto with Louis' bones. About May, 1228, the procession reached Bamberg and the Bishop accompanied Elizabeth to the Cathedral of Bamberg to meet the body. The coffer was opened and Elizabeth viewed Louis' bones, "whiter than freshly fallen snow." With Guda and Isentrude by her side, and tears flowing profusely, Elizabeth said:

[20]Ibid., p. 167.

Lord, I thank you for having mercifully consoled me by the sight of these bones of my husband. You know how great was my love for him. You know that I do not regret the sacrifice which my beloved offered you, and which I offered to you, for the liberation of the Holy Land. If I could have him back again, I would give the whole world in exchange and would willingly go begging with him. I call You, however, to witness that if it were against Your will, I would not call him back to this life even if I could do so at the price of a single hair.
I commend him and myself to your mercy.
May Your holy will be accomplished in us.

Bishop Eckbert then realized that Elizabeth's enduring love for Louis would not permit her to even consider remarriage. Though Louis was dead, Elizabeth's heart was still married to him.

Elizabeth accompanied the procession to Thuringia to the Abbey of Reinhardsbrunn for the interment. During the summer, Gregory IX sent a personal letter to Elizabeth offering encouragement and consolation.

Gregory, Servant of the servants of God, to his beloved daughter in Jesus Christ, the Landgravine of Thuringia, greeting and apostolic benediction.

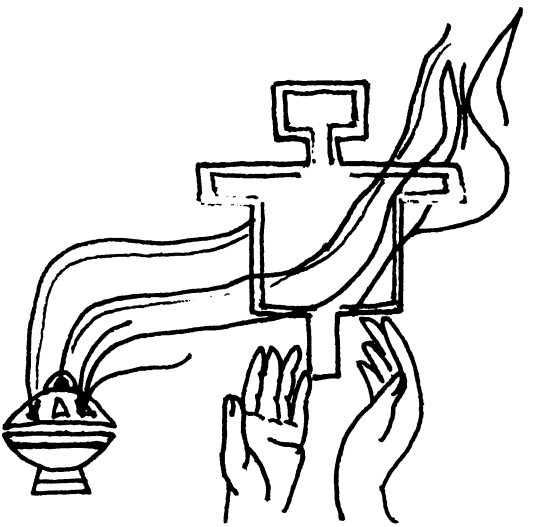
Experience has taught us that love is as strong and unconquerable as death. It has sometimes been thought that distance of place and the passing of time can extinguish the fire of love and weaken the glow of attachment. On the contrary, it appears that the Spirit of Truth who fills the world with the wideness of His love, enflames the attachment of those who are separated and pierces their heart so that all that is lost through the lack of the personal contact of those who love each other is copiously compensated by the grace of spiritual union.

Out heart is deeply moved in thinking of the lowliness and holiness, the purity of heart and body wherewith you desire to bear the wounds of suffering. Therefore, we have scattered the good seed in your soul that you may reap therefrom an ample harvest, and through the small seed of earthly tears may win unending eons of eternal joy. The beginnings of your pious life,

with God's help, will joyfully prosper; and this will bring joy to the angels, to you merit, and be an example to many. We rejoice that you of high rank, weak sex and tender age, in the grip of a cruel fate should give proof of faith and constancy of life and glowing love. He who is the Stone once rejected by the builders and who is, however, the cornerstone of the building, He it is who has strengthened your hand for labor and set the uncertain steps of your youth on the rock.

Therefore, daughter, hasten to follow your divine Bridegroom wherever He leads until He brings you into His innermost chamber. Walk gladly in the fragrance of His anointing and rejoice. "Enriched by the words of Thy lips I have trodden hard ways." No matter how hard and rough your sufferings may be, this hardness will be flooded with the oil of gladness and joy, the crooked will be made straight, and the rough places smooth; others run uncertainly to win an earthly reward; not as a stranger and guest, but as the bride of the Lord, hasten along the road to receive your well-earned crown.

Gregory IX seemed to understand Elizabeth's profound love. Probably because of his close association with Francis and Clare, (he would proclaim Francis a saint that very summer — July 16, 1228), he recognized that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Elizabeth, leading her, guiding her gently homeward to her eternal destiny.



SAINT ELIZABETH

Elizabeth...made herself like the saints of other times by following uncomplainingly God's laws and commandments, and by grace conceived God in her inmost soul, bringing Him to birth in her actions, feeding Him by her unceasing progress to such a point that the Lord...has carried her to the throne of the elect in the dwelling of inaccessible light."

— Gloriosus in Majestate

In the summer of 1228, at Marburg, Elizabeth made her profession in the Order of Penance and "she received from master Conrad, the gray, homespun habit, the cord and the veil of the Franciscan Third Order."[1] Isentrude and Guda entered the Order with her. Guda also testified that Elizabeth solemnly renewed the vow of chastity she had made several years earlier.

Because Master Conrad had insisted that Elizabeth should despise all earthly things, she prayed earnestly that God should detach her from everything of this world and not heed the insults and criticisms of others. On this day of profession, Elizabeth said to her maids:

> God has heard my prayer: I despise all the worldly goods I once cared for; and God be my witness, I love my children with the same love as I have for all my fellow creatures. I have give these children to God, to do with them as He wills. I gladly accept calumny, contempt and insults. My only love is God.[2]

Elizabeth's whole being was filled with the spirit of the Gospel. Radical Gospel living had been Francis' inspiration. Elizabeth's remaining years would be an enfleshment of Jesus' command to feed the hungry, give a drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger,

[1]De Robeck, p. 114.
[2]Ibid., p. 116.

clothe the naked, comfort the ill and visit the prisoner (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

Elizabeth's life really hadn't changed. True, her external circumstances were different. She no longer lived in the Wartburg. Yet during her time there, she always lived very simply. Now she was not only living very simply, but also very poorly. When Louis was alive, he spent many months away from the castle. Now, sadly, Louis would be away forever. Yet Elizabeth had learned to "live with" his absence; she carried him always in her heart. As a mother, she dearly missed her children. Hermann and Sophie had been sent to the castle of Kreuzburg — Hermann to begin his training as a knight and future ruler of Thuringia; and Sophie to be educated in the ways of the court just as Elizabeth had done many years before. Yet, had Elizabeth remained at the Wartburg, her children would have been sent off just the same. That was the custom of the time. Little Gertrude still remained with Elizabeth and would until she was about eighteen months old. Yet, here again, even had Louis lived and Elizabeth had remained at the Wartburg, Gertrude would have been sent to the Premonstratensian monastery of Altenberg. Louis and Elizabeth had mutually agreed to this before her birth. Does a mother every forget her baby?

Although her external circumstances changed, Elizabeth's heart was as enflamed as ever in her dedication to God and to the poor. She would pour herself out in service to the poor. At Marburg, Elizabeth built a hospital with the funds she received from her dowry, and there she personally cared for the worst cases. She served the poor in the hospital washing them, and making their bed. According to Irmingarde, in addition to what she did in the hospital, she also would secretly sell golden rings and silken gowns and other precious things in order to help the needy.

Elizabeth tenderly cared for a one-eyed boy with scurvy. Six times in the night, Elizabeth would carry him to satisfy his natural wants, after which she would put him back to bed, and cover him. She would also wash his dirty clothes.

Once Elizabeth took a large fine linen cloth and used it to bathe the poor, and to cover them. As she did, she stated:

"How happy we are to be able to wash and to cover Our Lord." To this remark, one of the maids answered: "I don't know if we all feel like that."[3]

[3]Ibid., p. 171.

Irmingarde continues: Elizabeth took in a leper girl of dreadful appearance, covered with wounds and sores, at whom no one could look even from afar. Blessed Elizabeth, however, nursed her in the hospital, treated her wounds with ointment, bound them up, knelt down to untie her shoe laces, and had the girl allowed it, would also have taken off her shoes. She cut her finger- and toenails, tenderly stroking her disfigured face. All were unanimous in saying that the girl permanently recovered her health. Blessed Elizabeth had placed this girl in an isolated room of the house, but often went to see how she was, calling the girl into her room, talking and laughing with her.

Elizabeth was most gentle in her speech with the poor, and most zealous in giving them all that they wished for. She constantly admonished the poor not to neglect the baptism of their children. She would accompany them to confession in order that they should receive Holy Communion.

When word reached King Andrew of Hungary of how Elizabeth was living, he sent Count Pavias with an envoy of knights to bring Elizabeth back to Hungary. When the Count arrived in Marburg, he found blessed Elizabeth spinning wool. Making the sign of the cross and greatly astonished, he said: "Never before has it been seen that a King's daughter should be spinning." Elizabeth refused to return to Hungary.[4]

Once, after having had undeservedly received the discipline from Master Conrad, Elizabeth commented to Irmingarde:

We must bear such things gladly. We are
like a willow growing by the riverside.
When a flood comes, the willow bends and
the water pours over it leaving it undamaged.
Then, when the flood has passed, the willow
straightens itself and goes on gladly growing
with new strength. And so we, too sometimes,
have to bend down and humble ourselves,
and then we rise up strengthened and glad.[5]

In every affliction, Elizabeth was always cheerful and gay. Whenever any angry or useless words were spoken in her presence, she would say:

"Where now is our Lord?"

The "Deposition of Witnesses" relates story after story of

[4]Ibid., p. 177.
[5]Ibid., p. 178.

the wondrous way in which Elizabeth served the poor. For four years, Elizabeth worked very hard and very prayerfully to meet the increasing demands of the poor.

In November, 1231, Elizabeth fell ill and after twelve days asked that all visitors be sent away. The only exception she made was the beggar child with scurvy whom she had nursed back to health. He sat beside her.

When asked why she wanted to be alone, Elizabeth replied that she wanted to "meditate on God's judgment and His almighty power."[6] On Sunday, November 16, Master Conrad heard her confession. He asked her what was to be done with her possessions. She replied that everything which appeared to be hers already belonged to the poor. She expressed a wish to be buried in the poor habit and old worn cloak that she always wore.

Elizabeth received Holy Communion and repeated the words of sermons that had appealed to her, and she reflected on the raising of Lazarus and Jesus' tears at his tomb. Several monks and sisters who were present started to cry, but Elizabeth spoke to them:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves."

After this she was silent, but everyone present heard a sweet song coming from her, even though her lips did not move. All evening Elizabeth remained peaceful and full of gladness. Finally she said:

"Let us talk of God and of the Child Jesus, for it is now about the time He was born and lay in the manger. He created a new star no one had ever seen before."[7]

She commanded all about her to God saying to Irmingarde:

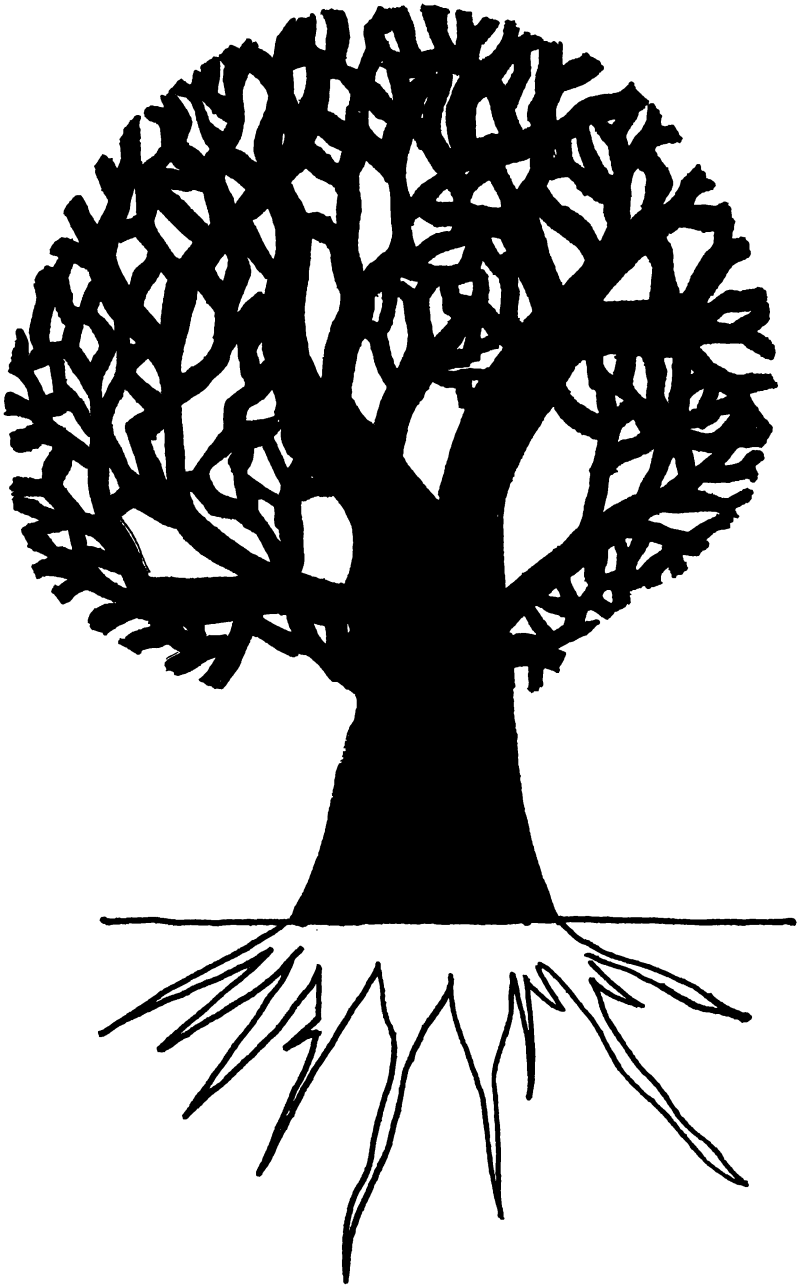
"This is the moment when almighty God calls His friends to Himself."

She died quietly as if falling asleep, a little after midnight between November 16 and 17, 1231.

People came from all over for her funeral. She was buried November 19. While she lay in state, it seemed as though she were sleeping, and her body exuded a sweet fragrance. After the office of the dead was chanted, Elizabeth's friend, the abbess of Wetter, heard a multitude of birds singing joyfully. When she went outside to look, sure enough a flock of birds were perched on the belfry singing for Elizabeth as the larks had sung at the Portiuncula for Francis!

[6]Ibid., p. 131.

[7]Ibid.



A REFLECTION

Elizabeth was proclaimed a saint by Pope Gregory IX on May 27, 1235, the feast of Pentecost. The official proclamation was contained in the Bull "Glorious in Majestate" published June 1 and 4, 1235. The translation of her body from its original place of burial to the new church in Marburg dedicated to her occured in May, 1236.

That Elizabeth turned her entire being toward God to be transformed by Him; that she, as Francis and Clare, embodied Gospel values; that she poured out her love for Jesus through ministry to the poorest of the poor — her very life testifies to this.

Yet, as Secular Franciscans who extol her as our patroness, simply to read her life and remark how wonderful she was, and commemorate the 750th anniversary of her death, is hardly meeting the challenge with which she confronts us. What relevance does Elizabeth, a 13th century holy woman, have for us?

Her life is of singular importance because she challenged the false values of the thirteenth century, not by protest, but by actively and courageously changing her own life-style and living radical Gospel values — even in the face of harsh criticism and ridicule. She responded *personally.* She preached the Gospel with her life. She "encountered the living and active person of Christ in her brothers and sisters." Does my life-style reflect the radical gospel values of love and peace and simplicity? Am I confronting the crass materialism and depersonalization of this age by a holy manner of living?

Elizabeth and Louis offer us an insight into friendship in marriage. Their relationship radiated that each respected, admired and reverenced the other. Each was willing, even anxious, to *be* for the other. This is evidenced in Louis' tender affirmation of Elizabeth's decisions, and by Elizabeth's affectionate solicitude for Louis when he returned to the castle. Truly their manifest love for each other is an expressive symbol of what sacramental marriage should reflect — Jesus' deep love for the Church.

Theodore Maynard, in his short biographical sketch of Elizabeth, commented that very few married women have been

canonized and thought it doubtful whether Elizabeth "would have been canonized had she not been a widow for several years before she died." (p. 31)

How sad if that were really true. Elizabeth's holiness permeated her total being. She was no less holy, no less a saint when intensely loving and cherishing Louis and her own children than when washing and tenderly stroking the disfigured face of the leper girl. Holiness is loving. And it is through the Spirit of Love that we are empowered to love.

Elizabeth and Louis ruled a kingdom. We are taught that the "kingdom of God is within" and "Seek first his kingship over you, his way of holiness" (cf. Mt. 6:33). Recently I read a beautiful understanding of what the kingdom of God is and I'd like to share it with you.

"A kingdom is whatever one rules over. And what does God want to rule over most? *Our hearts.* There is nothing else worth ruling. The kingdom of God is God's power and feast and joy already at work in our hearts — building them into a kingdom worthy of himself. ...My brothers and sisters, the most revolutionary thing we can do is to be witnesses to the kingdom that is present among us. ...It is an explosive reality. ...If anybody wants to be a true revolutionary in the world, all he or she has to do is let the kingdom of God come within. Then, we can love when love doesn't make sense. We can hope when there's no reason to hope. We can do all these things in the strength of Him who loves us freely."[1]

Isn't this why Francis is called the Seraphic lover? Isn't love the brilliance of Clare's and Elizabeth's life? Isn't that the charism which all the Franciscan saints radiate? My brothers and sisters, like Francis, we are minstrels of the Lord whose work is to love God and life people's hearts and move them to spiritual gladness.

[1]Robert Wild, *Word from Poustinia* (New Jersey: Dimension Books), p. 69; 72.

APPENDIX

CHRONOLOGY

The purpose of the intertwined chronology is twofold: 1) to enable the reader to see how Francis' holy manner of living so deeply affected, not only persons of his immediate surroundings, but also someone many hundreds of miles away; 2) to emphasize that all of our lives are mysteriously interwoven and the Spirit of the Lord can and will bring about wondrous transformation if we only say "YES" with our whole heart and soul, mind and strength.

The dates concerning Francis are from the Omnibus of Sources edited by Marion A. Habig.[1] The references in parenthesis after Elizabeth's data are to biographies by Nesta De Robeck (N),[2] and Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache (A-H).[3]

THE WHOLE WORLD

FRANCIS' WORLD — ELIZABETH' WORLD

1181

Francis born in Assisi.

1198

Innoncent III elected Pope

1205

May 29. Andrew II crowned King of Hungary. (N, 11; A-H, 5)

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[1]Marion A. Habig, ed., *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings and Early Biographies: English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1973), pp. xi — xiv.

[2]Nesta De Robeck, *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954).

[3]Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Gold Tried by Fire,* trans. P. J. Oligny and V. O'Donnel (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1963).

FRANCIS' WORLD	ELIZABETH'S WORLD
Fall. Message of the Crucifix of San Damiano. Francis' conflict with his father. Francis is 24 years of age.	
1206	
Spring. Francis in Gubbio nursing victims of leprosy.	
Summer — probably July. Francis returns to Assisi, assumes hermit's habit and begins to repair San Damiano.	
1207	
	Summer. Elizabeth is born at Pozsony, daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary and Queen Gertrude. (N, 11; A-H, 3)
1208	
February 24. Francis hears Gospel of St. Mathias Mass. Changes from hermit's habit to that of barefoot preacher and begins to preach.	
1209	
Spring. Francis writes brief Rule and goes to Rome with his eleven first companions. There he obtains the approval of Pope Innoncent III.	
	September. German Emperor-elect Otto IV passes by Rivo Torto.

1209-1212 (?)

Possible beginning of the Secular Franciscan Order.

1211

Elizabeth, age 4, is betrothed to Louis IV of Thuringia. Escorted from Hungary to live at the Wartburg Castle in Germany with Louis' family. (N, 17; A-H, 33)

1212

March 18/19. On Palm Sunday night, reception of St. Clare at the Portiuncula. Clare is 19 years of age.

1213

September. Gertrude, Elizabeth's mother is assassinated in Hungary. (N, 32; A-H, 47)

1215

November. Fourth Lateran General Council. Francis in Rome.

1216

July 16. Pope Innocent III dies in Perugia, (Papal Summer residence).

July 18. Honorius III is elected.

Summer. Francis obtains the Portiuncula Indulgence from Pope Honorius in Perugia.

December 31. Hermann, second son of Hermann I and Louis' brother, dies. Hermann was about 15 years old.
(N, 33; A-H, 51)

1217

January 15. Louis begins to reign Thuringia. Charter of this date officially recognizes Louis as Landgrave of Thuringia, Count Palatine of Saxony.
(N, 43; A-H, 65)

April 25. Hermann I, Landgrave of Thuringia dies. Louis is 17 and Elizabeth is 10.
(N, 33; A-H, 51)

1218

Summer, Fall. Louis solemnly dubbed a knight at Eisenach.
(A-H, 69)

1219

Fall. Francis visits Sultan. November 5, Damietta taken by Crusaders.

1221

May 30. Chapter. First Rule. Elias Vicar.

Friars arrive in Germany.

Rule of Third Order approved by Honorius III.

Christians lose Damietta

Summer. Elizabeth and Louis are united in Holy Matrimony.
(N, 47; A-H, 72)

1222

March 28. Elizabeth's and Louis' first child is born, a son, Hermann. Elizabeth is 15 years of age.
(N, 52; A-H, 73)

September 29. Elizabeth and Louis travel to Hungary to see Elizabeth's father, King Andrew II.
(N, 52; A-H, 73)

1223

Friars approach Bishop Conrad of Hildesheim. The Bishop gives permission to preach and to hear confessions in his diocese. Brother Rodeger is among these friars, and probably arrives at the Wartburg. At some point, Brother Rodeger becomes Elizabeth's spiritual director.
(N, 60; A-H, 84)

Early. At Fonte Colombo, Francis composes Second Rule.

Novemer 29. Pope Honorius approves Rule of 1223.

December 24/25. Christmas Crib — Midnight Mass at Greccio. Francis is 42 years of age.

FRANCIS' WORLD	ELIZABETH'S WORLD
	1224
	March 20. Elizabeth's and Louis' second child is born, a daughter named Sophia. Elizabeth is 17 years of age. (N, 55; A-H, 98)
August 15 — September 29. Assumption to St. Michael's Day. Francis fasts at La Verna, receiving the Stigmata about September 14. Francis is 43 years of age.	
	1225
	Jordan of Giano arrives in Eisenach. (N, 63; A-H, 84)
1225-1226 Period of Francis' blindness and illness.	
April-May (?) Francis at San Damiano, undergoes treatment for eyes without improvement. Receives promise of eternal life and composes Canticle of Brother Sun.	
	Autumn. Master Conrad of Marburg becomes Elizabeth's spiritual director. He plays a decisive part in her life. (N, 73, A-H, 111)
	1225 Autumn — 1226 Early. Elizabeth makes a vow of obedience to God through Master Conrad of Marburg;

also makes a vow of perpetual chastity should she become a widow. This was done at the Cistercian monastery of St. Catherine at Eisenach.
(N, 76; A-H, 113)

1225 — 1226. Period of severe famine in Thuringia. Elizabeth emties the royal granaries to feed the starving people.
(N, 67)

November 29. Elizabeth and Louis go to Nuremburg to attend the marriages of King Henry to Margaret of Austria & Henry of Austria to Agnes of Thuringia.
(N, 55; A-H, 100)

1226

October 3. Francis dies at the Portiuncula. Francis is 45 years old.

October 4. Sunday. Francis is buried in San Giorgio Church.

1227

March 19. Francis' friend, Hugolino becomes Pope Gregory IX.

March 28. Elizabeth and Louis attend the coronation of Margaret of Austria, the young

wife of King Henry. She is crowned by the Archbishop of Cologne.
(N, 82; A-H, 117)

Spring. Louis takes the red cross of the Crusaders.
(N, 83; A-H, 126f)

June 24. Feast of St. John. Louis leaves for the Holy Land.
(N, 87; A-H, 132)

September 11. Feast of the Martyrs SS. Protase and Hyacinth. Louis dies of fever at Otranto, Italy. Elizabeth is 20 and Louis, 27.
(N, 89; A-H, 135)

September 29. Elizabeth's third child is born, a daughter named Gertrude.
(N, 89; A-H, 137)

Winter, Elizabeth leaves the Wartburg.
(N, 98; A-H, 143f)

1228

Lent. Elizabeth has a mystical experience while praying.
(N, 102; A-H, 159)

Good Friday, March 24. Elizabeth makes a vow of complete

poverty to God at the friars' chapel at Eisenach. Elizabeth is 21.
(N, 105; A-H, 165)

Spring. Bishop Eckbert of Bamberg meets with Elizabeth to persuade her to marry Emperor Frederick II.
(N, 106; AH, 166f)

May. At the Cathedral of Bamberg, Elizabeth views the remains brought back from Otranto by the Thuringian crusaders. Elizabeth returns to Thuringia for the interment of Louis at the Abbey of Reinhardsbrunn.
(N, 108; A-H, 168)

Summer. Gregory IX sends Elizabeth a personal letter.
(N, 111; A-H, 161)

July 16. Gregory IX, in Assisi, canonizes St. Francis. Bull "Mira Circa Nos".

Summer. Elizabeth makes her profession into the Secular Franciscan Order at the friars' chapel at Marburg.
(N, 114; A-H, 174)

1229

Elizabeth arranges for a hospital to be built at Marburg. She lives in a small room in

the hospital. The hospital is dedicated to St. Francis, one of the earliest foundations to bear his name.
(N, 125; A-H, 183)

April 19. Gregory IX grants an indulgence to all who visit the hosptial of Marburg on October 4, the feast of St. Francis.
(A-H, 183)

1230

May 25. Translation of Francis' remains to his new basilica, San Francesco.

1231

November 16/17. Elizabeth dies a little after midnight, at the age of 24.
(N, 132; A-H, 200)

November 19. Elizabeth is buried in the church of the hospital.
(N, 132; A-H, 201)

1232-1235

Papal commissions gather testimony regarding Elizabeth's holiness.
(N, 134f; A-H, 202f)

1233

July 30. Conrad of Marburg assassinated.
(A-H, 110)

1235

May 27. Feast of Pentecost. Gregory IX proclaims Elizabeth a saint. Bull "Gloriosus in Majestate".
(N, 137; A-H, 218)

June 7. Letter of Gregory IX to Queen Beatrice of Castile, regarding Elizabeth's holiness.
(N, 137; A-H, 220)

1236

May 1. Translation of Elizabeth's body to the new church in Marburg dedicated to her.
(N, 140; A-H, 221)

LEGENDS*

According to the dictionary, a legend is a traditional, popular story handed down from earlier times. Originally, the term meant "the story of a saint's life." Its root is from the Medieval Latin — legenda — "things for reading." The legend, then, is a story which expresses an idea, a meaning and a truth deeper than the surface facts. Like the Gospel parables of Jesus, they should be read reflectively.

On the Feast of the Assumption, the Landgravine Sophie announced to Agnes and Elizabeth that she and they would go in state to Mass at the church of Our Lady in Eisenach which belonged to the Knights of the Teutonic Order. This meant that she and the princesses (both about ten years of age) would be dressed in the full magnificence of their rich silk and velvet clothes, with long embroidered sleeves and surcoats edged with fur, with magnificent long mantles carried by pages, their gloves sewn with pearls and precious stones, and their persons adorned with gold chains and jewels. The young princesses probably did not wear the customary linen coif, but would have had loose veils and coronets on their long flowing hair.

On entering the crowded church, they knelt before the crucifix, and then moved to their place of honor. Elizabeth, however, instead of moving to her place of honor with the others, took off her crown, laid it before the cross, and remained prostrate on the ground with her face covered.

Naturally, everyone stared at Louis' young fiancee. The Landgravine Sophie called Elizabeth and reprimanded her for the breech of court etiquette. Elizabeth responded: "How can I a miserable creature remain wearing a crown of earthly dignity when I see my King Jesus Christ crowned with thorns." (37-38)

* * * *

After the Friars came to Germany, it is inconceivable that

they did not tell Francis about Elizabeth and her great love and charity to the poor. From Luke Wadding we learn that Francis often spoke of Elizabeth. He and Cardinal Ugolino were good friends. Accordingly, it was Cardinal Ugolino who suggested that Francis should send Elizabeth his own cloak in recognition of her help to the friars and of her own spirit of poverty. It is said that Elizabeth always wore the cloak when she was praying for some special favor, and that it was this cloak which she kept after she had given everything else away and in which she was buried. (63)

* * * *

Isentrude stresses Elizabeth's joy and gaiety in ministering to the poor and to lepers, and that "She was no more afraid of a leper than of a healthy person." The Reinhardsbrunn chronicle tells how when she and Louis and the Landgravine Sophie were in the castle of Neuenberg, Elizabeth bathed a leper and dressed his sores. Afterwards, she placed him in her and Louis' bed. Sophie was enraged and fetched Louis: "See with what sick fold Elizabeth defiles your bed."

It was a very natural reaction, and Sophie counted on Louis' anger to match hers. But the chronicle continues: "God opened the Prince's eyes and he saw Christ Crucified lying in his bed. Moved at the sight, he begged Elizabeth to bring in such sufferers more often for he had understood that it is the Lord Jesus in person who is received and cared for in His suffering members." (65-66)

* * * *

The next two legends, or perhaps facts, record the transformation of the charity of this world into the glory of heaven.

One day ambassadors arrived at the court of Thuringia from Hungary, wishing to take news of Elizabeth back to her father. Elizabeth heard of their arrival with trepidation because she had given away every one of her rich clothes. What impression would it make if she appeared in the great hall dressed almost as a beggar? What tales would they carry back of Louis' treatment of her? And yet, what could she put on?

Louis came to fetch her, saying that she must come down, but he too was disturbed at her appearance. Elizabeth's confidence returned: "Dear Brother, do not be anxious; you will see I shall

know how to excuse myself with your guests." She took the mantle that lay nearby and prayer earnestly that God would help her when she went down to the hall.

Not only were the strangers delighted with the affability, the cordiality and sweetness of her manners, they were ravished by the beauty of her face, and the wonderful silk in which she was dressed; at the mantle of blue velvet sewn with pearls and the jewels she wore. They declared that they had never seen such clothes, which indeed astounded all the onlookers, and that not even the Queen of France was adorned as was the Landgravine of Thuringia.

After the guests' departure, Louis asked Elizabeth how she had come by the clothes. Elizabeth answered: "God can do anything He wills." (71)

* * * *

The next story is the famous one of the roses. Neither Guda, Isentrude, nor the earliest documents of Elizabeth's life mention it, but it was a commonplace of iconography not long after her death. It has sometimes been told as belonging to the early years before her marriage, but it seems natural to place the episode in the period of the famine when tradition says that some of Louis' officials were amazed at finding the reserves of corn unimpaired despite Elizabeth's depredations.

However, in view of the criticism against her, Louis asked that she should temporarily refrain from the luxury of giving away food. Elizabeth agreed. Each day, of course, brought piteous cases of need, one woman was dying, another had threatened to kill herself, the children had nothing to eat. Who could resist such appeals? Certainly not Elizabeth. She gathered up what she could find, and she, Isentrude and Guda started down the hill carrying a full hamper which they covered with Elizabeth's cloak.

On the way they met Louis. "What have you got there?" he asked.

"Dearest Brother, look for yourself."

Louis looked: "What, roses at this time of year." It was winter.

Elizabeth was taken aback: "But they aren't roses, they are loaves of bread." Then she looked herself and saw the red and white flowers.

Louis recovered the hamper with Elizabeth's cloak, and bowed before her. "God willed to stand on my side; His love knows no bounds," was Elizabeth's comment. (71-72)

One day Brother Rodeger had come to see Elizabeth and they were walking by the Lahn River. Elizabeth told him of the fear she felt at the thought of her sins, but none of his reassuring words comforted her.

But why do my fears last?" she asked.

Brother Rodeger pointed to a tree growing on the opposite bank: "It would be far easier for that tree to jump across the river than for God to fail in generosity to one of His creatures."

Instantly, the tree had moved and was growing beside them. (122)

* * * *

"There had to be many legends about Elizabeth, if only as an attempt by her friends and followers to explain the secret of her behavior, of her being, and in a way to console themselves for the outward hardship she endured. So, she is said to have been constantly consoled by visions of our Lady and the saints; when a woman ran off with her clothes, an angel replaced them — withholding a crown 'because Our Lord will soon crown thee with glory.' The legends are like a lovely garland of flowers around the reality of Elizabeth's complete correspondence to the divine grace." (122)

*All the legends are taken from Nesta De Robeck and the number in parenthesis after the story indicates the page on which it can be found.

A LETTER TO THE FAITHFUL* (EXHORTATION TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF PENANCE)

(c.1213)

In the name of the Lord!

Chapter One: Those Who Do Penance

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength (cf. Mk 12:30) and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance:

O how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, since the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (cf. Is 11:2) and He will make His home and dwelling among them (cf. Jn 14:23). They are children of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45) whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt. 12:50).

We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined to our Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father Who is in heaven (Mt 12:50). We are mothers, when we carry Him in our heart and body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and when we give birth to Him through a holy manner of living which should shine before others as an example (cf. Mt 5:16).

O how glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! O how holy, consoling, beautiful and wondrous it is to have such a Spouse! O how holy and how loving, pleasing, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable and desirable above all things to have such a Brother and such a Son: our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave up His life for His sheep (cf. Jn 10:15) and who prayed to the Father saying:

O Holy Father, protect those in your name (Jn 17:11) whom you have given to me in the world; they were yours and you have

given them to me (Jn 17:6). And the words which you gave to me, I have given to them, and they have accepted them and have believed truly that I have come from you and they have known that you sent me (Jn 17:8). I pray for them and not for the world (cf. Jn 17:9). Bless and sanctify them (Jn 17:17) and I sanctify myself for them (Jn 17:19). Not only for these do I pray, but for those who through their words will believe in me (Jn 17:20), so that they may be made holy in being one (Jn 17:23) as we are one (Jn 17:11). And I wish, Father, that where I am they also may be with me so that they may see my glory (Jn 17:24) in your kingdom (Mt 20:21). Amen.

Chapter Two: Those Who Do Not Do Penance

All those men and women, who are not living in penance, and who do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who are given to vice and sin and walk the paths of wicked concupiscence and evil desires of the flesh, and who do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and who carnally serve the world by the desires of the flesh, the preoccupations of the world and the cares of this life: all such are held fast by the devil whose children they are and whose works they perform (cf. Jn 8:41). They are blind, since they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ. They do not have spiritual wisdom, since they do not possess the Son of God, Who is the true wisdom of the Father. Of these people it is said: Their wisdom has been swallowed up (Ps 106:27), and: Cursed are those who turn away from Your commands (Ps 118:21). They see and accept, they know and do evil deeds, and knowingly lose their souls. See, you blind ones, you who are deceived by your enemies: by the flesh, the world, and the devil; because it is sweet to the body to commit sin and it is bitter to make it serve the Lord; because all vices and sins come forth and proceed from the heart of man, as the Lord says in the Gospel (cf. Mk 7:21). And you have nothing in this world or in the world to come. And you think you possess the vanities of this world for a while, but you are mistaken, since the day and the hour are coming of which you do not think, of which you have no knowledge, and of which you are ignorant; the body becomes sick, death approaches, and thus man dies a bitter death. And no matter where or when or how a man dies in the guilt of sin without doing penance and satisfaction, if he is able to perfom some act of satisfaction and does not, the devil snatches up his soul

from his body with so much anguish and tribulation that no one can know it unless he has experienced it.

And every talent and power and knowledge and wisdom (2 Chron 1:12) which they think they possess will be taken away from them (cf. Lk 8:18; Mk 4:25). And they leave their substance to their relatives and friends, and these have taken and divided the inheritance among themselves and afterwards they have said: may His soul be cursed since he could have acquired more and given more to us than he did! The worms eat the body, and so they have lost body and soul in this passing world, and both will go down to hell where they will be tormented without end.

In the love which is God (cf. 1 Jn 4:16), we beg all those whom these letters reach to accept with kindness and a divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ which are written above. And those who do not know how to read should have them read to them frequently and they should preserve them together with a holy manner of living even to the end, since they are Spirit and life (Jn 6:64).

And whoever shall not have done these things will be held accountable on the day of judgment (cf. Mt 12:36) before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rm 14:10).

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*Translation by Regis Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., Ph. D., St. Bonaventure University, Summer, 1981.

LETTERS OF MASTER CONRAD TO GREGORY IX

(1232)

RELATING TO THE MIRACLES

Raymond Abbot of Eberbach of the Cistercian Order and Master Conrad of Marburg, preacher of the word of God, to the Holy Father Gregory, and to Siegfried Archpriest of the Roman Church and through God's grace Archbishop of Mainz, with deep devotion, childlike obedience, and the profoundest reverence.

We have received the Letter of Your Paternity with the commission to inform you of all that we, ever mindful of God's majesty, have discovered regarding the behavior and life of the former Landgravine Elizabeth of blessed memory, and regarding the wonders which God works through her holy body. In obedience to this apostolic commission, we have made inquiries from suitable witnesses and have noted down their testimony with careful zeal and alert attention in writings which bearing our seals we now forward by the hands of reliable and trustworthy messengers.

Obedient to your order as was our bounden duty, we have done our utmost with zealous care to discover everything concerning the life of the said Landgravine and concerning the wonders worked by God through her holy body; this we have recorded in the document we now send to your Holiness.

We have interrogated her God-fearing and pious servants about her life after having prudently put them on oath, and we have noted in writing what they have told us. I, the humble preacher Conrad, have taken it down word for word intending it for Your eye; and in conscience, none of us has heard anything that might have led us to change, or to eliminate anything that has been said, nor to add anything further to it.

CONCERNING THE LIFE OF BLESSED ELIZABETH

It is surely known to You Holy Father, that Your Penitentiary Brother Raymond has written to me several times instructing me to inform you concerning the wonders worked by God

through the Lady Elizabeth, formerly Landgravine of Thuringia, whom Your Holiness had entrusted to my care and protection. I therefore took the opportunity offered on the last feast of Saint Lawrence when the Lord Archbishop of Mainz had come on my entreaty to consecrate two altars in the basilica where lies the body of the abovenamed Elizabeth (August 10, 1232). A great concourse of people had gathered there at my instigation and during the sermon, without any previous consultation, I wished to fulfill Your Holiness' command by obtaining the testimony of all present about the forenamed wonders and the cures obtained through the merits of the Landgravine. Therefore, I summoned all these people to appear early the next day before the Archbishop of Mainz and other prelates gathered here for the ceremony that they should bear sworn witness to the graces obtained through the invocation of the Lady Elizabeth. In answer to my invitation, a large crowd presented themselves declaring they had been healed of their ills through Elizabeth; the Archbishop of Mainz was in a hurry having other important business to attend to, and therefore he caused only the most striking of these healings to be noted down, appending his own seal to the document and that of other prelates. The confirmation of many of the prelates and other important persons was not recorded since they had no seal with them.

In order that Your Holiness should not only hear of these miracles, I will now give you an account of her life.

I was her confessor for two years before her husband's death. When she was entrusted to my direction, she complained to me that she was bound by matrimony and could not end her earthly life as a virgin. During the time that her husband was with the Emperor in Apulia, Germany was suffering through a terrible famine, and many people died of hunger. Elizabeth already then shone with many virtues; throughout her life she was the consoler of the poor, and she began to feed the hungry and built a hospital near her castle where she gave shelter to many children and ill folk. She gave copious victuals to all who came to beg for alms. She did this not only in that place, but in all her husband's principalities where she used up the reserves of corn and finally sold her jewels and rich clothes for the benefit of the poor.

She was in the habit of visiting her sick twice a day in person, in the morning and evening; she nursed the most repulsive cases herself, fed many with her own hands, served them, and carried

them about and did much else for them. In all this she had her husband's approval.

When her husband died and Your Holiness entrusted her to my care, she was striving for the highest perfection and asked me whether she would have more merit serving God as a hermit, in a monastery, or in any other state. Her dominating desire was that I should allow her to beg from door to door, and with many tears she implored me to consent. When I roughly forbade it, she answered: "Then I will do what you cannot prevent," and on Good Friday, when the altars were stripped in the church she had given to the Friars Minor, and in the presence of several friars, she laid her hands on the altar and renounced her parents and children, her own will, and all worldly pomp and everything which our Lord in the Gospel counsels us to give up.

After this, against my will, she followed me to Marburg on the frontier of her husband's domains for she feared the enticements of the restless world, and of remaining in the place where during her husband's life she had played a considerable part. In Marburg she built a hospital in which she gathered the sick, the poor, and set the most humble and miserable at her own table. When I reproved her for this, she answered that it brought her special graces of humility, and referring to her past life, like the clever woman she was, she insisted that for her it was necessary to heal one extreme through its opposite extreme. When I saw her so set on spiritual progress, I removed all her superfluous servants, and bade her to be content with three persons, a lay brother to see to her business matters, an unattractive girl, and a very severe widow, in order that the girl should try her humility and the repulsive widow her patience.

When the girl was washing the cabbage, her mistress washed the dishes and vice versa. Among others, she took in a paralyzed orphan boy who suffered continually from dysentery. In order to exercise herself in perfection, she put him to sleep in her bed, suffering many things through him, for often six times and even more in the night she would carry him to satisfy his natural wants. She washed his dirty linen cloths with her own hands.

When the boy died, without my knowledge, she took in a leper girl, hid her in the house and served her in every way. She would feed her, make her bed, wash her, take off her shoes, humbling herself in many ways, and cleverly won her servants' silence by begging them not to get her into trouble with me. When I did hear of it, may God forgive me, I gave her a sound beating be-

cause I feared she might catch the disease and I took the leper girl away from her.

While I was away preaching, she took in a poor boy covered with scurvy whose head was in such a state that he hardly had a hair left; she treated him with medicines, washed him, and did all to cure him. This boy was sitting by her bed when she died.

Besides all this, before God I declare that I have seldom found a woman more given to contemplation. Monks and nuns often saw how her face was wonderfully illuminated when she came from prayer and her eyes shone with rays of sun. When, as often happened, she was for hours in ecstasy, after it she took no, or hardly any food.

Finally, when she was near death, but still apparently quite well, I was troubled by a severe illness and asked her how she would manage her life after my death. She answered by foretelling her own death without the slightest hesitation. On the fourth day after this conversation she fell ill, and continued so for twelve days. Three days before her death, she would not see any secular persons, including those nobles who often came to see her. When these asked why they were shut out, she said to those around her that she wished to think of the Last Things, of the Judgment and God the almighty Judge. On the Sunday before the octave of the Feast of St. Martin, she made her confession to me, but could think of nothing beyond those things she had already confessed. When I asked her what was to be done with her belongings and furniture, she answered that everything which appeared to be hers belonged to the poor, and begged me to divide up these things with the exception of the old worn cloak in which she was wrapped and in which she wished to be buried.

When this was over very early she received our Lord's body, and until Vespers she spoke of passages in sermons that had struck her, and especially of the raising of Lazarus, and how on that occasion our Lord had wept. This caused several monks and nuns who were present to weep, but she said:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves."

After this she was silent, and though her lips did not move, a sweet song came from her throat and when those sitting by her bed asked what it might be, she asked if they had not heard someone singing with her. From twilight onward she lay there full of gladness and showing complete resignation until the first cock-crow, at which she said:

"See the hour is at hand when the Virgin
gave birth to her Son."

Then, she humbly commended all with her to God and quietly passed into her sleep.

On hearing of her death, Cistercian monks and Brothers of other Orders came from many places to the hospital where she was to be buried. The devotion of the people demanded that she should remain unburied until the fourth weekday, and except for her paleness she showed no sign of death, and her body was as flexible as it had been in life. From it there emanated a most sweet scent. On the day after her burial, the Lord began to work miracles through His handmaiden, for a Cistercian monk at her tomb was healed of the madness which had afflicted him for forty years, and he swore to this before me and the parish priest of Marburg.

There follow the miracles of holy Elizabeth.

"GLORIOSUS IN MAJESTATE"

The Bull of Canonization*
(June 1 and 4, 1235)

From His place in the glory of the eternal Father, Our Redeemer Jesus Christ saw the misery of our human condition in that moral deformity caused by the sin of our first parents. Moved by compassion, God's ineffable Providence decreed that our human nature, the work of His hands, should experience His omnipotent mercy, and by Him be freed from the shadow of death and called back to the fatherland of divine liberty. Thus the Creater in His Infinite Wisdom willed to perfect the work He had begun and to restore the fallen creature to its pristine dignity. To this end He entered the narrow womb of the Virgin (if that can be called narrow which harbors in itself the Lord who contains all things) and leaving His royal throne He took upon Himself our nature; He who is invisible made Himself visible, and through the mystery of His Incarnation and the triumph of His Redemption He defeated the Prince of Darkness and all his works, and thereby He opened to His faithful followers a sure way by which they might return to their eternal home.

Blessed Elizabeth of royal lineage and the gracious Landgravine of Thuringia gave herself to earnest meditation on the mystery of our Redemption; and this continued from her earliest years to the end of her life. Above all else she desired to become worthy of eternal glory and devoted herself to the consistent practice of virtue following the path traced by our Lord Jesus Christ, and she never ceased to find joy in the embrace of charity. Always confessing the true faith she dedicated herself to a life of sanctity inspired by love for the Divine Son of the Queen of Heaven, the divine Bridegroom of her soul; and she had such love for her neighbor that she wished to have near her those whose condition caused them generally to be shunned. She became voluntarily poor in many things in order to be rich toward those in need; from her earliest age she always wished to be their protector and friend knowing that the reward of eternal life is to be

acquired by the merits of God's friends the poor. She came so to love this condition which is despised by worldly pride that she repeatedly showed her contempt for even those legitimate pleasures open to her through the exalted rank of her husband, and mortifying her delicate body by the constant practice of renunciation she progessed in virtue to the point where a spontaneous action of self-denial is rewarded by more abundant grace. What more can be said? In her desire for the highest happiness after her husband's death, she set aside all family ties considering it as an imperfection did she not obediently remain in a state of chastity; indeed, she had already made a vow to this end during her husband's lifetime, only excepting his just claims upon her. As a widow, therefore, she put on the religious habit in which until her death she continued to live the mystery of Christ's passion.

O blessed wife! O marvelous woman! O sweet Elizabeth whose very name signifies one filled and satisfied with God, and who by feeding the poor has merited the bread of Angels! O glorious widow, rich in virtues, who sought to obtain through grace what nature cannot give; thou didst triumph over the soul's cruel enemies by the shield of faith, the armour of justice, the sword of the Spirit, the helmet of salvation, and the spear of perseverance! Elizabeth endeared herself to the immortal Bridegroom by unflagging love, and reducing her earthly dignity to the humble office of a servant she was united to the Queen of Virgins; she made herself like the saints of other times by following uncomplainingly God's laws and commandments, and by grace conceived God in her inmost soul, bringing Him to birth in her actions, feeding Him by her unceasing progress to such a point that the Lord who is the only support of those who hope in Him, who exalts the humble and innocent, arose to bestow on her the reward promised to His followers and delivered her from the bond of death and has carried her to the throne of the elect in the dwelling of inaccessible light.

This astonishing and ineffable transfiguration has caused her spirit to shine in the infinity of the divine light and its rays reach into the abyss of our darkness by the glorious miracles that increase the faith, hope and charity of the faithful, show the way to those who have strayed from the way of truth. Heretics are confounded in the depths of their estrangement when they see the dead brought back to life, sight being given to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, the power of walking to the infirm, and vast regions of Germany which they had thought to

poison with their doctrines turning with joy to the divine teaching of our Lord. All this comes to pass by the divine grace working through the merits of this saint who while on earth showed herself poor in spirit, unfailingly tender of heart, bewailing her sins, or rather those of others, thirsting for righteousness, given to mercy, pure of heart, truly peaceloving, bearing persecution and opprobrium with serenity.

These stupendous events have been irrefutably attested; and We have consulted Our Brothers the venerable Patriarchs, Archbishops, Bishops and Prelates of Our court, it being incumbent upon us to watch carefully over all that may contribute to the glory of our Redeemer. This being done We have inscribed the name of Elizabeth in the catalogue of Saints, and order that her feast shall be celebrated on the thirteenth day of the calends of December, being the day on which the bonds of death were broken and she flew to the Fountainhood of supreme joy, so that through her intercession we too with Christ's help, may obtain what she has already obtained and now glories in its eternal possession. Furthermore, availing ourselves of the power conferred on Us be God who wills that all the faithful should share in the divine graces, We desire that God's Holy Name should be honored by numerous pilgrims to the venerable tomb of His bride Elizabeth, and trusting in His mercy and by the authority of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, we grant one year and forty days Indulgence to all those who, having confessed their sins with true contrition, shall visit this sanctuary on the day of the feast or during the octave, there to offer their prayers and devotion.

Given at Perugia in the calends of June in the ninth year of Our Pontificate.

*Nesta De Robeck, *Saint Elizabeth of Hungary* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954), pp. 200-203.

LETTER OF GREGORY IX TO QUEEN BEATRICE OF CASTILLE

June 7, 1235

In these days the Almight has given us a *vas admirabile* which showed itself as a furnace of charity through the burning ardor of good works. This chosen vase consecrated to God is no other than Saint Elizabeth, whose name we interpret as signifying the satisfying of God since many times she nourished God in the poor and the infirm, and nourished our Lord with three loaves given her in the night of tribulation by her Divine Friend, the bread of truth, the bread of charity, and the bread of courage. In her burning love of eternal beatitude, Elizabeth served the Lord of Heaven and earth with three precious dishes; she refused whatever He forbade; she obeyed each of His commands; and she accomplished all His Counsels. She subdued human desires in vigils, fasting, and prayer, thus making the creature obedient to the Creator; she subdued the senses to reason, and the flesh to the spirit. Truly of her it may be said that she is a *vas admirabile,* the work of almight God, admirable in the virtue of humility, in the subjection of her body, in the tenderness of her compassion which will be celebrated in all ages.

Though of royal birth, she made herself the servant of the poor, and sick, and until her death she was obedient to the infirm, the pilgrims and the poor. Instead of the ornaments habitual to royalty, pearls, precious stones, gold and silver, she completely threw off all worldly vanity and ambition and put on the harsh habit of poverty.

Now her brother Conrad, formerly the Landgrave, still young and beloved by men and the world, has drunk of the same cup of the wine of compunction at which she drank and offered to others; for he has thrown off all worldly dignity, and braving persecution has hastened naked into the shelter of the Cross whose sign he carries in his heart.

Here too is your sister, the virgin Agnes, daughter of the King of Bohemia, and she, inebriated also with the same wine,

has refused the imperial dignity almost as though it were a poisonous reptile, and grasping the triumphal banner of the Cross goes forward to meet the Bridegroom accompanied by a choir of virgins. This indeed is the work of Almighty God, a new work accomplished on earth when Saint Elizabeth opened her heart to Jesus Christ, conceived Him by love, brought Him again to birth in the world by charity, fed Him and cared for Him.

Our enemy the devil raises up two high walls to hide the eternal light from our eyes, namely spiritual ignorance blinding man to the power of God, and concupiscence of the body blinding man to the love of our Redeemer; but Saint Elizabeth safely ensconced in the shelter of humility overthrew both these walls, and having put the clouds of pride to flight she could enjoy the inaccessible and divine light. She cut at the very root of concupiscence, bridling all her affections in order to come to the true Love.

Vas admirabile; this vase is made of the gold of pity, the precious stones of wisdom ornamented with imperishable works into which the Lord has poured so many proofs of divine grace that through this vase which is Elizabeth, earthly anger and envy, in themselves worthy of eternal death, might be purified. Thus God has shown what riches, what abundance of grace were contained in her whom the Lord prepared for eternal glory.

God created her in His image to make her share in His beatitude. She kept the thought of Him always in her heart, and kept the lamp of charity ever burning with works and this charity was not to be extinguished by floods or winds, nor by the thorns of tribulation and anguish.

Indeed, the Virgin Mother of God has already brought her into the heavenly chamber of the Bridegroom, who has set a crown of ineffable glory on her head. While the Church Triumphant rejoices in her presence, the Church Militant is enriched by many miracles through the merits of this blessed one.

Beloved daughter, We have had two motives in setting before you the example of Saint Elizabeth as a most precious pearl; first that you may often look into the mirror of her example and consider if anything in your own conscience offends the Divine Majesty so that nothing may be lacking to you of what is needful in a bride of Jesus Christ; and that so when you are called to appear before the eternal King, He may see you too ornamented with every virtue and precious work.

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