

St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Patroness of the Third Order.

November 19.

ST. Elizabeth, daughter of Andrew II, King of Hungary, was born in 1207. When she was four years old, an embassy arrived from Thuringia to ask her grave of Thuringia, that, according to the practice of the age, she might be trained in the customs of the people over whom she was one day to rule.



hand in marriage for Louis, the young heir of that rich and powerful state of Germany. The embassy was successful, and the young princess was conducted in a solemn manner to the court of the mar-

Amidst the distractions of the court at Eisenach, which was one of the most brilliant of Germany, the heart of the young princess was directed towards heavenly things. Prayer was her delight. She was

often found kneeling in the chapel rapt in devotion. Even at play and during court festivities, she found means to remain united with God. "For the love of God," as she said, she would interrupt her play, and deny herself little amusements and comforts. Her love of God led her to a sincere love of her fellow men, especially the poor and the sick, whom she assisted in every possible manner.

This life of piety and detachment from the things of the world brought down upon her the displeasure of the worldly-minded courtiers, who feared the future margravine would place many restrictions upon them and insist on a strict performance of all Christian duties. They even strove to induce her betrothed, who since 1216 had succeeded to the government of the country, to repudiate her and to choose a richer and "more presentable" bride. But Louis recognized Elizabeth's true worth, and answered their demand by giving her the greatest proofs of his esteem and affection. The marriage was at length celebrated with great magnificence in 1221. As Louis was a truly virtuous man, Elizabeth was enabled to satisfy the pious disposition of her heart and to help the poor without restraint. While strictly performing the duties of her high station, she redoubled her acts of devotion and of mortification. She rose every night to spend several hours in prayer, and made use of every opportunity to mortify her senses and to overcome the promptings of self-love. She not only avoided all unnecessary finery, but dressed very simply, unless the circumstances demanded otherwise. Her charity towards the poor and afflicted knew no bounds. She was in truth a mother to the needy, a protectress of the oppressed. In 1226, during the absence of

her husband on affairs of the Empire, a famine broke out, and now her charity shone forth in all its heroic greatness. To relieve the want of her subjects she daily fed four hundred poor who flocked to her castle, distributed the immense stores of grain, and gave away as alms her entire income. She even sold her costly garments and jewels to help the needy. Close to the castle she erected a hospital in which twenty-eight poor and sick persons were sheltered and cared for. Elizabeth visited them daily, consoled and encouraged them, and rendered them every possible service, and if she showed a predilection for any, it was for the poorest and for those afflicted with the most repulsive diseases. God did not fail to reward the Saint's extraordinary charity. One cold winter's day, as a pious legend tells us, she was on one of her missions of charity, carrying various articles that she intended to distribute among the poor and sick. She was met by her husband, who good-naturedly demanded to see what she carried in her cloak. He saw nothing but fresh, blooming roses.

But Elizabeth, like all the saints of God, had to pass through great tribulations. These, however, only served to detach her heart still more from the things of the world and to raise her to greater heights of virtue and perfection. In 1227, her pious husband, having joined an army of crusaders that was about to set out for the Holy Land, was attacked with a violent fever while in camp in southern Italy, and died after receiving the sacraments with a fervor worthy of a Christian hero. This great loss was but the beginning of the sorrows that were to come upon Elizabeth. In the winter of 1227, her brother-in-law, Henry Raspe, deprived her of her

dowry, and treated her in such a manner as to virtually drive her and her three children from the Wartburg, the castle of her husband. Only two faithful maids accompanied her. Fear of displeasing the new landgrave caused all, even those towards whom she had but lately exercised her charity, to close their doors to her, and she was finally obliged to seek shelter in a stable. Here, in this wretched abode, the thought that she had become like unto Christ, who was turned away from every door and was born in a stable, filled her with a joy greater than she had ever experienced in her palace. At midnight, hearing the bells of the Franciscan convent announce the time for matins, she repaired to the church and asked the friars to sing a "Te Deum" in thanksgiving for the misfortune that had come upon her.

Poverty had no terrors for her; she managed to provide for herself by the labor of her hands, like the lowliest of her former subjects. She even stinted herself in her poor food so as to have something to give away. With the greatest cheerfulness did she bear the insults that were inflicted upon her in her time of trial, and often by those whose poverty she had relieved.

When her relatives and the friends of her husband heard of her illtreatment, they intervened in her behalf, and she received the value of her dowry in money. In one day she distributed five hundred marks among the poor. She was at length enabled to carry out her ardent wish to practice the poverty of St. Francis and to consecrate herself more solemnly to God. On Good Friday, 1228, she repaired to the church, and kneeling before the altar, she vowed to renounce her own will, her relatives and friends, and all

the pomps and pleasures of this life, and to belong unreservedly to Christ. Thenceforth Elizabeth led the life of a religious. For this reason she has been declared patroness of the Third Order, both secular and regular. It would be difficult to describe the fidelity with which she fulfilled her vow, with what courage she exercised herself in the practice of poverty, patience, humility, self-denial, and charity towards all. We need not wonder that God often made manifest her sanctity by wonderful cures and other miracles.

The time had at length come when she was to receive the reward for her life of heroic virtues. God revealed to her the time of her death. After receiving the last sacraments with all the fervor of her God-fearing soul, she peacefully passed away on November 17, 1231, in the twenty-fourth year of her age, and was buried on November 19. Pope Gregory canonized her on May 28, 1535.

Reflection.

What a noble example has St. Elizabeth given to all Christians, especially to Tertiaries. It was her constant endeavor "to seek first the kingdom of God and his justice." She did not place her happiness in wealth, honors, and pleasures, but in detachment from earthly things, in humility, self-denial, and charity. And how richly has she not been rewarded! We cannot, indeed, imitate her in every respect, yet we can look up to her and follow her at a distance, as it were, by banishing from our hearts all inordinate attachment to the things of this world, by faithfully fulfilling the duties of our state of life, and by charity towards all, especially towards the poor and needy. "Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold."