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St. Elizabeth of Hungary  
Patroness of the Third Order

TERTIARY SAINTS' SERIES

NUMBER TWO



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**ST. JOSEPH'S CHURCH**  
THIRD STREET AND WOODLAND AVENUE  
CLEVELAND, OHIO

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“As hitherto We have always bestowed special care upon the Third Order of St. Francis, so now, being called by the supreme mercy of God to the office of Sovereign Pontiff since thereby We can most opportunely do the same, We exhort Christian men not to refuse to enroll themselves in this sacred army of Jesus Christ. There are many of both sexes who everywhere have already begun to walk in the footsteps of the Seraphic Father with courage and alacrity whose zeal We praise and specially commend, and now, Venerable Brethren, We desire that particularly by your endeavors the Third Order may be increased and extended still more. And the special point which We commend is that those who have adopted the insignia of Penance shall look to the image of its most Holy Founder, and strive to imitate him without which the good that they would expect would be looked for in vain. Therefore, take pains that the people may become acquainted with the Third Order, and truly esteem it.”—  
*Pope Leo XIII.*



St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

## ST. ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, PATRONESS OF THE THIRD ORDER.

“That boundless sympathy for the Passion of a God made man which sent St. Louis twice under the standard of the Cross to seek death and captivity in Africa; that longing for a better life which made him struggle against his friends and family to abdicate the crown and hide his royalty under the monastic habit; that respect for poverty which made him kiss the hand of everyone to whom he gave alms; his abundant tears, his sweet familiarity with Joinville, and even his conjugal tenderness—all that is found again in the life of St. Elizabeth, who was no less his sister by feeling and by sympathy, than by their common engagement under the Rule of St. Francis. So many charms, so much interest in the brief mortal existence of this young woman, are neither the creation of the poet's fancy, nor the fruit of piety exaggerated by distance. The profound impression which the destiny and heroic virtues of Elizabeth made on her age, is manifested by the tender and scrupulous care wherewith men have gathered and transmitted from generation to generation the most trifling actions of her life, the least words that she uttered, with a thousand incidents, which throw light on the innermost recesses of that pure and artless soul.”—*Count de Montalembert.*

**S**T. ELIZABETH was born in the year 1207, her parents being Andrew II, King of Hungary, and his wife Gertrude, daughter of the Duke of Carinthia. The young princess was scarcely four years old, when the Duke of Thuringia sent a solemn embassy to her father in Hungary, to ask the hand of Elizabeth for his eldest son Hermann. If their embassy was successful, the envoys were to bring the little child to the Thuringian court, as was the practice at this epoch, in order that she might be early trained in the customs of a people of whom she would one day be the sovereign. Andrew acceded to the request and confided his little daughter to the ambassadors, after making them magnificent presents.

The Thuringian court, then at the height of its magnificence and splendor, was to witness the dawning virtues of Elizabeth. The stately castle of Wartburg, the residence of the Thuringian court, and the new home of Elizabeth, was famous at this period for its riches and opulence, for its feasts and songs. Elizabeth, however, cared little for these pleasures. She had scarcely come to the age of reason when she began to show a special love for the house of God, the home of the Blessed Sacrament. The poorest chapel had more attraction for the saintly child, than the castle of Wartburg with all its royal splendor. She loved to kneel before the altar and stretch out her little tender arms toward the Divine Presence in the tabernacle. When her rides or walks led her by chance near a sanctuary, if the doors were shut,

she would fall on her knees and press her lips to them lovingly. According to custom, Elizabeth, a princess and daughter of a king, wore a golden crown studded with precious stones. It was noticed that the princess removed her crown as soon as she entered a church, and did not replace it until she left the holy place. Being asked why she did this the young girl humbly replied: "I cannot appear arrayed in a gorgeous shining crown in the place where my Savior hangs, cruelly crowned with thorns."

Elizabeth's love of solitude and prayer was undoubtedly strengthened by the many sorrows of her young life. Four years of age, she was separated from her parents to whom she clung with a child's unlimited love and affection; two years later, she received the sad news that her mother, Gertrude, was murdered by Hungarian nobles; Hermann, whom she was to marry, died in 1216. Moreover, some of the chief persons of the Thuringian court turned against her. They could not brook her simple life of piety and prayer. "We must send her to a convent," they would say among themselves, "she leads the life of the cloister here, and does not understand the dignity of her rank." Elizabeth noticed that the persons appointed to attend on her began to pay her less respect, others even sneered at her and remarked, it would be better to send her back to Hungary, since she is of no account. Elizabeth heard these remarks; her little heart beat with the same sweet love towards Jesus, but, nevertheless, she shed bitter tears. More than ever before the saintly child took recourse to our Savior and sought consolation and strength in fervent prayer.

God did not desert her in the midst of her trials. In spite of all sorrows, of hatred, envy, and persecution, her soul enjoyed that deep, interior peace that the world cannot give and cannot take away. After the death of Hermann, Elizabeth was betrothed to Louis, the second son of the Duke of Thuringia. This young prince was worthy of having the Saint as his betrothed. He loved Elizabeth chiefly on account of her virtues, he admired the heroism, gravity, modesty, austere yet loving devotion of his future companion. His heart understood these beautiful and touching virtues, and when he saw the Thuringian court set against her, he used what influence he had in her favor and took her part boldly.

The marriage of Louis and Elizabeth took place in 1221. Louis was truly a saintly prince; according to contemporary writers, his subjects delighted to call him *St. Louis*, partly on account of his own virtues, partly on account of his betrothal to *St. Elizabeth*. He ordered extraordinary magnificence to be displayed at the marriage, wishing to show again how much he prized the unappreciated qualities of his holy bride, and how much he scorned the insults of which she had been too long



The Child St. Elizabeth at Prayer.



The Marriage of St. Elizabeth.

the victim. Elizabeth's enemies were silent after this; the wicked considered it prudent to remain quiet. The name of the young duchess was in every mouth, but she did not allow herself to be dazzled by her more prosperous condition.

By a singular coincidence, it was also in 1221 that the followers of St. Francis of Assisi appeared in Thuringia with the petition, that they might be permitted to establish themselves in the country. They found a devoted protectress in the young duchess. Elizabeth welcomed them with unfeigned faith and admiration, she built them a monastery at Eisenach, and chose from among them a learned and holy instructor in the person of Father Rodinger. The latter, filled with the true spirit of the "Little Poor Man of Assisi," often came to the Wartburg at Elizabeth's request, and unfolded to her the ideals of St. Francis. The evangelic life of the new religious, all she heard related of their Father Francis, deeply moved her generous soul. She most vehemently desired to become a daughter of the great Patriarch. With the consent of Duke Louis the Franciscans admitted her into the Third Order.

Anxious to imitate her Spiritual Father, Elizabeth showed the greatest obedience and respect to all priests of God, especially to her confessor. Her position prevented her from the complete attainment of the other ideals of St. Francis, especially of voluntary and absolute poverty. Still she practiced mortification every moment of each day. She limited herself at meals to what was indispensable to sustain life, and this with simplicity, without any affectation, or losing any of the sweet cheerfulness that belongs to the children of God. Always attentive to the wants of those present, she managed to turn attention away from herself by multiplied acts of attention towards others. She accustomed herself to rise in the night to resume her prayers and increase her mortifications. Yet Elizabeth, a true Tertiary, did not lose sight of the duties of her state of life, nor did she do anything without the knowledge and consent of her confessor. She cherished an exceedingly strong affection for her husband, she leaned upon him as the protector of her innocence and the consoler of her sorrows. Louis, who probably also was a Tertiary, was to her a father, a brother, and a husband. God blessed his dutiful servants. He rewarded their virtues by giving them three children to add to the joys of their domestic life.

The characteristic virtue of our Tertiary Saint was her tender and inexhaustible charity towards the suffering members of Jesus Christ. The lepers, the poor and sick were her friends and her children, and the more repulsive their poverty and maladies, the more she loved to serve them. One day a beggar presented himself before her, his head covered with frightful ulcers. Elizabeth took him aside, cut off his hair, washed his wounds, applied remedies to them, and then allowed

him to rest his head, weary with suffering, for a few moments on her breast. Surprised by some of her women, and upbraided by them rather bitterly, she accepted their reproaches with a sweet smile. Elizabeth had recognized in this poor man, *Jesus*, the outcast of the world for the salvation of mankind. Every year, on Maunday Thursday, this servant of Christ herself washed the feet of twelve poor persons and gave them abundant alms. On the same day she was once enabled to collect several lepers, she washed their feet and hands, and lovingly kissed their wounds.

Like St. Francis, Elizabeth had always a special tenderness for these sufferers. She never showed the least sign of disgust toward them, she was never tired of exhorting them to patience, nor of helping them with generosity. St. Francis had already heard of the great virtues of the Duchess of Thuringia and of the benefits his Order had received from her. He rejoiced over such a precious conquest. Persuaded by Cardinal Ugolino, he sent his poor cloak as a gift to his illustrious daughter, and the pious princess, accustomed to venerate St. Francis as a spiritual guide, received it with feelings of lively gratitude. It was a treasure which death alone should take from her.

In the year 1226, while the Duke of Thuringia was in Italy attending the Diet at Cremona on behalf of the emperor and empire, famine was making itself felt at home. Knowing the generous disposition of her virtuous husband, and what St. Francis would do under the circumstances, Elizabeth considered it a duty as much as possible to help all in need. She therefore took whole families under her care, distributed food to them every day, and exhorted them to have confidence in the providence of their Heavenly Father. As many of the poor were at the same time sick, and on account of their maladies, unable to climb to the heights of the castle of Wartburg, Elizabeth established a hospital at the foot of the mountain, where they found shelter against the inclemencies of the weather, a bed to repose upon in their sufferings, remedies to cure them, and nourishment apportioned to their needs.

Every day this daughter of St. Francis went herself to visit her dear sufferers. She questioned them all in turn, that she might be able to prepare the remedies required by each; she dressed their wounds, made their beds, and rendered them the most humble services. She did all this without showing the least repugnance, with a calm, loving, and tender bearing, like a mother in the bosom of her family. In this hospital were also collected a number of children attacked by various maladies. Inflamed by supernatural love, the holy Tertiary liked to make herself their infirmarian, to take care of them herself, and to do for them what usually even the most merciful charity might have shrunk from undertaking.

Besides the poor maintained in the hospital, Elizabeth fed others in her own castle, and on several occasions it pleased God to multiply the food in the hands of His servant. Nine hundred persons were fed daily, either at the castle, or the hospital, or in their own homes. It was thus that the inexhaustible charity of this Tertiary was shown. Neither were the poor of the provinces forgotten; Elizabeth managed to find out and assist those at a distance, as well as those near at hand. The revenues of the state were, in her eyes, the natural property of those who were in want.

However, the heroic virtues of the princess had not been able to live down distrust and envy. In the Thuringian court there had always been jealous persons over whom her virtues had been unable to triumph. When the duke returned from Italy, he was besieged with complaints from those who had the management of his affairs. To listen to them, it would appear that Elizabeth had ruined him by her charities. "My castle is still standing," said the duke in reply, "allow my sister, (it was so he called St. Elizabeth), to continue her good works. Bread will not be wanting as long as we allow her to give to the poor." This answer silenced her detractors, but only for a time. Louis of Thuringia continued to show himself worthy of his admirable wife, by his ardent faith, and the daily practice of every Christian virtue. He belonged to the strong generation of Catholic princes of the thirteenth century, of whom the Tertiary, St. Louis, King of France, was the perfect model. He had also, in spite of his short career, shown great talent and ability as a statesman, and it was not his least glory to have understood the merit of Elizabeth, to have made himself her defence and her shield, and to have joined her name to his forever. But even the presence of the duke, and his publicly known affection for Elizabeth, could not reduce the envious to silence. New accusations were now made, under one pretext or another, all showing diabolical hatred for the virtues of the princess. God then took upon Himself to justify this Tertiary and make Himself her defender.

One day a leper presented himself to Elizabeth in a deplorable condition. Full of the deepest compassion, she washed his wounds carefully, and then put him in the duke's own bed, he being then absent. The duke arrived unexpectedly and was soon told of what had taken place. This time he was vexed and angry, he rushed to his room and violently tore aside the curtains of the bed. A man was lying there, it is true, but the leprosy had disappeared from his body, a holy light encircled his brow, an ineffable majesty reflected in every feature, he lay nailed by his hands and feet to a cross. It was *the Leper* that the prophet had seen in his holy visions, laden with the sins of the people, the Only and Eternal Son of the Heavenly Father, humbled to the



St. Elizabeth and a Beggar.

death of the Cross. Louis of Thuringia remained speechless at the sight, his passion changed into an unutterable emotion—better than ever he understood the marvellous sanctity of his spouse.

St. Elizabeth's biographers also tell us of another miracle, by which it pleased God to ratify the charity of His Saint. One day as she descended into Eisenach, accompanied by her maidens, carrying provisions in the folds of her cloak, she found herself all at once face to face with the duke who was returning from the chase. Astonished at seeing her bending beneath the weight of her burden, the prince playfully wished to know what she carried. He opened her mantle himself. It contained nothing but red and white roses, the most beautiful he had ever seen. Hence the holy Tertiary was able to live for some time longer in domestic happiness, and to go on with her works of mercy without troubling herself about the ill-will of her detractors; but great trials were soon to fall upon her. This pure and heroic daughter of St. Francis was to be plunged into sudden grief. In the year 1227, an army of crusaders, mustered through the influence of Pope Gregory IX, was ready to embark at Brindisi, after the feast of the Assumption, under the command of Frederick II, Emperor of Germany. The Duke of Thuringia was one of the first among the Catholic princes to take the cross. Elizabeth, in spite of her grief at his departure, not only helped him in his noble determination, but accompanied him a two days' journey beyond the limits of their dominions. The hour of parting was unspeakably bitter. The young Tertiary wept as if a mournful presentiment weighed on her soul; Louis also had need of all his faith to carry out his sacrifice.

On his arrival at Troja in Sicily, Louis of Thuringia was received with the honor due to his rank by the Emperor Frederick II. Louis was already attacked with fever before he embarked, but he did not consider his condition sufficiently serious to delay his departure for a few days. His illness, however, increased with frightful rapidity. He saw that the time was come for him to quit this life, and, in the flower of his youth, he accepted the great sacrifice without a murmur or complaint, as if it had been on the battle-field. He adored the inscrutable designs of the Supreme Ruler, put himself and all those belonging to him under God's fatherly providence, received the Last Sacraments with a fervor worthy a Christian hero, and fell asleep in the hope of entering that Jerusalem which the impure feet of the stranger shall never defile.

Louis died on the eleventh of September, near Otranto. The lords who were deputed to carry the mournful news to Wartburg, did not get there before the beginning of the winter. Elizabeth, a legend informs us, was ill at the time. They were therefore received by the

Duchess Sophia, the noble mother of Louis. She forbade anyone to tell Elizabeth of the sorrow which had come upon her, for fear of endangering her life. Afterwards, when she thought the moment favorable, she went herself to perform this sad task. The news was like a thunderbolt to Elizabeth, she remained speechless for a time, then clasping her hands, she exclaimed: "O Lord, my God! My brother is dead, he is dead! With him the whole world is dead to me." Her tears and sobs expressed her inconsolable grief; Elizabeth became a widow at twenty.

Our Saint, who was now more than ever detached from the things of the world, longed for a life of seclusion and prayer. The humble daughter of the seraphic St. Francis desired to spend the remainder of her life in still greater penance and poverty. She thought of the poor Babe of Bethlehem, and made use of the opportunity that Divine Providence gave her, to put her spirit of poverty into a more rigorous practice.

In the Wartburg she could not do this as she desired. She therefore procured permission to move to the more retired castle of Marburg, which was hers by dower right. According to many of her biographers, Elizabeth was driven from the Wartburg; this, however, seems to be untrue. It was not force, but a voluntary sacrifice that led her to Marburg. From the castle of Marburg she was possibly driven by force, and there at midnight, when she heard the bells ringing for Matins at the Franciscan church, she directed her steps towards the house of prayer, assisted at the Divine Office, and then begged the religious to have the goodness to sing the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for the misfortunes which had come upon her.

Elizabeth's uncle, however, Egbert, Prince Bishop of Bamberg, called her into his domains, and desired to provide for her in a manner befitting her station; he also wished that she should enter into a second marriage, and, it is said, that the emperor himself, Frederick II, desired her hand. But the saintly Tertiary's choice was made; God alone was to be her portion for evermore, and holy poverty was to be her spouse. Dead to the world, she had but one desire to follow the example of Christ as well as possible, by walking in the footsteps of her Seraphic Father, St. Francis. From the very beginning the life of St. Francis was to her a beacon-light, that led her on to heavenly love, and holiness, and God. All were astonished that this Tertiary, the daughter of a king, so young in years, and with such beautiful prospects, should have so ardent a desire to imitate St. Francis in all things.

The companions of Louis brought back the remains of their beloved sovereign to Thuringia. On their arrival at Bamberg, they apprised the Bishop and duchess of their return, and everything was arranged for the solemn, funereal reception of the body of the great prince. Elizabeth's

deep and inconsolable grief revived in the presence of her husband's remains. She wept bitterly, but found strength in God. She even thanked the Supreme Lord of all things for all that had happened, she bowed to the will of God and accepted with touching submission the death of her dear husband as a favor of Heaven granted to her vested in a garment of sorrow. She buried the body of Louis in the family vault of the dukes of Thuringia in the convent of Reinhardsbrunn, and then once more occupied herself with the thoughts of her own salvation.

Conrad of Marburg, her spiritual director and confessor, would not permit her to enter the Second Order of St. Francis, much as she desired to do so, nor would he permit her to fully and perfectly renounce all her earthly possessions. He did, however, grant her leave to add the three vows of religion, with some restrictions, to the practice of the Tertiary Rule. Good Friday was the day she chose for this solemn consecration of herself to her Crucified Lord. On that day she went with her children and household to the Franciscan church at Eisenach, and there placing her hands on the altar, she vowed to renounce her own will, her relations and friends, and all the pomps and pleasures of this life, to belong unreservedly to her Crucified Savior, and to follow Him till death in the path of poverty and penance.

Conrad then clothed her in the large, coarse tunic of St. Francis, and girt her with the cord. Further she bound herself to go barefoot, which austere practice she observed faithfully to the end of her days. Thus St. Elizabeth, who had entered the Third Order during the life of her husband, having become a widow, wished to practice the poverty of the Holy Patriarch, and to consecrate herself more solemnly to God. For this reason she bound herself by vows and took the exterior habit of the Third Order. Hence also, she has been given as patroness, not only to the sisters of the Third Order Secular, but also to the nuns of the Third Order Regular. In the Franciscan supplement to the Roman Martyrology is found the following passage: "Eamque sorores et moniales ejusdem Tertii Ordinis ut patronam praeicipuam venerantur."

Elizabeth having made her solemn vows, had a little hut built near the monastery of the Franciscans and settled in this humble abode. She dedicated her special income, which her director had not allowed her to renounce, to the relief of the poor. In imitation of St. Francis of Assisi she wished henceforth to beg her daily bread from door to door. Her confessor forbade this and so she resolved to earn her livelihood by the labor of her hands. She knew not how to spin flax, but she could spin wool. Thereafter like the poorest of the working classes the princess labored from early morning till late at night. "Even when sickness confined her to bed," writes Conrad of Marburg, "and when her companions took away the distaff, she used to disentangle and ar-



St. Elizabeth in the Famine of 1226.

range wool for future use. In this way she earned enough to provide for her support and make her offerings to the churches."

Her food was very coarse and simple. If persons brought her anything savory she at once sent it to some poor person who was sick. "She most generally ate vegetables," says Montalembert, "boiled in pure water without salt, and, well or ill, she prepared them herself. While she was thus occupied in labor and in the cares of her house, she ceased not to elevate her soul to God in prayer and meditation; and often when alone by the fireside, either engaged in cooking, or when she approached to warm herself, so absorbed used she be in contemplation that sparks and cinders would sometimes fall upon her garments and burn them without her knowledge, though, when her companions would return, they would feel almost suffocated by the smoke and odor of the burning stuff."

Her Tertiary habit might be compared to her food in its extreme poverty. She who had been clothed in silks and satin, in rich garments of the finest texture, now wore a habit of undyed cloth, such as was used by the peasantry and the poorest classes only. Her habit often torn and patched, was confined around her waist by a coarse cord. According to the testimony of her four female attendants she used to mend the rents and burns on her habit with her own hands, although she did not well know how to sew.

When St. Francis first appeared as a mendicant in the streets of Assisi, he was mocked at by worldly persons, treated as a fool, and insulted in many ways. St. Elizabeth, his spiritual daughter, met with no better fate. Profane men tried to convince themselves that she was insane; whilst pious souls looked upon her with respect as a second St. Clare. Wretched as her habit was, she frequently deprived herself of it to give it to some poor person, who came begging at the door of her hut.

Elizabeth had also been forbidden to renounce her revenue. She knew of no better use she could make of this income than to have a hospital built at Marburg as she had previously done at Wartburg. As soon as this asylum was completed our Saint divided her time between the hospital and her Franciscan home. Every day she went amongst the patients, cleansing and dressing them, and administering the prescribed remedies; she fixed their beds, washed and mended their garments, and scrubbed the floors. The discouraged she nursed back to life and hope, the sinful she exhorted earnestly, the virtuous she led on to greater virtue. In her manner she was kind to all, and very cheerful. To the poor she was not only a consoler, she even was their slave, and no service appeared to her to be too repulsive, too difficult, too mean, for each one of them was, in her eyes, the living image of the Heavenly

Spouse of her soul. Those among the sick whose disorders filled all with disgust, and drove every one from them, became the objects of her special care and tenderness. The royal hands of this humble Tertiary rendered them every assistance; she often kissed their sores and ugly ulcers.

Elizabeth had found her inspiration in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, and in his Rule of the Third Order, hence she dedicated her hospital at Marburg to the memory of St. Francis, who had died in 1226, and was canonized in 1228. Pope Gregory IX, according to Montalembert, sent to St. Elizabeth a present far more precious than the mantle which she formerly received with so much gratitude. The Holy Father thought it right to send to the intrepid and faithful imitator of St. Francis a few drops of blood which flowed from the wound in the side of St. Francis. Our Saint received the sacred relic with the greatest joy and respect, and looked upon it as a new pledge of her alliance to St. Francis.

For the love of God, St. Elizabeth had renounced all the things of this earth; she stripped herself of everything; she embraced the severest poverty, and practised the most austere penitential life, she tended to the sick, the lepers and the poor, but she reckoned all this as nothing; the more she loved God, the more she yearned for still greater love. Her father, the King of Hungary, hearing of her extreme poverty, and not knowing the cause, was greatly grieved. He at once dispatched a tried and trusty courtier to bring his daughter back to him. "Say to my dearest lord and father," Elizabeth told the ambassador, "that I am happier in this contemptible life than he is in his regal pomp, and that far from sorrowing over me, he ought to rejoice that he has a child in the service of the King of Heaven. All that I ask of him is to pray, and to have prayers offered for me, and I will always pray for him as long as life is left to me." Elizabeth rejoiced in the love of her Savior. Well could she exclaim: "The kingdom of this world and all the vanities of the age have I despised for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ, Him Whom I have seen, Whom I have loved, in Whom I have believed, and Whom I have preferred."

"Like Martha," says one of her biographers, "Elizabeth provided with the greatest care for the wants of Jesus Christ, in the persons of his poor, and like Mary she would go to the feet of her Savior, and there forget this world in the sweet recollections of his graces and mercies." Yet this seraphic daughter of the seraphic St. Francis, thinking of her own sinfulness and the sanctity of God, was often tempted by Satan in the most distressing manner. One day she said to Father Rodinger, her former spiritual director: "Reverend Father, there is one thing that torments me more than any other, and that is, that I

fear my Creator has but little affection for me. I know that He is infinitely good and prodigal of His love, but on account of my many faults that keep me far away from Him, I fear that He cannot love me, although my heart is inflamed with love for Him." "There is nothing to fear in that," said Father Rodinger, "for the Divine mercy is so great, that it is impossible to think otherwise than that God loves infinitely more those who love Him, than He is beloved by them." "How then, is it," said Elizabeth, "that He so often permits sadness and languor of soul to remove me from Him, to Whom I would wish to be always most intimately united?" The good Franciscan then explained to this saintly Tertiary that temptations, involuntary distractions at prayer, and spiritual languor are indeed fraught with danger to salvation, but that they are the marks of an elect soul, and not of an abandoned one. "The Kingdom of Heaven," says Holy Writ, "suffers violence and only they who use violence shall attain it."

Regarding St. Elizabeth's spirit of prayer, Conrad of Marburg wrote to Pope Gregory IX: "Before God, I declare that I have rarely seen a more contemplative woman." For hours would this holy Tertiary remain in prayer, immovable as a statue, absorbed in God and Heavenly things. At night when all slumbered Elizabeth, imitating St. Francis, would watch and pray. The beauties of nature had the same attraction for her, that they had for her Spiritual Father. She loved to pray in fields and forests, near purling streams and sparkling fountains. To this day *Elizabeth's Fountain*, a beautiful spring at the foot of a rugged hill, situated in a forest two leagues from Marburg, marks this Tertiary's favorite haunt of prayer. Surrounded by that nature which in all its rigor and in all its beauties reminded her of the greatness and clemency of the Creator, she habitually raised her soul to Him in contemplation.

Conrad, seeing how Elizabeth grew in sanctity, resolved to destroy in this precious soul entrusted to him the slightest trace of self-will. He forbade her to go among the poor in order to give them alms; he prohibited all communication with those most dear to her—the lepers; he even prevented her from giving her usual attention to the sick. "This holy man," says an ancient writer, "did all he could to conquer her will, to fix all her love upon God, and to make her forget her former rank and glory. And in all things Elizabeth was willing to obey and firm to endure. In patience she possessed her soul, and her victory was ennobled by obedience."

Accordingly St. Elizabeth gave much time to prayer. St. John the Evangelist, the beloved disciple of Christ, he who was pure as a lily in his holy virginity, was Elizabeth's favorite saint. She also professed the greatest devotion to St. Mary Magdalene. The Queen of Heaven, the Blessed Virgin Mary, was naturally the object of her fervent love,

all the more so, since St. Francis had dedicated to her his entire Franciscan family. The nearer this humble daughter of the Seraphic Saint approached the end of her short career, the more frequently her prayers were transformed into ecstasies. Finally these ecstasies became a daily occurrence, so that no day passed on which she did not leave this world to have a foretaste of the bliss of Heaven. The angels came to console her in her affliction and to give her celestial instructions; Christ himself, the sweet Spouse of her soul, appeared to her, accompanied by a multitude of saints. "After these celestial visions," says the grave Conrad, "her face beamed with marvelous brightness." Hence Elizabeth strove in vain to conceal these wonderful favors; her joy and gratitude also betrayed her. Contemporaries testify to her ecstasies and visions as incontestable facts.

Countless miracles marked these latter years of Elizabeth's life, her sanctity became more and more celebrated. Heretofore she herself went to the sick and helpless to soothe the pain she could not take away—now these were brought to her, imploring to be cured by her miraculous power. Divine Charity, to which nothing is impossible, was henceforth so identified with this heroic child of love, "that," as a writer remarks, "one word, or one prayer from her lips sufficed to dissipate and drive away forever the sufferings which before she could but strive to heal."

About ten years had elapsed since Elizabeth was received into the Third Order of St. Francis, and two years had scarcely passed away since this fervent Tertiary had made her vows, so that she could imitate her Seraphic Father more perfectly; and already God deemed her life sufficiently long, her time of trial completed, her strenuous task fulfilled. "He ordained that she who had forever given up the kingdom of this world should be received into the Kingdom of Heaven." "Like to the spouse in the inspired canticles," says Montalembert, "He came to announce to His beloved one that the dark winter of her life, with all its storms, had passed away, and that the dawning of an eternal spring was about to open for her. The year 1231 was nigh expired, the year wherein the Order of St. Francis had resigned to Heaven the great St. Anthony of Padua, the glory of Italy and Portugal; and the Almighty, willing to increase the number of Franciscan saints, demanded from the same order a new sacrifice, and proceeded to cull its fairest flower."

Elizabeth, frail and worn from hardship and penance, was attacked by a stubborn sickness which soon developed into a scorching fever. One day a little bird appeared to the saintly patient and sang so sweetly that Elizabeth's heart and soul were thrilled with joy, and she was impelled to sing along. "He revealed to me," said Elizabeth to the attendant who also heard the song, "that I will die in three days." "Doubtless," says one of her biographers; "it was a messenger from Heaven who came to

comfort her in her sickness and to announce the approach of eternal joy." We know that St. Francis in his illness received consolation by the music of an angel. "The mere sound," says St. Bonaventure, "which was marvelously harmonious, raised his mind so entirely to God, and filled his soul with so much delight that he thought himself enraptured with the joys of Heaven." Hence we need not be surprised that God granted a similar favor to St. Elizabeth, the faithful daughter of St. Francis.

Our Saint confessed for the last time to Conrad of Marburgh. "She took her heart into her hands, and read therein all that it contained," says a contemporary manuscript, "but naught was there for accusation, nothing that had not been a thousand times washed away by the most sincere contrition." Her children who were amply provided for, and who had always been the objects of her special affection she left to the continued care of God-fearing persons. To her eldest daughter Sophia she bequeathed a small image of the Blessed Virgin which she had always carried on her person. The drops of blood from the wound in the side of St. Francis were enshrined in the chapel of the hospital she had built at Marburgh, and the old mantle of her Holy Father, St. Francis, she gave as a most precious heirloom to one of her companions, saying: "I declare to thee, that whenever I prayed covered with this cloak, God granted my wishes, always with infinite mercy." She then requested that she have as a shroud the poor habit which had been her only garment and that she be buried in the chapel of St. Francis in her hospital at Marburgh.

With pious eagerness she expected the Last Sacraments. They were administered to her in the morning after Holy Mass. Who can describe with what tenderness, what contrition, what purity of heart, what ardent desire, what celestial joy she received them! For hours after she remained motionless and silent, absorbed in contemplation. Yet it was noticed that the nearer death approached, the more her joy and happiness increased. "I am weak," said she, "but I feel no more pain than if I was not ill." Most vehemently had she desired to be filled to overflowing with seraphic love of God, and, in her last hours, this love enraptured her so that it absorbed all pain.

It was on the nineteenth of November, 1231, that St. Elizabeth died; she had not entirely completed her twenty-fourth year. A religious who wrote the life of this Tertiary Saint, exclaims: "Do you blame me, dear reader, for having written that Elizabeth is dead? Do you accuse me for not having alleged other causes for her death than love and joy? Yes, love and joy led her from this vale of tears; she left it not with pain. Death, which is so hard and so terrible a struggle, had no share in this departure, in which a virtuous and holy life was succeeded by a triumphant and blessed eternity. It was rather a privilege of grace than



St. Elizabeth after Death.

a punishment of sin; an achievement of victory, not a failing of human nature."

On the eve preceding her burial a vast multitude of birds settled on the roof of the chapel where the body of St. Elizabeth, shrouded in her Tertiary habit, had been carried by Franciscan religious, shortly after her death. According to a charming tradition these little birds sang in tones so sweet and varied, that all who listened were filled with admiration. "They rendered testimony to her purity," says St. Bonaventure, "by speaking of her in their language at her burial, and singing with such wondrous sweetness over her tomb."

This great Tertiary Saint wrought many miracles at the close of her life and also after her sacred death. The sick and helpless were often cured miraculously through the tremendous power she possesses at the throne of God. By command of Pope Gregory IX, three different examinations of these miracles and of Elizabeth's virtues were made in Thuringia. All these were conducted with extraordinary care and exactness. In the springtime of the year 1235, the Pope was at Perugia, in the same city where seven years before he had canonized St. Francis of Assisi, when a delegation arrived bringing to the Supreme Pontiff the documentary proofs of Elizabeth's virtues and miracles. We are informed that their arrival made a great impression on the Papal Court, on the clergy at large, and the people. Cardinals even were moved to tears when they read of so much sorrow and suffering, such humility, such affection for the poor and for holy poverty, such pure love of God, so many miracles wrought by grace from on high. Yielding to the petition of the clergy and people, Gregory IX solemnly canonized "this fervent daughter of St. Francis," "the greatest woman of the German Middle Ages," on Pentecost Sunday, May 28, 1235. Her feast is celebrated November 19, the happy day of her death.

A year later, the Emperor Frederick II, Bishops, religious, and Teutonic Knights, attended the taking-up of the body of the Saint. The cornerstone of the exquisite Gothic church of St. Elizabeth, the most inspiring and artistic Gothic church of its century, had already been laid in 1235. The remains of the humble Tertiary were placed in the sanctuary of this magnificent edifice. Historians assure us that pilgrimages to the sacred shrine grew to such gigantic proportions, that they could be compared to the pilgrimages of St. James at Compostella.

The letters of Conrad of Marburgh to Pope Gregory IX, the written testimony of St. Elizabeth's four female attendants, and the researches of a great number of scholars, mostly German and Hungarian, furnish the material for the life of St. Elizabeth.

*St. Elizabeth, Pray For Us!*

CATHOLIC THEOLOGICAL UNION

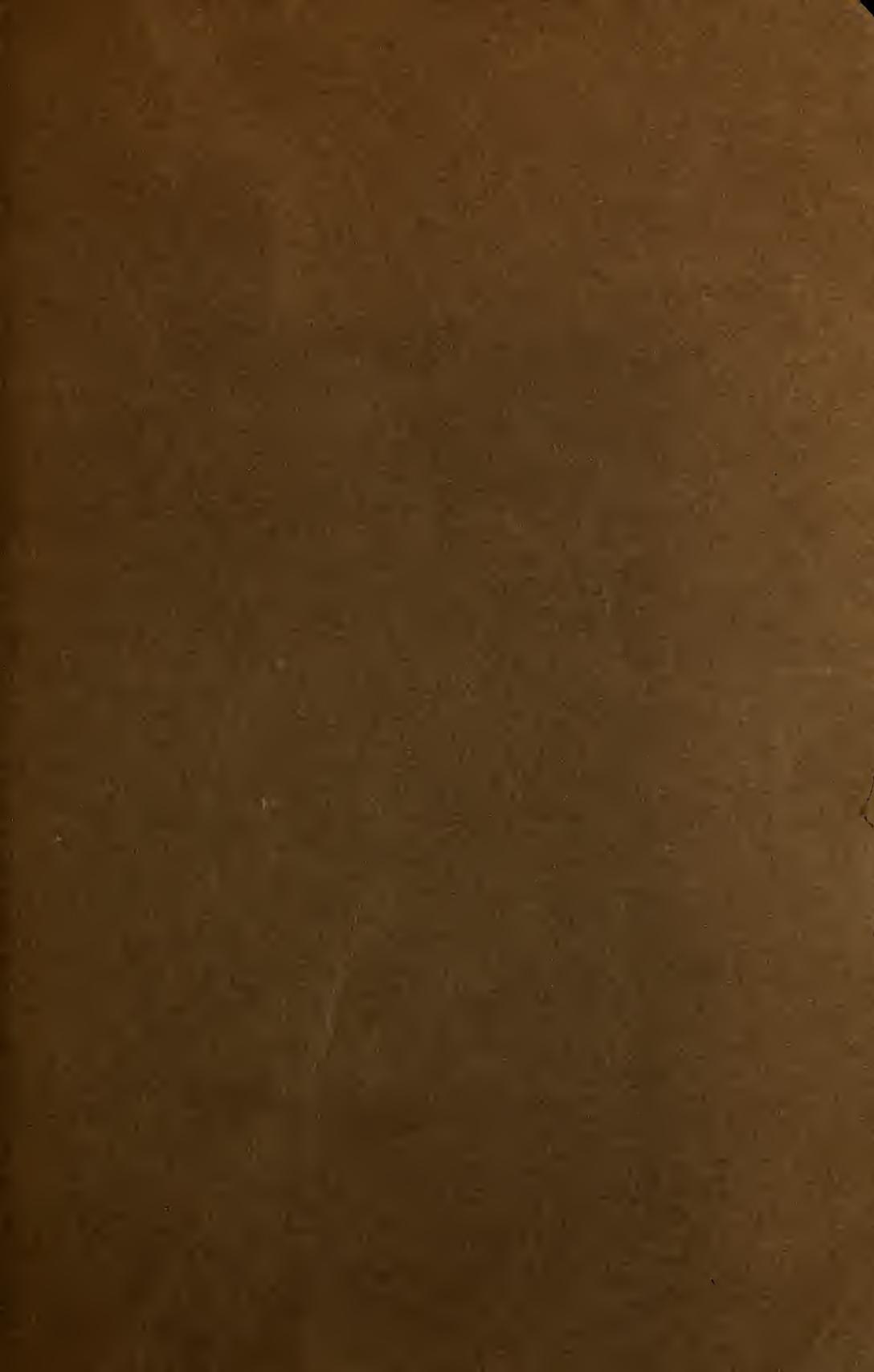


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St. Elizabeth of Hungary

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