

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary

When Peter asked us to report on a Franciscan Saint of our choice I immediately volunteered to take on Saint Therese of Lisieux, my dear and much loved Saint and role model. I talked to her frequently and even joined a group of women at church who met weekly to study her life and ask for her intercession as we prayed. I always received roses as a sign of her love and of hearing my prayers. Sometimes they were real roses, sometimes they were pictures of roses. One time when I was praying in church for a miracle to occur, I looked down and saw that something had fallen from my rosary box so I bent down to pick it up and it was a little round circle with roses all over it. It had come from the inside of my rosary box. Another one just like it was still in place in the rosary box. The prayer was not only heard but my request was granted.

Imagine my shock when Peter said sure go ahead and report on her but she is not a Franciscan. I had assumed that because I loved Saint Francis so much and the two seemed so much alike to me that she was also a Franciscan Saint. I was all set to go ahead and do as Peter said: I would have to show how she led me to the Franciscan Fraternity. A very short time after that Peter told me that he was wrong and that I could not report on a non Franciscan Saint because the idea was to help us all learn about Franciscan Saints. So he very kindly gave me several from which to choose. I didn't

really like any of the first bunch, poor Peter. Again he very kindly said well what about Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and yes it was a match. Saint Elizabeth though she was born into a wealthy family was a very humble and kind, happy and loving toward all she was also devoted to God from a very early age. As I looked more deeply into her life I found she was also a person who cared deeply for the poor and the sick.

History—Elizabeth of Hungary was born in Hungary to Andrew the II a very powerful King and

to Gertrude of Merania on July 7, 1207. She was a very happy child and loved to play music and dance, recite her prayers and already showed her dedication to the poor. Her happy childhood was interrupted at the age of 4 when due to her betrothal to Ludwig the son of

Herman I of Landgrave in Germany.

She left her home with a ppriich dowry and her two maids who remained faithful to her to the end. These two maids are the ones who brought the

stories of her childhood and her life forward when needed to examine her life as a possible Saint.

At age 14 she and Ludwig married and although it was and arranged marriage for political reasons, a love was born between the two young people, sincere and animated by faith and the desire to do the will of God, even though Elizabeth found herself in the middle of criticism because her behavior did not correspond to the cannons of life at court. The marriage was not a lavish banquet and even the poor were

thought of. When Pope Benedict was reviewing her life as a woman worthy of Sainthood, he highlighted a few episodes from the life of Elizabeth, such as when going as when going to church on the Feast of the Assumption she took off her crown and placed it before the cross and bowed to the ground in front of the crucifix with her face covered. And when her mother-in-law scolded her for that gesture, she replied: How can I wretched creature, continue to wear a crown of earthly dignity, when I see my King Jesus Christ, crowned with thorns? She behaved toward her subjects exactly as she behaved toward God. She never ate until she was sure that the food came from the legitimate properties and assets of her husband.

While abstaining from goods acquired illegally, she also sought compensation for those who had suffered violence. Elizabeth was active in carrying out works of mercy, she gave to drink and eat procuring clothes, paying debts, taking care of the sick and burying the dead. A miracle was reported at this same time. The turning of bread into roses. Elizabeth was walking down the street with her apron full of bread for the poor, she met her husband along the way and he asked her what she was carrying?. She opened her apron to show him and instead of bread, magnificent roses appeared. This symbol of love is often represented in depictions of St. Elizabeth. But Elizabeth's life was also one of hard trials. The first was her farewell to her husband in late June of 1227 when Louis IV joined the crusade of Frederick II, reminding his bride that it was a tradition among the rulers of Thuringia. Elizabeth replied I will not hold you back I have given all of myself to

God and now I have to give you too. Ludwig, however, fell ill and died at Otranto before embarking in September of 1227 at the age of 27.

Another trial came from her brother-in-law who usurped the rule of Thuringia, declaring himself the true heir to Louis. Elizabeth and her three children were evicted from the castle of Wartburg. The children were handed over to friends of Louis and Elizabeth, with two maids. Elizabeth worked where she was welcomed, assisting the sick, spinning and sewing. During this ordeal she endured with great faith, patience and dedication to God. Some relatives who had remained loyal to the government and considered her brother-in-law illegitimate, rehabilitated her name. So Elizabeth, at the beginning of 1228, was able to receive a proper income and retire to the family castle in Marburg. It was here that she had built a small Franciscan hospital and devoted herself entirely to the care of the sick, especially those afflicted with debilitating and disfiguring diseases. Elizabeth always tried to perform the most humble services and repugnant work. In 1221 Elizabeth became associated with the Franciscans. They established their first settlement in the region and she obtained spiritual instruction from them. The ideals of St. Francis appealed to her: chastity, humility, patience, prayer and charity. Because of her royal position, the vow of poverty that Franciscans took was not easy to pursue and her retention of funds made the charitable work she pursued more fruitful; over time she distributed everything she had. It was with her financial aid and spiritual support that the Franciscans in 1225 founded a monastery in Eisenach. Conrad of

Marburg, who had been held in high esteem by Ludwig, became her spiritual advisor.

It is said that he treated Elizabeth with all the severity of his nature, for which he had reputation, through this led her to new levels of sanctity and charity; after her death he was very active in her canonization.

On Good Friday, 1228 in the Franciscan house at Eisenach, Elizabeth formally renounced the world; she received from Conrad the dress of the Third Order of St. Francis. She built the Franciscan hospital at Marburg and on its completion devoted herself entirely to the care of the sick, especially those afflicted with debilitating and disfiguring diseases.

Soon after the death of Elizabeth, miracles were reported to occur at her grave in the church associated with the hospital, especially miracles of healing. At Pentecost of the year 1235, the solemn ceremony of canonization of the “greatest woman of the German Middle Ages” was celebrated by Gregory IX at Perugia, with Conrad present. Conrad had written in support of her canonization a letter, of which a portion is here: Elizabeth was a lifelong friend of the poor and gave herself entirely to relieving the hungry. She ordered that one of her castles should be converted into a hospital in which she gathered many of the weak and feeble. She generously gave alms to all who were in need, not only in that place but in all the territories of her husband's empire. She spent all of her own revenue from her husband's principalities, and finally she sold her luxurious possessions and rich clothes for the sake of the poor.

Twice a day, in the morning and in the evening, Elizabeth went to visit the sick. She personally cared for those who were particularly repulsive; to some she gave food, to others clothing; some she carried on her own shoulders, and performed many other kindly services. Her husband, gladly approved of these charitable works. Finally, when her husband died, she sought the highest perfection; filled with tears, she implored me to let her beg for alms from door to door. Good Friday of that year, when the altars had been stripped, she laid her hands on the altar in a chapel in her own town, where she had established the Friars Minor, and before witnesses she voluntarily renounced all worldly display and everything that our Savior in the gospel advises us to abandon. Even then she saw that she could still be distracted by the cares and worldly glory which had surrounded her while her husband was alive. Against my will she followed me to Marburg. Here in the town she built a hospice where she gathered together the weak and the feeble. There she attended the most wretched and contemptible at her own table. Apart from those active good works, I declare before God that I have seldom seen a more contemplative woman. Before her death I heard her confession. When I asked what should be done about her goods and possessions, she replied that anything which seemed to be hers belonged to the poor. She asked me to distribute everything except one worn-out dress in which she wished to be buried. When all this had been decided, she spoke often of the holiest things she had heard in sermons. Then, she devoutly commended to God all who were sitting near her, and as if falling into a gentle sleep, she died. In August of 1235, soon after her canonization, the corner-stone of the

beautiful Gothic Franciscan church of St. Elizabeth was laid at Marburg. On May 1, 1249 the remains were placed in the choir of the church of St. Elizabeth.

To me Saints like Saint Elizabeth, Saint Teresa of Lisieux, Saint Mother Teresa and many others that I have read about tell us that God gives to all of us the makings of great Saints. So many Saints are either brilliant and highly educated and also others are great martyrs and have done so many valiant and noteworthy things. If each of us were to just allow God free will to form us completely as He originally had intended, we could all become great Saints.

