

168// HERE FOLLOWETH THE LIFE OF ST. ELIZABETH

Elizabeth was daughter of the noble king of Hungary, and was of noble lineage, but she was more noble by her faith and religion than by her right noble lineage. She was right noble by example, she shone by miracle, and she was fair by grace of holiness, for the author of nature enhanced her in a manner above nature.

HER CHILDHOOD

When this holy maid was nourished in delices royal she renounced all childishness, and set herself all in the service of God. Then it appeared clearly as her tender infancy enforced in simpleness, and began to use good customs from then forthon, and to despise the plays of the world, and of vanities, and flee the prosperities of the world, and always to profit in the honour of God.

For when she was yet but five years old she abode so ententively in the church for to pray, that her fellows or her chamberers might unnethe bring her thence, and when she met any of her chamberers or fellows, she would follow them toward the chapel as it were for to play, for to have cause to enter into the church. And when she was entered, anon she kneeled down and lay down to the earth, howbeit that she knew not yet any letters; and she opened oft the psalter tofore her in the church for to feign that she read, because she should not be let, and that she should be seen occupied.

Elizabeth is expounded and as much to say as: My God knoweth her, or she is said the seventh of my God, or the filling of my God. First, God knoweth her, for he knew her good will and proved it, and he gave to her knowledge of himself. Secondly, she is said seventh of God, for she had seven things in her; she had the seven works of mercy, or because she is now in the seventh age of them that rest, and to come to the eighth of the general resurrection. Or for the seven estates that were in her. She was in the estate of virginity, in the estate of marriage, in estate of widowhood, in estate of action, in estate of contemplation, in estate of religion, and she is now in estate glorious. And these seven estates be appertly contained in her legend. So that it may be said of her like as it is said of Nebuchadnezzar, that is to wit seven times be changed in her. And also she is said the filling of my God, for God hath filled and replenished her with the resplendour of truth, of sweet savour, and of the vigour of the Trinity, whereof St. Austin saith: She woke in the perdurability of God, she shone in the verity of God, and she enjoyed in the bounty of God.

And when she was with other maidens for to play, she considered well the manner of the game for to give always honour to God under occasion, and in play of rings and other games she set all her hope in God. And of all that she won and had of any part profit when she was a young maid, she gave the tenth to poor maidens, and led them oftentimes with her for to say paternoster or for to salute our Lady.

And like as she grew in age by time so grew she by devotion, for she choose the blessed Virgin to be her lady and her advocate, and St. John the Evangelist to be warden of her virginity. And on a time there were schedules laid on the altar, and in every schedule was written the name of an apostle, and each of the other maidens took, at all adventure, such a schedule as happed to

her. And she made her orison, and thrice she took the same that she desired, in which was written the name of St. Peter, to whom she had so great devotion that she never warned thing to them that demanded it in his name.

And because that the good adventures of the world should not flatter her over much, she withdrew every day something of her prosperities, and when she took in any game any pleasure, anon she left it, and said she would play no more, but she would say: I leave you the remnant for God's sake.

She went not gladly to karols, but withdrew other maidens from them. She doubted always to wear jolly clothing, but she used always to have them honest. She had ordained to say every day a certain number of orisons and prayers, and if she were occupied in any manner that she might not perform them, but that she was constrained of her chamberers to go to her bed, she would there say them, waking.

This holy virgin honoured all the solemn feasts of the year with so great reverence that she would not suffer her sleeves to be laced till the solemnity of the mass was accomplished, and she heard the office of the mass with so great reverence that when the gospel was read or the sacrament was lifted up, she would take off the brooches of gold and the adornments of her head, as circles or chaplets, and lay them down.

HER MARRIAGE

And when she had kept in innocence the degree of virginity, she was constrained to enter into the degree of marriage, for her father constrained her thereto, because she should bring forth fruit. And howbeit that she would not have been married, yet she durst not gainsay the commandment of her father. Then she avowed in the hands of Master Conrad, which was a good man and her confessor, and promised that if her husband died and she overlived him, that she would keep perpetual continence. Then was she married to the landgrave of Thuringia, like as the divine purveyance had ordained because she should bring much people to the love of our Lord, and teach the rude people.

HER GREAT HUMILITY

And howbeit she changed her estate, yet she changed not her will in her thought, and she was of great humility and of great devotion to God, and was towards herself of great abstinence and of great mercy. She was of so right ardent desire of prayer that she oft went sooner to the church than her meiny, to the end that by her prayers secret she might impetre [beseech] and get grace of God.

She arose oft by night for to make her prayers, and her husband would pray her that she would lie and rest her a little. She had ordained that one of her women, which was more familiar with her than another, that if peradventure she were overtaken with sleep, that she should take her by the foot, for to awake her, and on a time she supposed to have taken her lady by the foot, and took her husband's foot, which suddenly awoke, and would know wherefore she did so, and then she told to him all the case, and when he knew it, he let it pass and suffered it peaceably.

And because she would render good sacrifice to God of her prayers, she wetted oft her body with abundance of tears, and let them flow out of her eyes gladly without changing of semblance, so that oft she wept with great sorrow, and she yet enjoyed in God.

She was of so great humility that, for the love of God, she laid in her lap a man horribly sick, which had his visage stinking like carrion, and she share off the ordure and filth of his head, and washed it, whereof her chamberers loathed and laughed her to scorn.

And she would in roagation time¹ follow the procession barefoot and without linen smock, and at the preaching she would sit among the poor people.

She would not array her with precious stones, as others, on the day of Purification of our Lady, ne wear rich vesture of gold, but after the ensample of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she bare her son in her arms and a lamb and a candle, and offered it up humbly. And by that she showed that the pomp and bobance of the world should be eschewed, and that she conformed her unto the Virgin Mary; and when she came home she gave to some poor women the clothes in which she went to church.

She was of so great humility that by the consenting of her husband she submitted herself in the obedience of Master Conrad, a poor man and a small, but he was of noble science and perfect religion, and she did with joy and reverence that which he commanded, for to have the merit of obedience, like as God was obedient unto the death.

On a time it happed that she was called for to go to his preaching, and the marquis of Messence came upon her by whom she was let, and might not go thither. Wherefore he held him evil apaid, and would not release her obedience till that she was despoiled to her smock, with some of her chamberers which were culpable, and that he had strongly beaten them.

HER GREAT ABSTINENCE

She did so great abstinence, that at the table of her husband, among the divers meats that were there, she would not eat but bread. She took so great rigour on herself that she waxed lean. For Master Conrad defended her that she should not touch the meats of her husband of which she should not have a whole conscience. And she kept this commandment with so great diligence, that when others abounded in delices she ate with her chamberers gross meats.

On a time when she had sore travelled in going, there were brought to her and to her husband divers meats, and were supposed not well gotten of good and just labour, wherefore she refused them and took her refection of a hard brown loaf tempered with water, and for this cause her husband assigned a pension to her, by which she and her chamberers consented for to live by,

¹ “Days of prayer, and formerly also of fasting, instituted by the Church to appease God's anger at man's transgressions, to ask protection in calamities, and to obtain a good and bountiful harvest, the Rogation Days are the 25th of April, called Major, and the three days before the feast of the Ascension, called Minor.” – *Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1908

and her husband suffered all in patience, and said he would gladly do so if he doubted not to anger his meiny.

And she, that was in sovereign glory, desired the estate of sovereign poverty, to the end that the world should have nothing in her, and that she should be poor like as Jesu Christ had been. And when she was alone with her chamberers, she would clothe her with poor vestments and vile, and set a poor veil upon her head and said: Thus shall I go when I shall come to the estate of poverty.

HER GENEROSITY TO THE POOR

And though she did abstinence, yet was she liberal to the poor, so that she might not suffer that any had misease, but gave to them all largely. She entended with all her power to the seven works of mercy.

She gave on a time to a poor woman a right good vesture, and when this poor woman saw that she had so noble a gift, she had so great joy that she fell down as dead, and when the blessed Elizabeth saw that, she was sorry that she had given to her so noble a gift, and doubted that she was the cause of her death, and prayed for her, and anon she arose all whole.

And she span oft wool with her chamberers and made thereof cloth, so that of her proper labour that she gave to the church, she received glorious fruit, and gave good ensample unto others.

On a time when her husband the landgrave was gone to the court of the emperor, which was then at Cremona, she assembled in a garner all the wheat of the year, and administered part to every each that came from all parts, and that time was great dearth in the country, and oft when she lacked money she sold off her adornments for to give to the poor people, but for all that she gave, the garners minished not ne lessed. She did do make a great house under the castle, where she received and nourished great multitude of poor people, and visited them every day, and she left not to visit them for any sickness ne malady that they had, but she washed and wiped them with her own hands, howbeit that her chamberers would not suffer it. And yet moreover then she did do nourish in her house poor women's children so sweetly, that they all called her mother. She did do make sepultures for poor people, and went devoutly unto the death of them, and would bury them with her own hands in the clothes that she had made, and oftentimes brought the sheet wherein she lay for to wind the dead bodies therein, and was at the death of them much devoutly.

THE NOBLE DEATH OF HER HUSBAND

And among these things the devotion of her husband was much to be praised, for how well he was occupied in his other things, nevertheless he was devout in the service of God, and because he might not himself entend personally unto his things, he gave full power to his wife in all that should be to the honour or to the health of their souls.

And the blessed St. Elizabeth had great desire that her husband should employ his puissance to defend the faith of God, and advised him, by debonair admonishments, that he should go visit the holy land and thither he went, and when he was there, this devout and noble prince, full of faith and of devotion rendered his spirit unto Almighty God, and so died, receiving the glorious fruit of his works, and then she received with devotion the state of widowhood.

THE VASSALS DRIVE HER INTO EXILE

And when the death of her husband was published and known through all Thuringia, some of the vassals of her husband held her for a fool and wastrels of her goods, and threw her out of her heritage. And because her patience were more clear and that she had the poverty that she long desired, she went then by night into the house of a taverner in the place where the pots lay, and gave great thankings to God. And at the hour of matins she came into the house of the friars minor, and prayed them that they would give laud and thankings to God for her tribulation.

And the day following, she came with her little children to a place and into the house of one her enemy, and then was delivered to her a strait place for to dwell in. And when she saw that she was much grieved of the host and hostess, then she saluted the walls and said: I should gladly salute the men, but I find them not.

And thus she being constrained by necessity, she sent her small children here and there for to be nourished in divers places, and returned herself into the first place. And as she went, there was a strait way upon stones and a deep mire under, and full of filth; and as she passed she met an old woman to whom she had done much good tofore, and this old woman would give her no way, so that she fell in the deep mire and filth, and then she arose and scraped her vesture and laughed.

THE BISHOP OF BAMBERG TRIES TO MAKE HER MARRY

And after this, one, her aunt, had great pity of her, and sent her wisely to her uncle, bishop of Bamberg, which received her much honestly, and retained her in entent to marry her again. And when her chamberers heard thereof; which had vowed continence with her, they were passing wrath and wept, and she comforted them and said: I trust in our Lord, for the love of whom I have vowed continence perdurable, that he shall keep me in my purpose and shall take away all violence and shall corrupt all counsel human; and if mine uncle would marry me to any man I shall withstand it to my power and shall gainsay it with words. And if I may not so escape I shall cut off my nose so that every man shall hate me for my loathliness.

And then the bishop did do lead her in a castle against her will, for to abide there till that some man should demand to have her in marriage. And she commended to our Lord her chastity, all weeping. And then our Lord ordained that the bones of her husband should be brought from over sea, and then the bishop made her to come and go devoutly to meet the bones of her husband. And then the bones were received of the bishop with right great honour, and of her with great devotion, and weepings of tears. And then she said to our Lord: Sire, I render to thee graces and thankings of this, that I may receive the bones of my sweet husband, and that thou hast vouchsafed to comfort me, poor caitiff. Sire, I loved him much which loved thee, and Lord, for

the love of thee I suffered well his presence. And I sent him unto the help of the holy land, and I call thee to witness that howbeit that it were a delectable thing to me to live yet with him, so that he were poor and I also a poor beggar through the world; but that against thy will I would not buy him again with a hair, and I would not return again to temporal life. Lord, I commend me and him into thy grace.

SHE UNDERTAKES VOLUNTARY POVERTY

And then she clad her with habit religious and kept perpetual continence after the death of her husband, and obedience performed. She took wilful poverty, and her clothing was coarse and vile. She wore a russet mantle, her gown of another foul colour, the sleeves of her coat were broken, and amended with pieces of other colour.

Her father, king of Hungary, when he heard that his daughter was come to the estate of poverty, he sent an earl to her for to bring her to her father, and when the earl saw her sit in such a habit and spinning, he cried for sorrow, and said there was never king's daughter that ware such a habit ne seen spinning wool. And when he had done his message and desired to have brought her to her father, she in no wise would accord to it, but had liefer to be needy among the poor people than to abound in great riches with rich people, to the end that she should not be empeshed, but that her will and mind should be always in our Lord.

And she prayed our Lord that he would give to her grace to despise all earthly things and take away from her heart the love of her children, and to be firm and constant against the persecutions. And when she had accomplished her prayer she heard our Lord saying: Thy prayer is heard.

And said she to her chamberers: Our Lord hath heard my voice, for I repute all earthly things as dung and filth, and set no more by mine own children than I do by other men's and my neighbours, ne I love none other thing but our Lord.

MASTER CONRAD BREAKS HER WILL

Master Conrad did to her oft things contrary and grievous, and such things as he saw that she loved, that removed he and took away from her company. And took from her two maidens, her chamberers, beloved among all others, and had been nourished with her from her childhood. And this holy man did this for to break her will, so that she should set all love in our Lord, and to the end that she should not remember her first glory.

In all these things she was hasty for to obey, and constant to suffer, that by patience she might possess her soul, and by obedience to be made fair and ennobled. She said: If I, only for God's sake, dread so much a man mortal, how much more ought I to dread and doubt the heavenly judge. Therefore I make obedience to Master Conrad, a poor man and a beggar, and not to a rich bishop, because I would put away from me all occasion of temporal comfort.

On a time because she went into a cloister of nuns, which prayed her diligently for to visit them, without licence of her master, he beat her so sore therefor that the strokes appeared in her

three weeks after, by which she showed to our Lord that her obedience was more pleasing than the offering of a thousand hosties. Better is obedience than sacrifice.

She was of so great humility that she would suffer in no wise that her chamberers should call her lady, but that they should speak and say to her as to the lowest and least of them. She washed otherwhile the dishes and the vessel of the kitchen, and she hid her otherwhile that the chamberers should not let her, and she would say: If I could find another life more despised I would have taken it; she chose the best. She had a special grace to weep abundantly tears, for to see celestial visions, and for to inflame the hearts of others to the love of God.

HER VISIONS OF JESUS

On a day of the holy Lent she was in the church and she beheld ententively the altar like as she had been in the presence divine, and there she was comforted by revelation divine. And then she returned to her house and prophesied of herself that she should see Jesu Christ in heaven: and anon as she lay down for feebleness in the lap of her chamberer, she began to look up into heaven, and she was so glad that she began debonairly to laugh, and when she had been long joyful she was suddenly turned into weeping, and then she looked up to heavenward again, and anon she returned into her first joy; and when she closed her eyes she began to weep, and in this manner she abode till compline, and had divine visions, and then she was still a while, and said thus after: Lord, wilt thou be with me, and I with thee, ne I will not depart from thee.

After these things the chamberers desired her to tell to them why she had so laughed and wept, and she said: I have seen heaven open and Jesu Christ which inclined him debonairly to me, and I was glad of the vision and wept for to depart from it, and he said to me: If thou wilt be with me, I shall be with thee, and I answered like as ye heard. Her prayer was of so great ardour that she drew others to good living.

SHE PRAYS FOR A DISSOLUTE YOUNG MAN

On a time she saw a young man, and she called him to her, and said to him: Thou livest dissolutely, and thou oughtest to serve God, wilt thou that I pray for thee?

He said: I will well and require it of you desirously.

And then she prayed for him, and the young man also prayed for himself, and anon the young man began to cry: Cease ye, lady, and leave off.

But she prayed always more ententively, and he began to cry: "Cease! lady, cease! for I begin to fail and am all burnt.

And he was esprised with so great heat that he sweat and fled, as he had been from himself, so that many ran, which despoiled him for his great heat, and they themselves might unnethe suffer the heat of him.

And when she had accomplished her prayer the young man left his heat, and came again to himself, and by the grace that was given to him he entered into the order of the friars minor, and when he had taken the habit of religion she prayed for him so affectuously that by her fervent prayers she made him that so burned to be cold, and left his dissolute life and took upon him a ghostly and spiritual life.

SHE FOUNDS A HOSPITAL

And then this blessed Elizabeth received the habit of religion and put herself diligently to the works of mercy, for she received for her dower two hundred marks, whereof she gave a part to poor people, and of that other part she made a hospital, and therefore she was called a wasteress and a fool, which all she suffered joyously.

And when she had made this hospital she became herself as an humble chamberer in the service of the poor people, and she bare her so humbly in that service, that by night she bare the sick men between her arms for to let them do their necessities, and brought them again, and made clean their clothes and sheets that were foul. She brought the mesels [lepers] abed, and washed their sores and did all that longed to a hospitaller.

And when she had no poor man she would spin wool which was sent to her from an abbey, and such as she gat whereof she gave to the poor people, and when she had been in much poverty she received five hundred marks of her dowry, which she gave unto the poor much ordinally.

THE SHEARING OF RADEGONDE

And then she made an ordinance that whosomever removed his place in prejudice of another when she gave her alms, should have his hair cut off or shorn. Then came a maid named Radegonde, which shone by the beauty of her hair, and passed by, not for to have alms, but for to visit her sister which was sick, and she commanded anon that her hair should be cut off, and she wept and gainsaid it. And there was a man which said that she was innocent. Then St. Elizabeth said: Then at the least, said she, she shall swear that she shall no more, because of her hair, go to dances ne karols, ne haunt such vanities.

And St. Elizabeth demanded of her if ever she was disposed or were in purpose to use the way of health, and she answered that if she had not had that fair hair, she had long since taken the habit of religion. And she said: I had liefer that thou shouldest lose thine hair than my son were made emperor. And then anon the maid took habit of religion with St. Elizabeth, and finished her life laudably.

HER DEATH

When the time approached that God had ordained, that she which had despised the reign mortal should have the reign of angels, she lay sick of the fevers and turned her to the

wall, and they that were there heard her put out a sweet melody; and when one of the chamberers had enquired of her what it was, she answered and said: A bird came between me and the wall and sang so sweetly that it provoked me to sing with it.

She was always in her malady glad and jocund, and ne ceased of prayer. The last day tofore her departing, she said to her chamberers: What will ye do if the devil come to you?

And after a little while she cried with a high voice: Flee ! flee! flee ! like as she had chased away the devil.

And after, she said: The midnight approacheth in which Jesu Christ was born; it is now time that God call his friends to his heavenly weddings.

And thus, the year of our Lord twelve hundred and thirty-one, she gave up her spirit and slept in our Lord, and though the body lay four days unburied, yet came there no stench from it, but a sweet odour aromatic came, which refreshed all them that were there.

Then there was heard and seen a multitude of birds, so many that there hath not been seen the like tofore, over the church, and began a song of right great melody, like as it had been the obsequies of her, and their song was: *Regnum mundi*, which is sung in the praising of virgins.

There was a great cry of poor people for her and much devotion of people, so that some took a hair of her head, and some a part of her clothes, which they kept for great relics. And then her body was put in a monument, which after was found to redound in oil, and many fair miracles were showed at her tomb after her death.

It was well showed in the dying of St. Elizabeth of what holiness she was, as well in the modulation of the bird as in the expulsion of the devil. That bird that was between her and the wall, and provoked her to sing, is supposed to be her good angel, which was deputed to her, and brought her tidings that she should go to the everlasting joy, and in like wise is showed to cursed men otherwhile their everlasting damnation.

MIRACLES OF ST. ELIZABETH

The Sick Monk's Vow

In the parts of Saxony there was a monk that hight Henry, which was fallen in so great a sickness that he cried and would suffer no creature to have rest about him in the house. On a night appeared to him an honourable lady clad in white, which advised him that he should vow him to St. Elizabeth if he would have his health, and the next night she appeared to him in like wise, and then by the counsel of his abbot he made the vow. The third night she appeared to him again and made the sign of the cross upon him, and he then received anon full health and was perfectly whole.

And when the abbot and the prior came to him, they were greatly amazed and doubted much the accomplishment of the avow, and the prior said that oftentimes under the likeness of good cometh illusion of the fiend and counselled him to be confessed of his avow.

And the night following the same person appeared unto him and said: Thou shalt be always sick till thou hast accomplished and fulfilled thine avow, and anon his infirmity took him again and would not leave him. And afterwards, by the licence given of his abbot, he accomplished his avow and was made all whole.

The Demoniac Made Whole

There was a maid demanded drink of a servant of her father's, and she gave her drink and said: The devil mayst thou drink, and she drank, and her seemed that fire entered into her body. Then began she to cry and her belly to swell like to a barrel, so that each man saw that she was demoniac, and she was two years in that estate, and after was brought into the tomb of St. Elizabeth, and was made perfectly whole and was delivered of the fiend.

The Hanged Man Raised from Death

There was one Herman, a man of the diocese of Cologne, which was holden in prison, and he called with great devotion St. Elizabeth unto his help, and the night following she appeared to him and comforted him. And on the morn sentence was given against him that he should be hanged, and the judge gave licence to his friends to take him down off the gallows, and they bare him away all dead and began to pray St. Elizabeth for him, and anon he arose from death to life tofore them all.

The Child Fallen into a Pit

A child of four years old was fallen into a pit and drowned, and a man came for to take water and espied the dead child, and he was drawn out, and then they vowed him to St. Elizabeth, and he was anon re-established to his first life and health.

The Drowned Swimmer

There was one Frederick, a mariner, which was conning in swimming, and on a time bained him in a water, and he mocked a poor man which St. Elizabeth had enlumined, and given again to him his sight. And the poor man said: This holy lady which hath healed me will avenge me on thee, so that thou shalt never come out of the water but dead, and anon the swimmer lost all his strength and might not help himself but sank down to the bottom like a stone, and was drowned, and then was drawn out of the water, and forthwith some of his friends avowed him to St. Elizabeth and she gave to him his life again.

The Cripple

There was a man named Dietrich which was grievously vexed in his knees and in his thighs, so that he might not go, and he avowed that he should go to the tomb of St. Elizabeth, and was eight

days on going thither, and abode there a month, and had no remedy, and went again to his house. And then he saw in his sleep a woman spring water on him, and awoke withal and was angry, and said to her: Wherefore hast thou awaked me and cast water on me?

And then she said: I have wet thee, and this wetting shall do to thee profit and ease.

And then anon he arose all whole and gave thankings to God and to St. Elizabeth. Then let us pray to her that she pray for us, for such things as shall be for the most profit of our souls. Amen.

The [iconography of St. Elizabeth](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000
halsall@fordham.edu

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke, rstracke@aug.edu