

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

Year One: The life of St. Elizabeth

4. Motherhood

Elizabeth and her husband had three children: Hermann, heir to the rulership of Thuringia, who died, however, shortly after beginning his rule, at the age of eighteen. Their second child, Sophia married Henry the Duke of Brabant, had children and continued the family line. The youngest, Gertrude, was born shortly after her father's death. Her parents had determined before her birth to have her raised as an oblate in a monastery so that she might be completely devoted to God. She later became abbess of the Praemonstratensian monastery of Altenberg, and is herself venerated as a saint.

Elizabeth knew and believed that "Children too are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb, a reward" (Ps. 127:3); At that time, the Catholic custom was to go to church forty days after a child's birth for the rite of purification and blessing, recalling the trip that Mary, Joseph and Jesus took to Jerusalem after the birth of Jesus and the Purification in the temple. Elizabeth would go for this rite to the church in Eisenach, barefoot, dressed in simple wool garments and carrying her child in her arms, to offer the fruit of her womb to God in imitation of Mary. There she would also have recalled the words spoken by Simeon in the Temple: "You yourself will be pierced by a sword." (Luke 2:35), foretelling the sorrow she would experience in her Son's crucifixion. She knew that children are a source of joy, but also require sacrifice.

Elizabeth would experience much sorrow and anxiety in regard to her children; after her expulsion from her dower castle, she suffered from anxiety when she did not know where to lay her children's heads or put food in their mouths, and finally was forced to send them away so they could get enough to eat. She also had to give up her youngest daughter Gertrude to the monastery. Her children were one of the sacrifices she made to God.

Elizabeth wanted to have her children put God first in their lives. She once said that she would have her son Hermann a poor Friar Minor than have him become emperor. Even her pride in her children or what they might become was not as important to her as their souls.

Word of God: You shall love the LORD, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. (Deuteronomy 6:5-7).
