

"[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food
(Matthew 25: 35)

Elizabeth of Hungary

Peter Menkin, Obl Cam OSB

Church of Our Saviour (Episcopal)
Mill Valley, CA USA
November 19, 2008

Tobit 12:6b-9
Matthew 25: 31-40

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

As one report of Elizabeth of Hungary's good works, "During a famine she generously distributed all the grain from her stocks, cared for lepers in one of the hospitals she established, kissed their hands and feet. For the benefit of the indigent she provided suitable lodging."

This Holy woman, whose Feast Day is today in the Episcopal Church, was a remarkable woman of religious faith, relationship to God in Christ, and someone who in her exemplary Christian life helped the poor, the widow, the misbegotten.

Our reading from Matthew in the Gospel this day accurately provides an insight into her character and Christ-like living. Note that this stalwart woman who had remarkable endurance in faith, lived in the 13th Century and died at the early age of 24.

Some words from Matthew, telling of Christ's teachings:

"[F]or I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." That from Matthew 25: 35-36.

Married at 14 to royalty, husband dead at 20, Elizabeth had already begun her work with the poor and needy. Her husband, also venerated for his service to the poor, supported her in her religious work. As a widow, the work became the greater, and with three children she continued her devotion, becoming even more devout and holy. God was calling her; she responded. This we know. Elizabeth of Hungary said "yes" to the Lord.

As she gave most of what she had to the needs of the poor, and she had much as a royal person, her family became alarmed and threw her out. She was even left homeless with three children, and out in the cold, literally. At one point, as a story goes, Elizabeth was confronted by irate family members who said she was spending their money and giving

away their food. Thinking she was carrying money to the poor, they demanded she open her arms and show what she was "hiding." As the tale goes, she opened her arms, and pressed against her body was a bouquet of roses. So beautiful. The tale lives with her special service to God, and indicates her favor by Him and her goodness. A miracle is what people consider the story of the roses.

Sometimes it is necessary to select an entire Psalm for a homily. So I think.

I am doing so, because it neatly describes this Godly woman. Here it is, the alternate Psalm for reading today:

Psalm 112 is from the New Standard Revised Version of the Bible. I'll comment on her life as I read the lines.

Praise the Lord!

(And she did so, in heart and deed.)

Happy are those who fear
The Lord.

(Did God not call her, and give her trials as well as rewards?)

Who greatly delight in his commandments.
Their descendants will be mighty
In the land;

(Elizabeth studied under a strict spiritual director, and later in her young life became a Third Order Franciscan. She was a patron of the Franciscan Order, and they are her spiritual descendants, in a way of exemplary--Christ centered living.)

the generation of the upright
will be blessed.
Wealth and riches are in their
Houses,
And their righteousness endures
Forever.

(We remember Elizabeth eight Centuries later. Surely she is an inspiration, and the Church memorializes her for she was a righteous person who helps us come to Christ, and know what God wants of us. In our own Church of Our Saviour we engage in acts of charity and mercy, helping the poor and needy. One indication of this is our outreach through cooperative, Ecumenical service by feeding the homeless once a month in concert with our neighbor Catholic Church, Mt. Carmel.)

They rise in the darkness as a light

For the upright;
They are gracious, merciful, and
Righteous.
It is well with those who deal
Generously and lend.

(This woman of trials, banished by family among others, driven from her home city, lived a life of joy and service. Somehow this mystery of God's joy is difficult to fathom. But we find evidence of it time and time again.)

who conduct their affairs with
justice.
For the righteous will never
Be moved;
They will be remembered
Forever.
They are not afraid of evil tidings;
Their hearts are firm, secure
In the Lord.
Their hearts are steady, they will
Not be afraid.

(Elizabeth, young, unafraid, steady in her faith, gave succor to so many, and was a self-sacrificing woman who began living a life of Holy denial. Sometimes it is missed that this remarkable woman as widow raised three children as she did Holy works. Elizabeth was a mother.)

in the end they will look in
triumph on their foes.

(We do believe that good prevails and that our God is on the side of good, that Christ is merciful, generous, forgiving, and loves man and woman, all of creation. We as a Parish participate in our own acts of service and needs of our neighbor as a moral religious community, who believes that our fellow humankind are part of creation. Even the poor, the misbegotten, the widow and alone, or orphan more than deserve our help, but require it.)

They have distributed freely, they
Have given to the poor;
Their righteousness endures
Forever;
Their horn is exalted in honor.

(This day we remember Elizabeth of Hungry, and we join in Eucharist together as part of our Feast Day in celebration. Thanks be to God.)

The wicked see it and are angry;
They gnash their teeth and melt
Away;
The desire of the wicked comes
To nothing.

Here ends the reading and lesson.

The Psalm is both beautiful and instructive. As I say, it does describe and illustrate the life and work of Elizabeth so well.

As you know from what we've been talking about, Elizabeth was a young widow. She is considered a patroness of widows. Here are two famous prayers in her name. I will say them for you.

Prayers to St. Elizabeth of Hungary
Patroness of Widows and widowers
feast day: November 17

Dear Saint Elizabeth, you were always poor in spirit, most generous toward the poor, faithful to your husband, and fully consecrated to your Divine Bridegroom. Grant your help to widows and widowers and keep them faithful to their heavenly Lord. Teach them how to cope with their loss and to make use of their time in the service of God. Amen.

Prayer of Widows and Widowers

Lord Jesus Christ, during your earthly life You showed compassion on those who had lost a loved one. Turn your compassionate eyes on me in my sorrow over the loss of my life's partner. Take him/her into your heavenly kingdom as a reward for his/her earthly service.

Help me to cope with my loss by relying on You even more than before.
Teach me to adapt to the new conditions of my life and to continue doing your will as I see it. Enable me to avoid withdrawing from life and make me give myself to others more readily, so that I may continue to live in your grace and to do the tasks that You have laid out for me. Amen.

What to add about this exceptional woman. We praise her.

Thank you for being here on this Feast Day.

Amen. Sermon About the Poor, the Widow, the Hungry
by [*Peter Menkin*](#)

1/17/2009 / Bible Studies

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Amen.