

July 4th: Memorial of Saint Elizabeth of Portugal

Gospel text (Mt 25:31-40): Jesus said to his disciples, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, He will sit on the throne of his Glory. All the nations will be brought before him, and as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, so will He do with them, placing the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

The King will say to those on his right: ‘Come, blessed of my Father! Take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me into your house. I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to see me’.

Then the good people will ask him: ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food; thirsty and give you drink, or a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to see you?’ The King will answer, ‘Truly, I say to you: whenever you did this to these little ones who are my brothers and sisters, you did it to me’”.

“You did it to me”

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Today we rejoice in the holiness of a queen of the late Middle Ages (13th–14th centuries), Saint Elizabeth of Portugal. She was baptized with the name Elizabeth in remembrance and honor of her great-aunt, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231).

Despite the distance in time and geography, the parallels in holiness between these two women are striking: both were given in marriage at a very young age, yet remained heroically faithful to their marriage commitment; both were devout and faithful to God in the midst of royal courts; both were personally inclined to care for the poorest and most marginalized, carrying out many works of charity with great generosity, making use of their social position.

Elizabeth of Portugal could well have heard the words of the “King of kings”: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). She founded hospitals,

shelters, and monasteries. Her court became a center of Christian charity, and it was common for her personally to distribute alms and food.

One of Elizabeth's most outstanding virtues was her role as a "mediator of peace." "Love is patient, love is kind, (...) it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury" (1Cor 13:4-5): even into her old age, Elizabeth was a tireless peacemaker. At a time when dynastic, territorial, and political disputes were constant, she repeatedly acted as an instrument of unity, defusing conflicts, even when the wars involved her husband or her son.

Saint Elizabeth deserves the praise Jesus gives to those who foster peace: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Mt 5:9). The praise is beautiful, but attaining it is demanding and rests on friendship with the Lord. In the words of Pope Leo XIV, "the unity for which Jesus prays is a communion founded on the same love with which God loves. And as such, it is above all a 'gift' that Jesus brings with Him." Elizabeth, immersed in the always complicated world of the royal court, knew through her habitual piety how to "court" the principal Author of peace: the Holy Spirit.