

November 17th: Saint Elisabeth of Hungary

Gospel text (Lk 6:27-38): Jesus said to his disciples: “To you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. To the person who strikes you on one cheek, offer the other one as well, and from the person who takes your cloak, do not withhold even your tunic. Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, and get back the same amount. But rather, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back; then your reward will be great and you will be children of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as also your Father is merciful.

“Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven. Give and gifts will be given to you; a good measure, packed together, shaken down, and overflowing, will be poured into your lap. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you.”

“Love your enemies and do good to them, and lend expecting nothing back”

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
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Today we pay tribute to St Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231): a woman of the highest social class performing services that, in the world’s eyes, would be considered the lowest and most humble. But in the “eyes of God” – the true measure – there is nothing definitively low and humble: greatness depends on love. For example, the two small coins that the poor widow put into the Temple treasury did not go unnoticed in the eyes of Christ: the trumpets did not sound, but Jesus said that this woman gave “more than all the rest” (Lk 21:3), because she gave her whole self by giving everything she had.

This is how Elizabeth of Hungary acted: by her social destiny (princess of Thuringia), she had much, but she also gave much to those who had nothing. And she did it without consideration or respect: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). It is said that her husband, Louis, Count of Thuringia-Hesse, referring to the care she gave to the poor, said to her: “Dear Elizabeth, it is Christ whom you have washed, fed and cared for.”

She was not without criticism for her way of acting. Fortunately, Louis willingly consented to the magnificence of his young wife. In fact, “the marriage celebrations were far from sumptuous and a part of the funds destined for the banquet was donated to the poor” (Benedict XVI). Princess Elizabeth's attitude, with her husband’s collaboration, is an example for those who hold positions of responsibility: authority must be lived as a service to justice and charity, in constant search of the common good.

Elizabeth was widowed while still very young. From then on, she dedicated herself even more fully to works of mercy for the most disadvantaged. According to her spiritual director, Brother Conrad of Marburg, Elizabeth “built a hospice where she gathered together the weak and the feeble. There she attended the most wretched and contemptible at her own table.”

After her death, she was soon canonized (1236), becoming a symbol of Christian charity for all of Europe.