

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

Month 5.

Elizabeth's desire for a more devout life continued to increase. She received a gift that corresponded to her desire when in 1223 or 1224, the first Franciscan missionaries to Germany arrived in Eisenach. Elizabeth was then about eighteen years old. She granted a church in Eisenach to the friars, and became so devoted to them that she spun the wool for their habits herself.

What she learned then about the life of St. Francis and the work of the friars who went barefoot and begging throughout the world must have had an enormous impact on her, for when she was with her ladies-in-waiting, she used to wrap a shabby cloak around herself and an old piece of cloth around her head, saying, 'This is how I will walk when I go begging and bear misery for the love of God.' This was little more than a desire; fulfilling it at this point would have been impossible for a woman with a family. One of the Franciscans in particular, Brother Rodeger, became Elizabeth's spiritual teacher. He urged her to "to preserve chastity, humility and patience and to keep watch in prayer and to apply herself to works of mercy."

Perhaps these friars knew about the penitential fraternities in Italy and were acquainted with the *Memoriale Propositi*, the first Franciscan rule and St. Francis' Letter to the brothers and sisters of Penance. We don't know whether Elizabeth followed this rule; it was almost certainly only later that she was professed as a penitent. She may have followed the rule informally. One thing is certain: the very depths of her soul were attuned to St. Francis' love of poverty and humility.

Spiritual reflection:

Discerning our own vocation and the path we are to follow is an ongoing process. Often encounters with people who are living a vocation help us. It was from the Franciscan friars that Elizabeth learned of the life and teachings of St. Francis which helped her discern her own path in life. From this time on, she did everything she could to follow those teachings.

Elizabeth did not only learn from the Franciscans; she gave them help in their ministry as well as personally. This type of mutual help can be an example for to us in our relationship with the friars.

Gospel: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3).