

November 17

Commemoration: Elizabeth of Hungary, renewer of society, 1231



Elizabeth of Hungary was born into royalty and holiness. Her father, Andrew II, was king of Hungary. Her aunt Hedwig and two nieces, Cunegundes and Margaret, are canonized saints. Many other family members, born into an elite ruling class, were renowned for their charity and holiness.

It might seem easy to become a saint with such a holy family, but Elizabeth lived in an era marred by greed and violence. The ruling elite of the day were obsessed with seizing and maintaining power. Elizabeth's own mother was violently killed by those opposed to her alliance with Germany. Perhaps these difficult times are what made her family's holiness so renowned. Heroic virtue is only forged in the fires of conflict, temptation and suffering.

Elizabeth was married to royalty in Germany. Her life, which could have been marked by excess, was instead marked by prayer and service. She would take off her crown as she entered a church out of reverence for the Savior who wore a crown of thorns. She often gave away her jewels to help the poor. She even gave her state robes to those who lacked clothing. Elizabeth was in charge of state affairs when her husband was away, and she always gave the poor and sick top priority.

Elizabeth's husband died of the plague when she was quite young, leaving her with three children. She and her maids went on to become Third Order Franciscans. Elizabeth devoted the rest of her life to living out the vow of poverty and service to the poor in a hospital she had built for them. Her legacy of charity and detachment in an age of greed and violence has made her one of Germany's most beloved saints.