

This reflection appeared first in *The Church World*, the diocesan weekly of Maine.

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AMONG THE SAINTS: BLESSED ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

Baptism makes us members of Christ's household, part of a family. The saints are our brothers and sisters. But some of these heavenly siblings we do not know well or if we are slightly acquainted with them, it would be worthwhile to know them better. In this number is Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, a Carmelite nun of Dijon. She lived at a time when Catholics felt the weight of persecution in France under the Third Republic. Her community was poised to flee and establish themselves in a foreign country if matters became worse. The situation was fraught with anxious forebodings. And then the young nun's health began to deteriorate.

Yet in Elizabeth we find an invigorating optimism. The clouds overshadowing her physical existence cannot block out her interior sunshine. She finds light and assurance in the mysteries of salvation and redemption. Elizabeth writes to an older woman, "Yes, the future is very dark, and don't you feel the need to love much in order to make reparation?...St. Paul says that we belong to the 'City of the saints and the House of God.' Oh, then, why not live there now since in the depths of our soul, we possess Him who will one day make our beatitude" (Letter 160).

Dwelling on earth, we do not yet possess the fullness Jesus has promised us, but in this time of exile we have already the companionship of those established in His glory. "The Heaven of the saints is our homeland. It is the Father's House where we are awaited, where we are loved, where one day we, too will be able to fly and rest in the bosom of Infinite Love" (Letter 184).

These are times when our church is heavily criticized for many deficiencies. Too often enterprises involving human beings will disappoint us, even more deeply so when they are linked to a sacred trust. In coming as our Brother Who saves us, Jesus did not guarantee a smooth passage for His followers. Turbulence, deceit, unworthy ambitions are all part of the earthly scene whatever century we look at. We find in scripture the accounts of members of the Chosen People going astray, and the new testament records Christ's closest disciples deserting Him.

We turn to the saints to lift our hearts and to awaken our confidence in the power of cleansing love. "It seems to me that the weakest, even the guiltiest soul is the one that has the most reason for hope; and the act of forgetting self and throwing oneself into the arms of God glorifies Him and gives Him more joy than all the turning inward and all the self-examinations that make one live with one's own infirmities...the soul possesses at its very center a Savior who wants at every moment to purify it" (Letter 249).

We acknowledge our personal failings and the failings of some representatives of our church. But this recognition doesn't leave us in a ditch of misery. When we are downcast, we raise our eyes and see the path of redemption that Jesus beckons His faithful to walk upon. "How God has enriched us with His gifts. He has predestined us to divine adoption and thus to be heirs of His glorious heritage. 'From all eternity, He

chose us in Him (Christ) that we might be holy in His presence in love.' This is what we are called to be through a 'divine decree,' says the Apostle" (Letter 238).

The goal of our life is not limited to the borders of this temporal world. Each of us makes use of time since it is the material God assigns for carrying out the plan laid out for us. The saints help us grasp how the moving hours enclose everlasting treasures. What I do in the fleeting minutes has eternal import. "Realize that your soul is the Temple of God...at every moment of the day and night, the Three Persons are living within you....If you'd prefer to think that God is close to you rather than within you, follow your attraction as long as you live with Him....It's so simple. There is no need for beautiful thoughts, only an outpouring of your heart" (Letter 273 to her mother).

Living on the surface gives us a meager return for our lives. Elizabeth takes us into the deep regions of awareness where our vision penetrates reality as we have not seen it beforehand. "Each incident, each event, each suffering, as well as each joy is a sacrament which gives God to (the soul); so it no longer makes a distinction between these things. It surmounts them." (ibid. p. 97).

For Elizabeth, heaven is no distant realm far out of reach of our earthly longing. Her special emphasis is on the possession of heaven granted already through the Indwelling Trinity of Persons Who come to us in sanctifying grace. She writes to a young friend, "We must become aware that God dwells within us and do everything with Him. Then we are never commonplace, even when performing the most ordinary tasks, for we do not live in these things. We go beyond them!...Oh, how life is simplified, how it resembles the life of the blessed" (Letter 310).

Elizabeth of the Trinity and all you saints in glory, help me understand how whatever we experience in this world brings me into deeper contact with the Divine Presence, lovingly penetrating every aspect of my existence.

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