

St Elizabeth of the Trinity: Let Yourself be Loved

St Elizabeth of the Trinity was the daughter of a military captain, Joseph Catez, and Marie Rolland. Her father died when she was seven years old and she, her mother and sister Guite moved to Dijon. She was a gifted pianist, but gave this gift up to enter Dijon Carmel, 200 metres from her home. Her mother was strongly opposed to this choice. Elizabeth struggled hard to overcome a fierce temper, managing to muster a great deal of self-control after her first communion in 1891. She died of Addison's disease at the age of 26.

The Indwelling Trinity

St Elizabeth of the Trinity's great gift to the Church is her profound awareness of the Trinity dwelling within her soul:

'It is there, right in the depths, in the Heaven of my soul, that I love to find Him since He never leaves me. 'God in me, I in Him', oh! That is my life!' (Letter 62).

She loved this teaching of Jesus from the Gospel of St John:

'Those who love Me will... win My Father's love and We will come and make our home in them' (Jn 14.23).

'He is always there, although you don't feel it; He is waiting for you and wants to establish a 'wonderful communion' with you' (Letter 249). 'In that little inner sanctuary [of my soul], ... I find Him at every hour of the day and night. I'm never alone: my Christ is always there praying in me, and I pray with Him' (Letter 123).

Elizabeth's prayer is to so identify herself with Christ as to let Him pray through her.

Let yourself be loved

Once, while still a teenager, Elizabeth was asked by a family friend what she said to God during the long hours of prayer. 'Oh Madame, we love each other'. Elizabeth's genius was to allow Him to love her. Elizabeth wrote to her Prioress, Mother Germaine:

'You are uncommonly loved... [Jesus] does not say to you as to Peter: 'Do you love Me more than these' Rather his invitation is: Let yourself be loved ... Let yourself be loved more than the others' ('Let Yourself be Loved' 2,3).

Friendly conversation

Elizabeth's prayer bears the marks of St Teresa's – the Carmelite family imprint of conversation, friendship, listening, looking – that can be carried from the hours of prayer into daily working life:

'I pour out my heart [to Him], I catch myself saying all sorts of foolish things ... but He likes me to be uninhibited and to speak to Him heart to heart' (Diary 135).

'We come quite simply to the One we love, stay close to Him like a little child in the arms of its mother, and we let our heart go' (Letter 123).

'He wants to be the Friend you can always find. He is standing at the door of your heart... He is waiting... Open to Him' (Letter 174).

'Take your Crucifix, look, listen... Don't be troubled when you are occupied like you are now and can't do all your exercises: you can pray to God while working, it's enough to think of Him' (Letter 93). 'We find God at the wash, just as at prayer' (Letter 89).

Praise of Glory

Elizabeth discovered in the writings of St Paul her vocation within Carmel – to live for the ‘praise of His glory’ (Eph. 1.12). To live this she learnt that she must keep herself in the presence of God all the time, and even more so keep herself ‘in love’ because ‘God is love’. This contact with God is what – she believes – will make her holy and immaculate. Contemplating God by an ‘intuitive vision’ we are ‘transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3.18). God in turn contemplates His own splendour in those who praise Him. Elizabeth sensed that it thrilled the heart of God for her to cling to Him by a simple contemplative gaze which ‘resembles the state of innocence in which man was created’ (Last Retreat).

Love is completed in sacrifice

Jesus prayed to the Father in John 12.28: ‘Father, glorify Your name’, to which the Father responds ‘I have glorified it and will glorify it again’. He will glorify it by Christ’s victory over death and sin on the Cross. It is no surprise therefore that this spouse of Christ, His little ‘praise of glory’, ends her days surrendered to His action in the form of suffering from Addison’s disease. Let’s hear what she says about this:

‘Lord my heart rejoices when I consider that You have deigned to associate me to the great work of Redemption that in me You may undergo, as it were, an extension of Your Passion. You have taken me, and You will that I be as another humanity in which You can still suffer for Your Father’s glory and for the needs of Your Church.

O Lord, You called the hour of Your Passion ‘Your hour’, the hour for which You had come, the hour You welcomed with all your desires. When a great or even a very small sacrifice presents itself to me, I want to think quickly that this is ‘my hour’, the hour in which I can give a proof of my love to You, who have loved me ‘exceedingly’ (Letter).

Her dying words were ‘I am going to Light, to Love, to Life’.

by Dolgellau Carmel, Wales

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