

We are called to be stewards of the wealth that God gives us. What we have is not meant to be ours to use selfishly, but ours to share. Jesus is our role model. Jesus is the beloved Son of God who “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Ph 2:7-8).

July 4th is the Memorial of Queen Elizabeth of Portugal. Because the feast falls on the weekend, it has been transferred to the 5th just like our federal holiday. As a queen she felt a great obligation to serve the poor and to maintain peace, avoiding war in the 13th and 14th centuries.

“Elizabeth was born in 1271, the daughter of King Pedro III of Aragon and his wife Constantia. Even in her youth, Elizabeth showed a notable devotion to God through fasting, regular prayer, and a sense of life’s seriousness. While still very young, she was married to King Diniz of Portugal, a marriage that would put her faith and patience to the test.”ⁱ Although he was diligent in his duties as a king, he was not so faithful as a husband. The king fathered two children with his wife and another seven through adulterous relationships.

The king’s poor moral example set a tone for his court which was mired in various forms of immorality. With God as her first and foremost love, Elizabeth sought to advance Christ’s reign on earth by living faithfully to the Gospel and pouring her heart into serving the poor and the sick. Elizabeth of Portugal modeled virtuous behavior and surrounded herself with attendants who also had a heart for caring for the poor and the sick.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches: “Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8). Instead of being repelled by the sight and smells of the sick, Elizabeth saw and served Christ in those who were most challenged. “The queen’s bishop testified that she had a custom of secretly inviting in lepers, whom she would bathe and clothe, even though the law of the land barred them from approaching the castle.”ⁱⁱ

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Mt 5:9). Elizabeth used her influence and power to prevent civil war in the kingdom. King Diniz favored one of his illegitimate sons in such a way that his own legitimate son Alonzo was ready to go to war against his own father. Father and son gathered rival armies and were on the brink of open war in 1323 before Queen Elizabeth intervened putting herself in harm’s way to stop the foolishness. She insisted that “Diniz and Alfonso come to terms and make peace with one another. In 1336, the last year of her life, she intervened in a similar manner to prevent her son from waging war against the King of Castile for his poor treatment of Alfonso’s own daughter.”ⁱⁱⁱ

With the death of King Diniz in 1325, Elizabeth who had become a Franciscan of the Third Order went to live in a convent where she could focus on prayer as she continued to offer corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Many sought her intercession for help even after her death in 1336. Through the faith of those who asked for her help, Elizabeth continued from heaven to care for the poor and the sick that she loved so much in her earthly life.

Elizabeth of Portugal had a wonderful role model in her great aunt, Elizabeth of Hungary. “Both of them were married at very young ages, they sought to live the precepts of the Gospel despite their status as royalty, and finished their lives as members of the Third Order of Saint Francis.”^{iv} Both had a deep devotion to God who showed them in prayer how to be good stewards of the wealth they inherited in this life. “The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 Jn 3:16).

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-elizabeth-of-portugal-535

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Ibid.