

Formation program for the Eighth Centenary of St. Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-2007)

Year One: The life of St. Elizabeth

Month 1. St. Elizabeth's birth family and first home

Each saint is an individual who comes from a particular family and particular culture. The variety of cultures in which holy lives are found helps enrich our understanding of the universality of the Gospel.

St. Elizabeth's human history was part of her history as a saint. She was from the Magyar people in Eastern Europe, the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. She was born in 1207, not much more than 200 years after her father's people first accepted Christianity. One of her ancestors was King Stephen I, the first Christian king of Hungary (975-1038), who was later declared a saint. His son, St. Emeric (1007-1031), is also regarded as a saint.

Elizabeth was also of German ancestry: her mother was Gertrude of Andechs-Meran. Her mother's sister, Hedwig (1174-1243), who was married to Henry, the Duke of Silesia, was also a saint. Clearly, there was an abundance of holy ancestors and a rich family tradition for Elizabeth to imitate.

When she was only four years old, Elizabeth had to leave the family of her birth behind, because she had just been betrothed by her parents to Ludwig IV, the future Landgraf of Thuringia, who was then just eleven. Farkasius and David, two priests or almoners, went with her to her new homeland, to remind her of her heritage.

Elizabeth's glory as a saint was to come from leaving her home for Thuringia, where she was to become renowned for her work with the poor and destitute, and where she achieved sanctity with the husband God had chosen for her. But she did not forget her family of origin, and went back to visit Hungary as a young married woman. But after her husband's death, rather than go home, she chose to live in her new country, where she could fulfill the choice of life she had made on behalf of the poor.

Spiritual reflection:

God's promises to the Israelites were given through a human culture and ancestry. Abraham left his homeland to fulfill the plan that God had for him. In return, God promised him, "I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" (Gen 12:1-2). Elizabeth experienced this same call, and her life also became a blessing for future generations.

Gospel: "He has helped Israel his servant, remembering his mercy, according to his promise to our fathers, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." (Lk 1:54-55).
