

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

### Year One: The life of St. Elizabeth

#### Month 3. Marriage

Elizabeth understood that marriage was not just a means to happiness or personal fulfillment, but a vocation, as serious as the religious vocation, and a means by which she was called to achieve holiness.

Our love of those close to us is the root of our understanding of love in general, and of how we are to love God. This is true of married love, for, as the Second Vatican Council tells us, this love "wells up from the fountain of divine love," that is, it has its origin in God; the Council adds that "authentic married love is caught up into divine love" (GS., no. 48).

Little attention has been devoted to marriage in the lives of the saints; in fact, Elizabeth is one of the very few married people canonized until just recently. She was happily married to Ludwig IV of Thuringia, who is also popularly considered a saint.

Elizabeth lived her married love as a means to love of God. One of her closest friends, Isentrude, her lady-in-waiting at court, said that she and her husband "lived in marriage in a way worthy of praise. They loved each other with a wonderful affection, gently inviting and strengthening each other in the praise and service of God."

They were saints not because they had no problems, but because they overcame their problems. One was that they lived in a very immoral atmosphere at court, amid many temptations, which the writers of the time don't try to hide from us. But they were resolute in avoiding these traps. Ludwig's men actually expressed their surprise to him that he was not unfaithful to his wife. He replied, "Never mention these words to me again: I have a wife, with whom I am bound to keep faith." Elizabeth also had to deal with some long separations from her husband, who traveled very frequently on behalf of the emperor. When he was away, she withdrew from court parties and entertainments and spent her time in prayer, to withdraw from any worldly distractions and temptations.

Like all other married women, Elizabeth had to balance her work, her children and her attention to her husband with her duties to God.

Elizabeth's awareness of the injustice caused by riches, and her desire for a simpler life sometimes came into conflict with her love for her husband. The officials her husband employed extorted unfair taxes in kind from the people. Elizabeth, out of conscience, would not eat any of the foods that came from this source. In doing so, she at least implicitly accused her husband's government of injustice. Ludwig respected his wife's conscience and supported this choice, promising that he would soon change the situation.

Elizabeth lived her love for her family faithfully within her love for God, through the way she and her husband practiced faithfulness in marriage, their respect for each other, their devotion to the same faith, and their daily work. Elizabeth and Ludwig put God at the center of their married

lives. They teach us how to live this love as well. They fulfilled St. Paul's words:

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated,

it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Gospel: [Jesus said]: "From the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female' For this reason a man shall leave his mother and father and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh" (Mt. 19:5-6).

"I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:34-35).