

TUESDAY OF 33<sup>RD</sup> WEEK IN OT St. Elizabeth of Hungary 11/17/2020

The saints in our Catholic calendar that we honor at weekday Masses are a fascinating group of people with unique experiences, presented to us for our edification and to be prayed to, even if they lived 800 years ago.

Today's saint Elizabeth lived in what has been termed the greatest of centuries for the Catholic Church -- the thirteenth, the 1200's. Born in present-day Hungary, as a royal princess in 1207, at age four she was sent to Thuringia in present day-Germany to become one day the bride of the son of the local ruler. When she was 14 and he 21, they married. She and her young husband, Landgraf Ludwig IV, were very happy -- he too is honored locally as a saint -- and had three children. When she was 20, her husband went off to fight in the Crusades and died on the way from the Black Death. In 1231, at age 24, Elizabeth herself died. And was canonized four years later. Again, we can ask, why is she a saint, and why are Catholics world-wide asked to honor her this day?

Well, first for us in La Quinta, there is a Franciscan connection. Elizabeth was a contemporary of St. Francis of Assisi and he sent her a personal letter of blessing just months before his death. Shortly after her marriage, Franciscans arrived at Wartburg Castle in Eisenach where the couple lived. She was much attracted to them and quickly acquired a Franciscan love and concern for the poor. Because, as their Countess, she personally brought food to the destitute and even established a hospital for them, our Church has named Elisabeth, or Isabel as she is known in Spanish, the special patroness of the homeless, the dying, widowed mothers and Third-order Franciscans, among whom she was one of the very first. In art she is usually shown with a half-hidden bouquet of roses. It is said that once when she was bringing food hidden under her mantle to the poor, a relative objected. She told him it was roses, and when she opened her cloak it truly was a beautiful bouquet.

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Soon after her husband's death she moved to Marburg, where she died in 1231; St. Francis had died just five years earlier. Until the Protestant Reformation, her tomb was a major place of pilgrimage in Germany. Ironically, it was one of her noble descendants who had become a follower of Luther, who ordered her tomb-shrine to be destroyed. So, because of her association with St. Francis and Third-Order Franciscans, and because of the special concern that the parish of St. Francis in La Quinta has for helping the poor and the hungry, today's saint should be especially significant and dear to parishioners there.

Beginning a few days ago, our First Reading for most of the rest of November will be taken from the Book of Revelation. In today's long passage the author scolds and chastises two of the larger cities of then southwest Asia Minor (now Turkey). They are Sardis and Laodicea. For some reason those selecting the First Reading omitted the passage about the city that originally was spoken about between these two cities. It is a name familiar to Americans: Philadelphia. Some years ago, on a pilgrimage I visited most of these cities which today are mostly small villages or abandoned ruins.

Most Catholics are familiar with the Zacchaeus Episode in Jericho, because with a few changes of detail it appears in several Gospels. I don't remember seeing any sycamore trees when I was in Jericho, but I have a clear memory of the stately palm trees. Zacchaeus seems to be a very likeable person, and in the Greek Orthodox Church he said to have become a disciple of Jesus and is honored as a saint.

Finally, we should never forget, the saying of the Lord in today's passage from the Book of Revelation: **THOSE WHOM I LOVE, I REPROVE AND CHASTISE. BE EARNEST, THEREFORE, AND REPENT.**

