



Saint Joseph de Clairval Abbey

Letter of April 9, 2017,
Palm Sunday

Dear Friends,

FOR our confused humanity that no longer knows how to find God or that distorts Him, that searches for a word on which to base its hope, Elizabeth of the Trinity gives witness to a perfect openness to the Word of God" declared Saint John Paul II, in his homily for the beatification of this Carmelite (November 25, 1984). The next day, speaking to pilgrims, the Pope added, "An admirable witness to the grace of Baptism permeating a soul that welcomed it unreservedly, she helps us find in our turn the paths of prayer and gift of self."

The morning of Sunday, July 18, 1880, in the military camp in Avor, outside Bourges, anxiety reigned in the small house where Mrs. Catez awaited the birth of her first child. "I had a daughter," she would later explain, "Marie Elizabeth, who had been condemned before birth by the two attending physicians who told to my husband that they would have to sacrifice the baby, whose heart was no longer beating. But God was watching over us, and during the final Gospel of the Mass, which I had requested from the chaplain and which was being celebrated at the camp chapel, little Elizabeth made her entrance into life, very beautiful, and very much alive."

A Confession that leaves its mark

In November 1882, the Catez family moved to Dijon. On February 20, 1883, a second daughter, Marguerite, nicknamed "Guite," was born. A profound affection would unite the two sisters who were, however, of very different temperaments—Elizabeth was as lively and intense as Guite was gentle and reserved. The daughter and granddaughter of officers, Elizabeth had indeed inherited a resolute disposition. "As a child," Guite would testify, "Elizabeth was very hot tempered, very intense, impulsive... but with a very sensitive and affectionate nature—for her, the severest punishment was to be deprived of her mother's caresses." On October 2, 1887, Mr. Catez died suddenly, in the arms of seven year old Elizabeth. Their financial resources diminished, Mrs. Catez and her two daughters left their villa for an apartment, still in Dijon. Life resumed, and the temper tantrums as well... Elizabeth tried to master herself to please her loved ones. Her mother spoke to her about God, and the little girl began to go to catechism. Her upright and profound heart was touched. She made an effort to forget herself in order to please others and JESUS. Towards the end of the year, she made her first Confession. She would always think of this day as the



Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity

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day of her "conversion," of her awakening to divine things. Mother Germaine, the Prioress (superior) of her Carmel, later confirmed: "Elizabeth herself confided to me that her truly considered and persevering resolve to conquer her temper dated from her first Confession."

During her summer vacation in 1888, Elizabeth found herself with her family in Saint-Hilaire, in Aude. The local parish priest, Canon Angles, received a secret from her: "It was one evening," he would write to Mother Germaine in 1907... "Elizabeth had managed to climb onto my knees. Quickly, she leaned to my ear and said: 'Mr. Angles, I will be a nun. I want to be a nun!' I will always remember her angelic tone... and also her mother's somewhat irritated exclamation: 'What did the little fool say?' Mrs. Catez anxiously asked me if I seriously believed Elizabeth had a vocation, and I gave a response that pierced her soul like a sword: 'I do!'" On April 19, 1891, Elizabeth made her first Communion at Saint Michael's parish church in Dijon. Her intimate meeting with the living JESUS, present in her heart, was a moment of grace and joy that brought forth another interior transformation. "From that day on, no more fits of anger!" her mother would write. That afternoon, Elizabeth went to Carmel, and Mother Marie of JESUS taught her that her name meant "House of God."

Two months later, she received the sacrament of Confirmation. "From that moment on," testified a friend, Marie-Louise Hallo, "Elizabeth's piety grew even more. She received Communion often, shedding abundant

tears afterwards." Her mother was alarmed at a piety that seemed to her overly intense, but Elizabeth felt growing in her the hunger for this Friend who nourished and strengthened her wonderfully. More and more JESUS was for her "the Beloved of the Eucharist." But for years, she would not be allowed to receive Communion more than once or twice a week, in keeping with the practice of the time. However, she could visit and adore this Beloved present in the tabernacle. She wanted to enter Carmel, but her mother did not agree; she forbade her to visit the nearby convent, and pushed her to discover the worldly life. Elizabeth became fashionable—she loved to wear beautiful outfits and jewels, and participated enthusiastically in worldly parties, all while striving to maintain the presence of God.

"My secret"

From the age of eight, Elizabeth had been enrolled in the Conservatory of Music. Her spelling would always be poor, but the long hours at her piano, in the company of Chopin, Schumann, Liszt and other great composers, developed her profound sense of beauty. At thirteen, she won the Conservatory's first prize, and the following year, the award of excellence. One day she would divulge her secret, writing to a friend: "I will pray for Madeleine that the good Lord invade her down to the tips of her little fingers; then I challenge anyone to rival her. So that she doesn't get nervous, I will give her my secret: she must forget everyone listening to her, and feel herself alone with the Divine Master. Then ones plays for Him with all one's soul, drawing full forth from the instrument full tones, at once powerful and sweet. Oh! How I loved to talk to Him this way!" When Elizabeth played, she was, in fact, with "the Friend of every moment," the God who is all Love who filled her heart.

At the same time, Elizabeth took part in parish activities—teaching catechism, singing in the choir, bringing the youth to the church to pray during the month of MARY. But her desire to belong entirely to JESUS continued to grow. One morning, at the end of Mass, she received a special grace: "I was about to turn fourteen," she would later relate to Mother Germaine, "when one day, during my Act of Thanksgiving, I felt irresistibly drawn to choose JESUS as my only spouse, and immediately, I united myself with Him through the vow of virginity. We said nothing, but we gave ourselves to one another in such intense love that my resolution to belong entirely to Him became even more definitive." Several weeks later, once again at the end of Mass, she received a sign: "It seemed to me," she would later say, "that the word 'Carmel' was uttered in my soul." But her mother still did not want to accept her vocation. Respecting her will, Elizabeth, who had not reached legal majority, exercised her patience. The poems she wrote from the age of fourteen to nineteen, softly spoke of her Beloved JESUS, her guardian angel, the saints in heaven, and in particular Saint Joan of Arc, "the virgin they could not defile."

Vacations were often spent in the mountains, in the Pyrenees, the Jura, the Vosges, and the Swiss Alps, or by the sea. They gave her the opportunity to dance, play music and make excursions. At the age of eighteen, Elizabeth began to keep a diary. The entry for January 30, 1899, reads: "Today I had the joy of offering to my JESUS several sacrifices on my dominant fault, but what they cost me! There I see my weakness... It seems to me that when I receive an unjust remark, I can feel the blood boiling in my veins, and my whole being revolts... But JESUS was in my heart and so I was ready to endure anything for love of Him." One day, her mother, having become aware of a good match, suggested the marriage to her. But Elizabeth reaffirmed her will to enter Carmel. Mrs. Catez finally gave her permission to meet with the superior of the convent, but refused to allow her to enter before the age of majority, twenty-one.

"He is there!"

At the beginning of 1899, Elizabeth read *The Way of Perfection* by Saint Teresa of Avila. In the saint's explanations, she recognized how much the Lord had already taught her about prayer. "That interested me greatly and did me much good," she wrote in her diary. She searched for God's presence in her soul, and confided to a friend: "It seems to me that He is there." Father Vallée, a Dominican she met several times at Carmel, inflamed her love for God, infinite charity, *great love* (Eph. 2:4), which is offered to us in JESUS. He then reminded her that this God of love whose presence she already experienced, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He guided her towards the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, in accordance with these words from Saint John: *If a man loves Me... My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him* (Jn. 14:23).

We know that God is Trinity thanks to JESUS Who revealed to us this mystery of the intimate life of the Creator. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches: "The Incarnation of God's Son reveals that God is the eternal Father and that the Son is consubstantial with the Father, which means that, in the Father and with the Father, the Son is one and the same God... The mission of the Holy Spirit, sent by the Father in the name of the Son and by the Son *from the Father*, reveals that, with them, the Spirit is one and the same God. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified" (CCC, nos. 262, 263). This is why the Church affirms: "We do not confess three Gods, but one God in three persons... The divine persons do not share the one divinity among themselves but each of them is God whole and entire... The divine persons are really distinct from one another... 'Father,' 'Son,' 'Holy Spirit' are not simply names designating modalities of the divine being, for they are really distinct from one another... They are distinct from one another in their relations of origin: 'It is the Father who generates, the Son who is begotten, and the Holy Spirit who proceeds'" (CCC, nos. 253, 254). "The ultimate end of the whole divine

economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity" (CCC, no. 260). This mystery, which Elizabeth experienced, is the light of our spiritual life.

In 1900, Elizabeth visited the World's Fair in Paris. However, she preferred the basilicas of Sacré-Cœur in Montmartre and Our Lady of Victories. During the months that followed, Elizabeth endured a trial of spiritual dryness, to the point that she described herself as "dead as a log." In the midst of worldly parties, however, she retained her nostalgia for the cloister. She pointed out to a friend the importance of attentiveness to the presence of God: "'God in me, and me in Him,' may this be our motto!"

"Can I abandon Him?"

At last, her entrance into the Dijon Carmel was set for August 2, 1901. On Thursday the 1st, Elizabeth spent part of the night in prayer, wishing to remain with the Beloved in the solitude of Gethsemane. Mrs. Catez was unable to sleep. She came and knelt by her daughter's bed. Their tears mingled: "Why then are you leaving me?" "Ah, my dear mother, can I resist the voice of God who is calling me? He is reaching out his arms out to me and telling me that He is unknown, scorned, forsaken. Can I abandon Him also?... I must go, despite my sorrow at leaving you, at plunging you into grief. I must answer His call." At the beginning of her religious life, Elizabeth was favored with perceptible graces: "How good the good Lord is!" she wrote to her sister. "I cannot find the words to tell you my happiness... Here, there is no longer anything but Him... He is found everywhere, in the laundry as in prayer!" Every day, she spent several hours in the choir for silent morning prayer, the Office, Mass, and again for evening prayer. Nevertheless, she did not forget those she had left behind, but presented them in her heart before JESUS. In order to live with God, Elizabeth strove for exterior and interior silence: "If my desires, my fears, my joys, or my sorrows, if all the movements proceeding from these four passions are not perfectly directed to God, I will not be solitary—there will be noise within me."

In a questionnaire during recreation, to the question: "In your opinion, what is the ideal of holiness?" she replied "To live on love." And to the question: "What is the quickest means to attain it?" her response was: "To make oneself very small, to surrender oneself entirely." It also asked: "What is the dominant feature of your character?" "Sensitivity." Then: "The fault you most dislike?" "Selfishness in general." On December 8, 1901, the novice took the habit of Carmel and received her name in religion—Elizabeth of the Trinity. Shortly thereafter, her facility in prayer gave way to dryness. Sister Elizabeth continued to search for God in faith: "Faith tells me that He is there all the same, and what good are sweetness or consolations? They are not Him. And it is He alone

we seek... So let us go to Him in pure faith." Again she wrote, "I too need to search for my Master who hides Himself well. So I stir up my faith, and I am happier not enjoying His presence, so that He can enjoy my love."

The work of the Holy Spirit

Sister Elizabeth read the books of Saint John of the Cross, Saint Catherine of Siena, and Sister Thérèse of Lisieux, a young Carmelite who had recently died (1897), who made a profound impression on her. She copied out her "Act of Oblation to Merciful Love" several times. But her deepest spiritual source remained the New Testament. Already before her entry into Carmel, she particularly liked the Gospel of Saint John. After her profession, she thrived on the Letters of Saint Paul, and in particular, the Letter to the Ephesians. Mother Germaine later wrote: "The most beautiful texts of the great Apostle supported the movements of her contemplative soul... Elizabeth discovered profound meaning in them, identifying with this weighty doctrine which strengthened her, and nourished her constant prayer." This spiritual work took place under the influence of the Holy Spirit. For the young sister, the months that followed were marked by doubts about her vocation. She experienced moments of scruples and, the evening before her perpetual profession, a priest had to be called to help her dispel her doubts. "In the night that preceded the big day," she would affirm, "while I was in the choir awaiting the Spouse, I understood that my heaven was beginning on earth, the heaven in faith, with suffering and sacrifice for Him whom I love." On January 11, 1903, Sister Elizabeth made her profession, and on the 21st, the feast of Saint Agnes, virgin and martyr, she took the black veil of the professed.

The sixteen sisters in the Carmel gathered for meals, as well as for two recreations during which they spoke simply and joyously, while doing some handiwork. But otherwise, each sister did her work to the extent possible in solitude. Sister Elizabeth performed various tasks, particularly in the Clothes Room. Sister Marie of the Trinity testified: "As the Sub-Prioress, charged with distributing the household duties each week, I was able to observe that she was a true treasure in the community, someone of whom one could ask any favor, with the assurance that it would delight her."

Elizabeth of the Trinity always nurtured a special devotion to the Virgin MARY. She contemplated in particular the mystery of the Annunciation: "It takes no effort for me to enter into this mystery of the Divine Indwelling in the Virgin: that is where I find my habitual movement of soul, which was hers: adoring the hidden God within me." The day of the Feast of the Presentation of MARY in the Temple, on November 21, 1904, she wrote a now-famous prayer that was found only after her death: "O my God, Trinity that I adore..." In Carmel, Elizabeth wrote many letters, particularly to her sister, with whom she arranged specific times for them to pray

at the same time. She also wrote poems and spiritual works. She wished to share with all her friends this experience of the presence of Triune God in her soul: "This better part which seems to be my privilege in my beloved solitude of Carmel, is offered by God to every soul of the baptized." She wrote to one of her friends: "It's so simple. He is always with us. Be always with Him, through all your actions, in your sufferings, when your body is broken, remain under His gaze, see Him present, living in your soul." In Elizabeth's view, to live in this reality, one need only "make acts of recollection in His presence."

A new name

In 1905, a passage from Saint Paul touched her profoundly: *God the Father destined us in love to be His sons through JESUS CHRIST, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved* (Eph. 1:5-6). Over the months that followed, she meditated on this text and in it foresaw the new name that she would have in Heaven: *Laudem Gloriæ* (Praise of Glory). The praise of glory became the center of her spirituality: "My dream," she wrote, "is to be the praise of His glory. It is in Saint Paul that I read this, and my Spouse has made known to me that this is to be my vocation during my exile." Sister Elizabeth began to sign letters with the words *Laudem Gloriæ*. For her, to be the praise of His glory consisted in reflecting the glory of God, and for that, it is necessary to forget oneself, to strip oneself of everything, and seek silence. This forgetfulness and silence make possible the adoration and contemplation that allow God to transform the person, to restore His image in him and to make of him His praise of glory.

In spring 1905, Elizabeth began to experience the first symptoms of Addison's disease, an adrenal insufficiency which at that time was incurable and very painful. On March 19, 1906, she entered the infirmary. "I am growing weaker by the day," she wrote, "and I feel that the Master will not be much longer in coming to fetch me. I taste and experience unknown joys—the joys of suffering... Before I die, I long to be transformed into JESUS Crucified, and that gives me great strength in suffering." Elizabeth of the Trinity saw in her illness the opportunity to resemble JESUS CHRIST, who himself chose to experience suffering (cf. Lk. 24:26), and thus to repay Him love for love. For this reason, she called her disease "the disease of love."

On Palm Sunday, Sister Elizabeth fell into a coma and received Extreme Unction, but the following Saturday her health improved a little. She composed the retreat "Heaven in the Faith" for her sister Guite, then she made her personal retreat. Mother Germaine asked her to write, during this retreat, her "good encounters": the manuscript would be called "The Last Retreat." It notably includes a meditation on the Virgin MARY, whom she describes as a model to follow in the interior life but also in suffering. Shortly before she died, Elizabeth gave a friend as a testament: "In the light of eternity, the soul sees things as they really are. Oh! How empty is all that has not been done for God and with God! I beg you, mark everything with the seal of love! It alone endures." In the fall, the illness worsened, and Sister Elizabeth died on November 9, 1906, after nine days of agony. Her last audible words were, "I am going to Light, to Love, to Life!" She was canonized by Pope Francis on October 16, 2016.

Shortly before her death, Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote, "I will confide to you what has made my life an early heaven: believing that a Being, who is called Love, lives in us at every moment of every day and night, and that He asks us to live in his company." Her greatest desire was to draw us into this divine intimacy: "I think that in Heaven, my mission will be to draw souls by helping them to go out of themselves in order to cling to God by a wholly simple and loving movement, and to keep them in this great silence within, which will allow God to communicate Himself to them and transform them into Himself." May we discover this hidden treasure and live it!

Dom Antoine Marie
— — D.A.B.

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