

Saint Elizabeth of Portugal

1271-1336

PURGATORY

The Roman Martyrology remembers Saint Elizabeth of Portugal in this way: “Saint Elizabeth, who, as Queen of Portugal, was exemplar in her work of reconciliation between kings and in charity towards the poor; after becoming widow of King Denis, embraced the rule of the nuns of the Third Order of Saint Clare in the coenobium of Estremoz in Portugal, founded by herself, in which later she returned to the Lord, while she was intent in having her son reconcile with her son-in-law.”

She was born in Zaragoza, Aragon (Spain), in 1271, a daughter of King Peter III. When just 12 years old she was given in marriage to Denis, King of Portugal, from whom she had two children. It was a marriage characterized by the infidelities of her husband, but Elizabeth was able to offer a true Christian witness. She carried out a work of peace in her family and, as adviser to her husband, succeeded in calming the disagreements between Aragon and Portugal. But not only that: Elizabeth also took much care for the children brought into the world by her husband with other women. And the unfaithful husband Denis recognized the moral superiority of Elizabeth, so much that when their son Alphonse rebelled against him, it was the authority of the Saint which averted an armed fight between

father and son. Later this intervention led to the accusation that Elizabeth was siding with their son Alphonse against Denis, and therefore she was confined in the town of Alenquer, north of Lisbon. But soon her husband called her back, because he wanted her close to him. Elizabeth returned and resumed her place beside the king until when her husband was struck by an illness. At the death of her husband in 1325, she donated all her belongings to the poor and to monasteries and became a Third Order Franciscan. She went on a pilgrimage by foot to the Shrine of Campostela, where she left her crown and entered among the Poor Clares of Coimbra. That monastery becomes her dwelling, but one time she had to leave it because there was again need of her: she had to reconcile her son Alphonse IV with King Ferdinand of Castile who was her son-in-law (the husband of Constance). She died in 1336 in Estremoz, Portugal.

Saint Elizabeth had a daughter named Constance, who died suddenly, a short time after marrying the king of Castile. Elizabeth was made aware of the tragedy when she was going to Santarem together with her husband. During the journey, a hermit started running behind the royal entourage and began shouting that he wanted to speak with the queen. Upon being received in her presence, he



told her how her daughter Constance appeared to him several times and had confided to him that she was condemned to staying a long time in Purgatory. She would be liberated within a year, if every day a Mass would be said in her supplication. Elizabeth, in agreement with her husband, did what was requested. After one year Constance dressed in white and surrounded by glory appeared to Elizabeth to announce that thanks to the Masses celebrated, she was ascending to Heaven.

