

ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

The Charism of her Prayer

JEAN LAFRANCE

adapted from the French
by a nun of the Carmel du Pater Noster, Jerusalem
with an Introduction by Archbishop Joseph Tawil

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James Joseph Beltritti
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Carmel of the Pater Noster, Jerusalem

Carmel of the Pater Noster, Jerusalem
DIOCESE OF NEWTON Meikite Greek Catholic
19 Dartmouth Street
Newton, Massachusetts 02165

INTRODUCTION

This book, which is intended to be a simple statement of the beginnings of mystic prayer, is based totally on the way of a French Discalced Carmelite nun, Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, who died in 1906 at the age of 26, after only six years in the cloister. Her vocation was simply prayer, silence, and suffering, “because our Lord lives in our soul, His prayer dwells within us and it is there I want to abide without ceasing, as a little vase at the source and fountain of life, sharing this prayer with others by letting it overflow in ways of unending love”.

Sister Elizabeth's life, which was hidden with Christ in God, became an apostolic witness, showing that, no matter what our way of life may be, each one of us is called to an intimacy with the Lord. It is from this unity that we find her gift and her charism. Her example raises us to a higher level and there instills in us a deep current which keeps us ever united in God. “Prayer is a response, a relaxation. One must come in total simplicity to the One whom one loves, holding oneself near Him as a small child in its mother's arms”.

“Praise of Glory” is but one of the many terms of admiration and respect which have been applied to Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, who has been identified with the Carmelite Monastery of Dijon in France since she entered it in 1900. The story of her short but rich life and spirituality is told here with all the warmth and simplicity which characterized this handmaid of the Lord. This book deals with mystic prayer in its more common manifestations, of its nature, characteristics, and effects in a manner which should be helpful to both the understanding and the practice of it. Its particular aim is to encourage those who are progressing in prayer but who are unaware of its simple and more unitive forms, and it seeks to meet their needs.

Prayer, solitude, praise of glory, silence of the mind and heart are, as many biblical values, dear to Eastern Monasticism, and they culminate in “Esychia” (hence hesychism), that is interior quietude and serenity of the soul which has emigrated to God and found its peace in Him.

We do highly recommend this short but helpful book.

Archbishop Joseph E. Tawil
Eparch of the Melkites of
United States of America

Unless otherwise stated (see list of References on page 111) all the passages quoted in this book are taken from the *Reminiscences of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity. Servant of God. Discalced Carmelite of Dijon*. Published by Dijon Carmel after her death.

Let us sanctify ourselves for the sake of souls and since we are members of one and the same body, in the measure in which we possess abundantly the divine life we shall be able to impart it to the great body of the Church. For me, all apostleship is summed up in two words: union and love. Pray that I may fully realize them in my life and therefore that I may live buried with the Holy Trinity.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity

PREFACE

'Love draws its object'

LIFE AND PRAYER

Elizabeth Catez was born in an army camp on 18 July 1880 in Avor, a small town in northern France. She was the first child of Captain Francis Joseph Catez and Marie Holland. A few years later there would be a little sister, Marguerite. Elizabeth's childhood was happy, loving and secure in an atmosphere of genuine Christian devotion. Her father died when she was seven and this loss created an even closer bond between Elizabeth and her mother and sister. Elizabeth's milieu was that of a comfortable middle-class French family at the turn of the century when scientific finesse was just beginning to show itself in a boom of industrialisation and technological discoveries. Her life was simple and ordinary, revolving round her mother and sister, relatives, family friends and music. Because of her outstanding ability in music, her education was focussed primarily in that direction and as a whole it could be considered fairly average. Her devout upbringing served as a preparation for her life in Carmel and would have spiritually influenced her development and evolution. When she was twenty-one (and not without much anguish on her mother's part at the thought of losing her daughter behind the grilles of a cloister) she entered the Carmel of Dijon. Five years later she died of a stomach ailment, diagnosed at the time as an ulcer but now believed to have been Addison's disease. Her death was on 9 November 1906, the feast of the Dedication of St John Lateran, which epitomizes so well her own very special vocation. 'Didn't you realize that you were God's temple?' wrote St Paul; 'the temple of God is sacred and you are that temple' (1 Cor. 3:16-17). The name 'Elizabeth' means 'House of God' and Elizabeth Catez was to make that meaning a reality in her life. In Carmel she became Elizabeth of the Trinity. She would be in Carmel only five years but God's time is not measured by ours and her short life, consummated in holiness, was but a beginning of her life and mission in all eternity.

On 12 July 1982, His Holiness Pope John Paul II officially recognized Elizabeth's cause for canonization which had been initiated by his much-loved predecessor, Pope John XXIII. On 25 November 1984 in Rome, she was beatified: the first process of canonization. In being elevated to the altar, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity has been placed among those who lived so heroically in love of God and who by their example encourage us to follow them in the way of holiness.

Love draws its object after it [wrote Elizabeth of the Trinity]; we draw Jesus after us, He draws us into Himself. Then, carried away above ourselves, into the inner recesses of love, gazing upon God, we go to meet Him, to meet the Spirit that is His Love; and this Love burns us, consumes us, draws us into the unity where beatitude awaits us.

God was the object of Elizabeth's love. She would pass through a consuming fire, cleansed and purified in suffering, and he whom she loved so much would draw her ever more intimately into the depths of her own heart, there to find the peace and unity of God, 'where beatitude awaits us'.

When we read the various letters written by Elizabeth to her family and friends, her last

retreats and other writings given to us in the *Reminiscences*, we see what a truly remarkable person she was. She had an unusual perceptivity and wisdom for one so young. 'I am young', she wrote, 'but nevertheless I have suffered'. She was heroic in her suffering and through it came to have a better understanding of life and of herself. Her suffering became a means of growth, deepening in her heart a compassion and universal love for others. She is an example to us that, as we are baptized in Christ, so too we must be buried in Christ and rise and live anew in Christ. She thirsted for God and her way was one of trust and abandonment as it must be for every Christian. Her gift to humanity and to the Church was her recollection, her longing to be unified in her own depths where God dwelt. Elizabeth was 'of the Trinity' and it was within this mystery that her life and spirituality blossomed in her immense love of the 'Three'.

To be with God, Elizabeth sought silence and solitude. She was not looking for an escape, a cult, a mysticism remote from the human condition. Like her mother in religion, the great St Teresa of Jesus, her desire for her own salvation was something to be shared. 'I do so long to bring souls to God. I would give my life to ransom one of these souls whom He so loved'. Two years before entering Carmel she wrote, 'Eternal Father, I must have souls, whatever be the cost in suffering ... my whole life shall be an expiation ... I ask for grace, for mercy for the world, in the name of Jesus whom I wish to console'.

In the heart and soul of each one of us there is a hidden desire for God which longs for expression and which daily activities and the difficulties of life can never really smother. 'I so long for Him!' wrote Elizabeth, 'He creates a great void in my soul that only He can fill, and to do that He leads me into deep silence from which I should like never to emerge'.

The hunger for God in each soul is a challenge to us to recognize this inner longing by finding within the depths of ourselves the way of prayer. In the midst of all the world's chaos we beg for peace of mind. We long to find meaning in life. God created us in his image. He wants to have a relationship with us, an exchange of love. He longs for us to know him, to love him and to share his love with others.

If I look at things from an earthly standpoint [wrote Elizabeth] I see loneliness and even emptiness, for I cannot say that my heart has not suffered; but if I keep my eyes fixed upon Him, my shining Star, then all the rest vanishes and I lose myself as a drop of water in the ocean. All is calm, all is soothed and all is so good; it is the peace of God of which St Paul speaks, the peace that 'surpasseth all understanding' (Phil. 4:7).

Carmel's witness is the way of prayer. It is a beacon in the night for souls seeking their way to God. Carmel's mission has always been considered twofold: a hidden witness which is its very core, and a visible witness of sharing the hidden aspect of Carmel's life with others. It has not, however, been the Carmelite's role to teach the methods of its apostolate directly. The cloistered life underlines our need to *be* and to live each day in God's presence. In living out an ideal we become aware of our need for prayer, without which we cannot have God working in our life.

Since He is there, let us keep Him company, as a friend with a friend. This Divine union is quite interior and it is the essence of our life in Carmel. It is what makes our solitude so dear to us, for as our Father St John of the Cross says, two hearts that love each other prefer solitude to everything else.

It seems that Carmel has assumed a very prophetic role. Often we lack the incentive to exert ourselves in our spiritual life, and prayer may become so remote from our daily routine that we do not even know where to begin. We are without that essential which is needed to make our life vibrant and spiritually healthy. We need to make an effort to become better acquainted with the great spiritual writers and, most especially, with the word of God in Holy Scripture. From Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity we learn:

It is good to study the souls of the saints and follow them in faith until they reach heaven. There they shine with the light of God whom they behold face to face for all eternity. This heaven of the saints is our fatherland, the Father's House, where we are awaited and loved ... the saints grasped so well the true knowledge that makes us go forth from all earthly things and, above all, from ourselves in order to cast ourselves upon God and to live only by Him ...

We wish to be united with the spiritual strivings of the saints. To help us, God has given us a number of reliable guides who have as their mission the work of leading us along the sometimes difficult way of prayer. Among these guides, St Thérèse of Lisieux, had a providential vocation. *The Story of a Soul* has truly become a bedside book for souls athirst for God. Without losing sight of Carmel's role, St Thérèse has pierced to the very depths of the essence of the message of St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross. Transcending the milieu of her own time, she gives us her view of the omnipotence of God, inviting us to share in her 'Little Way' so that we too, with humility and grace, may ascend to the summit of Mount Carmel.

Elizabeth of the Trinity has a similar mission. Through the *Reminiscences* published by the Dijon Carmel after her death, she has become an example of grace, leading souls forward to a life of intimacy with the three Divine Persons. As did St Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of the Trinity took an intuitive glance into the future and foresaw her mission throughout eternity. A month before she died she wrote to a friend:

... in heaven my mission will be to draw souls towards an inner recollection, helping them to go out from themselves and to cling to God in a wholly simple and loving movement, maintained in that great interior silence which allows God to imprint Himself upon them and transform them in Himself.

In 1956, on the fiftieth anniversary of Elizabeth's death, the Very Rev. Father Anastasius of the Holy Rosary, then the Father General of the Discalced Carmelite Friars and now Cardinal Ballestrero, clarified the mission of Elizabeth of the Trinity in the heart of Carmel and contemporary spirituality. He wrote as follows:

Sister Elizabeth is, in essence, a soul who understood and lived fully the ideal of our Order. It is impossible to think of this typical figure of contemporary spirituality and separate her thought from her profile as a Carmelite. As her biography indicates, all her spirituality has been nourished in the very heart of Carmel's mystery. Her interior attitude is open towards God: to search for God within the depths of her soul, to make herself a heaven, God's heaven and her own. There is the predominant note of her interior life. This searching for God, openness and orientation towards God and God alone is the essential attitude of Carmel.

In 1980, for the 100th anniversary of Elizabeth's birth, the Father General of Carmel, the Very Rev. Felipe Sainz de Baranda, wrote:

As Carmel prepares itself spiritually to commemorate the 400th centenary of the death of our Holy Mother St Teresa of Jesus, we arrive also at the anniversary of the birth of one its most illustrious daughters, Elizabeth of the Trinity. Much has been given us in this century by the fruitfulness of her contemplative charism in Carmel, enhancing and benefitting the whole Church. Although in Carmel for only six years, her sanctity contributed richly to the Carmel of Dijon as well as to the whole of Carmel by her fidelity to her life of prayer, centered on the union of faith and love of the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity within the soul. Her spirit of prayer transcended all difficulties, morally and spiritually, and the physical sufferings which she endured without limit. She epitomized perfectly the Carmelite contemplative ideal given to her by our Holy Mother. The anniversary of her birth is a grace enabling us all to become more aware of our vocation within the Church.

St Teresa of Jesus in her *Way of Perfection* left us with a developed teaching on prayer, whereas Elizabeth of the Trinity never wrote anything of a strictly methodical nature; yet we find in her writings many profound insights and suggestions on the dispositions necessary for a life of prayer.

Her mission was not primarily doctrinal [the Dominican Father Philipon tells us], nor was she ever given the responsibility of forming novices in the ways of mental prayer. Her vocation in life, above all else, was simply prayer, silence and suffering, and it would be futile therefore to ask of her a well-ordered doctrine on prayer. It was enough for her to live as a contemplative the great mystery of the Divine Indwelling, without pretending to be a theologian or spiritual master or knowing how her writings would be used in the future. Indeed, she had not even the slightest surmise that her doctrine would have such a universal appeal.⁰

Prayer is an experience of the presence of God, a deep and unique bond sustaining our whole life. It does not separate or distract us from our daily routine, but presents life to us more fully.

Let us quicken our faith by constant communing with Him. Let us live with God as with a friend [Elizabeth reminds us] that is how saints are made. We carry our heaven about within us, since He who satisfies the glorified soul in the light of vision gives Himself to us in faith.

We long for wholeness and all our efforts for spiritual growth should tend towards this interior unification. To the extent that we allow ourselves to become supernaturalized, our life becomes fundamentally one of faith, hope and charity, a continual prayer as our thoughts become united to the thoughts of God himself and our human standpoint and natural love are transformed into supernatural love. Our heart then becomes grafted to God, loving him and our fellow human beings with a love which is a participation in his love.

To understand better the unity between prayer and life, we need to look to Christ, our divine model. The essence of his prayer was established by a basic attitude whereby he made himself totally dependent on the Father. As Christ always did the will of his Father, his was a continuous state of oblation and prayer. Jesus said, 'I glorified you on earth,

⁰ M. Philipon, OP, *La Doctrine Spirituelle de Soeur Elizabeth de la Trinite*, Preface de R.P. Garrigou-Lagrange, avec de nombreux documents inedits. Paris 1938.

having accomplished the work which you gave me to do' (Jn. 17:4). Blessed Elizabeth, reflecting upon this, tells us:

We who belong to Him ... should be completely identified with Him, ought to be able to repeat those words at the close of each day. You will ask me perhaps how we are to glorify Him. It is very simple, and He told us the secret when He said, 'My meat is to do the will of Him who sent Me'. So cling closely to the will of this adorable Master. Look upon everything, every suffering and every joy, as coming straight from Him and your life will be a continual communion since everything will be, as it were, a sacrament which gives you God — and that is really true, for God is not divided. His will is Himself. He is wholly and entirely in everything and these things are, in a way, but an emanation of His love.

It is in Christ's desire always to the will of the Father that we find the meaning of Blessed Elizabeth's prayer. Her prayer was participation in the prayer of Christ within her and this influenced all her interior life. 'Because Our Lord lives in our soul, His prayer dwells within us and it is there that I want to abide without ceasing, like a little vase at the source and fountain of life, sharing this prayer with others by letting it overflow in waves of unending love'. In following the way of Christ, her prayer evolved from a life of intimacy with the Father, becoming so fully immersed in God's presence that her whole being became a continual prayer.

O Divine Master, let my life be but a continual prayer, that nothing, nothing, will be able to distract me from You, neither my occupations, nor my pleasures, nor my suffering, that I may be absorbed in You. Take all my being, that Elizabeth may disappear, that only Jesus may remain.

We want to enter into the movement of recollection which became the password of Elizabeth's entire Carmelite vocation. Her recollection was never separate from an awareness of God dwelling within her; it was not an egoistic quietism. 'All my effort is to "enter within" and to lose myself in the Ones who are there. I sense Him so abiding in my soul, I have only to be plunged in recollection to find Him within myself. It is the source of all my happiness'. It is in understanding her recollection that we may come to distinguish the character of her intimate dialogue with God. This hidden life in God demanded of her a radical detachment from everything. 'Her beloved Master drew her ever further on and revealed to her new marvels of love hidden in the Cross. He made her understand how her dreams of divine union were to find their realization in suffering'. Only after purifying trials did she attain full spiritual maturity in which her soul became totally at peace and she was ready to prepare herself for, the operations of transforming union. Having arrived at this summit, her prayer became an extension of the prayer of Jesus.

I am asking him to reveal Himself to your soul [she assures us], to be the Friend whom you can always find. Then everything becomes bright and it is so good to be alive! ... I am letting my soul overflow into yours, so that together we may go and lose ourselves in Him who loves us.

Let us go then with Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity to lose ourselves in him who loves us and ask that she give us a little of her spirit of prayer. When the disciples gathered around Jesus, they asked him, 'Lord, teach us to pray'. Jesus replied, 'When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret and your Father

who sees in secret will reward you ... pray then like this, "Our Father ..." (Mt. 6:5-10). Elizabeth of the Trinity echoes the words of Jesus: "Our Father who art in heaven". It is in that little heaven which He has made for Himself in the centre of our soul that we ought to see Him and above all to live'. Our Lord wants us to enter into the inner chamber of our soul, shut the door to all but him, and there, in the secret depths of our being, open our hearts to him. 'You want to belong entirely to Him, even though you are living in the world and it is so simple! He is ever with you; remain with Him, no matter what you may be doing ...in His presence; see Him as present, dwelling in your soul'.

We must be prepared for a struggle! Praying is not day-dreaming and it requires much patience and perseverance. We are not talking to ourselves when we pray. We are communicating with the One who created us.

Our created essence [wrote Elizabeth] cries out to rejoin its Principle. The Word, the Splendour of the Father, is the eternal prototype on which creatures are designed on the day of their creation. That is why God wills that, having been freed from what is purely of self, we shall stretch out our arms ... and possess Him ...this contemplation opens up to the soul prospects before unhopd for.

In this little book on Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, we wish to capture the charism of her prayer. It is not a book on methods of prayer, nor does it have the intention of placing on Elizabeth's lips all the practical conclusions which came to us from her reflections. Nor is it our intention to analyse the components of her prayer, useful as that might be.

Chapters 1 and 2 deal with the source of her prayer, linking it with the movements of grace within her. It is an exploration of events and signs not only as they seem, but also of their nature and motive for being. Chapter 3 enters with Elizabeth into the 'nights' of her soul, her suffering and those purifications necessary for the Christian who desires union with God. Chapter 4 is given to a somewhat free examination of prayer in all its aspects, in the hope of making us respond by making the expressions of our own prayer more meaningful. Brought together in this study of Elizabeth of the Trinity are many of her own thoughts which are in themselves transparent crystals of prayer, placing us in a disposition of openness to the Lord. From them we may find a source of strength and inspiration as we too journey along the way of prayer.

CHAPTER ONE

'A Praise of Glory is a soul that dwells in God'

THE SPIRITUALITY OF ELIZABETH OF THE TRINITY

Elizabeth of the Trinity's life as a Carmelite was one of prayer and we find in this the basis of her spirituality.

Let us live in close union with our Beloved and be wholly given to Him as He is given to us ... commune with Him all the day long, since He is living in your soul ... there you have the whole of the Carmelite life, to live in Him ... in everything that happens the soul sees Him whom it loves and everything leads it to Him. Cherish silence and prayer for they are the essence of our life. Ask the Queen of Carmel, our Mother, to teach you to adore Our Lord in deep recollection ... pray also to our seraphic Mother, St Teresa. She loved Our Lord so ... ask her to obtain for you her passionate love of souls, for the Carmelite must be apostolic.

In each moment and in each event Elizabeth of the Trinity found God's presence. She deeply loved the most Holy Mother of God from whom she received a spirit of pondering in her heart' the words of the Lord. In the solitude of Carmel, her life 'hidden with Christ in God' became an apostolic witness that, no matter what one's way of life, each one is called to an intimacy and union with God dwelling within the soul. We shall find in Elizabeth both a personal doctrine and a guide in the way of prayer.

'I am going to be a nun', Elizabeth announced at the age of seven! She was an artistic and sensitive youngster and unusually gifted in music. Her sensitivity was a characteristic that bothered her all her life, but one in which she became magnificently detached. As a child her piano recitals brought her recognition not only for her technical skill, but also for the depths of her musical interpretations. She was a playful child and in her very early years revealed an uninhibited hot temper which was tamed through the efforts of a loving and patient mother. She loved her mother more than anyone else, and one word, one glance from Madame Cater was enough to bring the vivacious Elizabeth back into line! The *Reminiscences* reveal that at the age of eleven, when she was preparing to receive her first Communion, 'the struggle against her volcanic nature was bearing fruit; as the great day drew nearer so did she win more victories with a will which had already gained the mastery over itself'. This passionate and affectionate child could at the same time be serious and reflective. Such natural gifts complemented her spiritual inclinations which were allowed to grow and be nurtured in the atmosphere of a loving home. Her first Communion and confession became a turning point in her life and from that time on, her way to the Lord would be more direct. It was about this time, too, that she had her first meeting with the Prioress of the Dijon Carmel, Mother Marie of Jesus. As a fourteen-year-old, Elizabeth would find that she still had many miles to travel before arriving at her beloved Carmel, but a hope had been born and a dream was beginning to take shape. The Lord had touched her.

Referring to her conviction that God was calling her to be exclusively his, Elizabeth wrote: 'On another occasion, after Holy Communion, it seemed to me that I heard pro-

nounced in my soul the word “Carmel” and I no longer thought of anything but of shutting myself up behind its grille’. In preparation for fulfilling this desire she took a vow of virginity at fourteen, sealing her interior commitment to be God’s very own. Her mother was hoping that Elizabeth might eventually change her mind. Elizabeth even had an excellent opportunity for marriage with a promising young doctor and although she realised, from a human point of view, that such an arrangement would perhaps be fulfilling and a consolation to her mother, her mind was nevertheless made up and she would not turn back. An old friend of the family with whom summer vacations in the mountains were often enjoyed was the venerable Canon of Carcassonne. Elizabeth was very fond of taking walks with the Canon and confiding to him the secrets of her heart. He was well aware of the suffering the mother and daughter were going through in view of the inevitable separation, and when the time came for Elizabeth finally to leave for Carmel, he said to Madame Cater, ‘She belongs to God before she belongs to you’. He later remarked of Elizabeth’s mother, ‘... like the Mother of God, she has made her offering. God will reward her as she deserves. Meanwhile, she may be proud and comforted; she has given a great saint to heaven’.

‘O Carmel! When will your doors be open to me?’ we find written in Elizabeth’s diary of 1897. On 2 August 1901 the doors of Carmel opened at last and Elizabeth Cater stepped over the threshold towards her life in eternity within the ‘Three’, there to be God’s little *Laudem Gloriam*.

Her Prioress remarked of Elizabeth as a postulant in Carmel, ‘Although it may be said that Sister Elizabeth was very well suited to our life and had fully entered into it, we do not claim that she was already perfect’. Her life was like a little seed that had yet to come to its full growth. She must undergo a transformation: ‘It was true that she was humble and unassuming, but it was good for her to learn by experience the powerlessness of her human nature’. Gradually, as the fruits of a tree appear from the sap giving them their nourishment, so too Elizabeth’s faith and love responded to the movements of grace within her. Prayer enables us to enter into ourselves and as we become aware of the divine movements within our soul, we are drawn out from ourselves into a freedom of love and faith in God. ‘You know, everything is delightful in Carmel (wrote the enthusiastic postulant) and we find God in washing as in prayer. Everywhere there is only He; one breathes and lives in Him. If you only knew how happy I am! My outlook widens every day’. It may happen by the will of God that our prayer becomes dry and difficult. If we are faithful, in time a life of intimacy with the three divine Persons will give to the movements of our soul an impetus which cannot be resisted and we shall be on our way to a life lived in God’s presence.

This was the foundation of Sister Elizabeth’s life, and the indwelling of the Trinity in the very centre of her soul was the key to her rapid growth in holiness. She learnt very quickly that her soul, sanctified by grace, was a presence of God. Animated by this activity of the new life in her soul, she was drawn into communion with the Holy Spirit in order to share in the mystery of his love.

A Praise of Glory is a soul that dwells in God, loves Him with a love that is pure and disinterested, without seeking itself in the sweetness of this love; that loves Him above all His gifts, and would do so even if it had received nothing from Him, and desires the good of the Object thus loved. Now, how can we desire and effectively will good to God, except by fulfilling His will, since His will orders all things for His greater glory? Therefore this soul must surrender itself completely, blindly, to that will, so that it cannot possibly will anything but what God wills.

Before arriving at a contemplation of the Trinity, Elizabeth had a special devotion to Jesus crucified. Father Vallée wrote of her: 'For a long time her soul was predisposed to the contemplation of the Crucified; later she would be attracted to the Holy Trinity and the need to feel the "society" of the Father, the Word and the Holy Spirit'. When preparing to enter Carmel, she had wanted to take the name 'Elizabeth of Jesus', since her entire ideal of holiness was to be transformed into Jesus crucified. It was not easy for her to relinquish this desire when Mother Marie of Jesus told her that she wanted instead to dedicate her to the Most Holy Trinity. Elizabeth, nevertheless, quickly grasped the beauty of being a little 'house of God' and was 'delighted with everything and especially with her name, which so well expressed the special characteristic of her relations with God. She entered into the deep recollection which was to give her over entirely to the Blessed Trinity'. During one of her first recreations in Carmel, a nun asked her, 'What is your favourite book?' 'Them Soul of Christ', she replied, 'in this I find all the secrets of the heavenly Father'. Father Vallée explains this Christological outlook of Elizabeth when he states, 'It was such a joy to speak of our Lord and of his grace with this soul so pure, so intuitive and yet so simple and in which the will as much as the intellect was given to her Master from the very first moment of her being'. Elizabeth was to fulfil her destiny within the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity: 'O my God, Trinity whom I adore, let me entirely forget myself that I may abide in You, still and peaceful, as if my soul were already in eternity'. It is in this unity within the 'Three' that we find her gift and her charism.

TRINITARIAN VOCATION

Already at the age of thirteen, Elizabeth felt 'held captive', having experienced mystical graces which drew her submissively under the influence of the Holy Spirit. In this openness to God's presence, she became increasingly absorbed in deep recollection: 'When I see my confessor, I shall ask him what is happening in me'. God, in touching this young soul, was initiating her into his divine indwelling. In time it would be the Dominican, Father Vallée, who would have the strongest influence on her spiritual life, ultimately guiding her in the mystery of the Trinity which later would become for her a mission and a vocation. 'God had foreordained for her a mission of calling souls to that centre within themselves, that they might come to know more abundantly the interior blessings bestowed on them at baptism'.⁰

In Carmel, Elizabeth found a milieu conducive to the unfolding of this grace within her. For the Carmelite, life in the presence of God is a sacred heritage, consecrated and holy, from St Elias: 'I hold myself in the presence of Yahweh, the living God' (1 Kings 17:1). Taking the words from the great St Teresa of Jesus, Elizabeth writes in her childhood diary, 'It is within You that I must search for myself'. She learnt in Carmel that the source of all spiritual life was the awareness of God's presence within her.

St Teresa of Jesus in her commentary on the Our Father in her *Way of Perfection*, tells us that God is not just in heaven, but in the very depths of our soul'. It is there that we must go to find him. Elizabeth became aware that the whole purpose of one's spiritual life is transformation and union. It is a life of intimacy, full and rich, with the three divine Persons.

⁰ M. Philipon, OP, *La vie mystique de Soeur Elizabeth*, Vie Spir. Juin 1938, p.263.

This presence of the Trinity, as described in St Teresa's *Interior Castle*, is the summit of the mystical life. Souls who have arrived at the stage of transforming union, live always in the ineffable fellowship of the three divine Persons, finding in this Trinitarian society the most blissful of all earthly joys (P. Philibon OP).

Elizabeth of the Trinity found a spiritual doctrine in tune with her life in Carmel, but more was needed for this soul so in love with truth. Father Vallée gave a retreat to the Dijon Carmelites in 1902 and, as a contemplative theologian, he clarified the Christian concept of the divine indwelling. He revealed to Elizabeth the theological basis of her own inner convictions. He demonstrated with the text of St Paul the way in which God is present within us, giving us at each moment the breath of our being, 'Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?' (1 Cor. 3:16). He confirmed that through the grace of baptism we become the spiritual temple in which the 'Three', each of whom is inseparable from the others, come to take their place in us. Sister Elizabeth was reassured by this dogmatic interpretation and was able to give herself to it entirely and in complete freedom. Her way was now clear and with a singleness of purpose she reduced all else for the rest of her life to the intimacy of this divine fellowship within her:

Did I mention to you my name in Carmel? It is Marie Elizabeth of the Trinity. To me this name means a special vocation ... I love the Mystery of the Trinity so much. It is an abyss in which I am lost. I am Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth disappearing, losing herself, letting herself be seized by the Three.

Here we find the heart of Elizabeth's prayer. She did not approach prayer simply as a routine of spiritual exercises, but as a life totally given to God from which she felt an overflowing need to express adoration and love: 'God's Presence is wonderful! There, in the depths of this Presence, is the heaven of my soul, where I love to find Him since I know He never leaves me. God and I, I and He, that is my life'. Prayer for Elizabeth was holding herself in the presence of God and submitting to his benevolent sway, mindful of the grace ever acting within her: 'The pleasure and happiness of my life, is this intimacy with the Guests of my soul'.

As it was for St Teresa of Jesus, the humanity of Christ is the way leading us to the Trinity. We cannot hope to find God without going through Christ, and it was a longing to be transformed in him which led Elizabeth to be identified with his prayer:

No longer do I want to live my own life, but I want to be transformed in Jesus Christ, so that my life may be more divine than human and that the Father, bending Himself towards me, may thus see in me the image of His dearly beloved Son in whom He is well pleased.

This ideal is clearly expressed in her 'Prayer to the All-Holy Trinity', which is the synthesis of her spirituality. Her only desire was to become for Christ 'a super-added humanity', as it had been St Paul's desire when he said, 'I make up in my flesh that which is lacking in the passion of Christ for his body which is the Church'. By identifying herself with Christ, Elizabeth makes his prayer her prayer, his adoration her adoration and his love for the Father her own: 'O consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, descend within my soul and make everything in me as an incarnation of the Word, that I may be to Him a super-added humanity wherein He renews His Mystery'.

Sister Elizabeth wanted to identify with Christ in her daily life and it is from this viewpoint that her prayer is to be understood. This identification with Christ, a life totally submitted to the Lord, is best explained by a single word, 'abide'. 'Abide' vividly characterizes the teaching of Jesus as we have received it from the beloved apostle John (Jn. 15:4).

'Abide in me [echoes Sister Elizabeth]. It is the Word of God who gives this order, who voices this will. Abide in Me — not just for a moment or a few hours — but abide in a lasting and permanent fashion. Abide in Me — pray in Me, adore in Me, love in Me, suffer in Me, work and act in Me. Abide in Me so that in Me you may go out to all persons and all things, entering ever more deeply into Me.

This is how Elizabeth understood her vocation in the bosom of the Trinity and what shaped her outlook. As with the apostle John, the injunction to 'abide' forged a lasting effect in her soul. It created a vibration affecting the whole of her being. The more one comes to understand Elizabeth of the Trinity, the more one sees that she was, above all else, a contemplative. She gave of herself without hesitation to the mystery that she so loved:

All Three Persons of the Holy Trinity dwell in the soul that loves Them 'in truth' ... keeping Their word. And when the soul has understood its riches, whatever natural or supernatural joy may come to it from creatures or even from God, only calls it to enter within itself, to enjoy the substantial good which it possesses and which is none other than God Himself.

This was Elizabeth's way and what Jesus so loved in her, as it was the way also for Mary Magdalen whom Elizabeth so admired; for Jesus is someone who lives and who wants others to live with him. He takes pleasure in those who take pleasure in him and who find in him all their delight. This is his call: 'Abide in me. Abide in my love'. It is the meaning of the Eucharist: 'As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me' (Jn. 6:57).

Nothing shows forth the love which the Heart of God bears for us as does the Eucharist [Elizabeth wrote]. It means union, consummation, He in us and we in Him. Is not that heaven on earth, heaven in faith, while we await the face to face vision for which we so yearn? Then, when His glory appears, we shall be satisfied when we see Him in His light. Do you not find that it rests the soul to think about that meeting with Him whom we love supremely? Then all else vanishes and we feel that already we are penetrating into the Mystery of God!

Elizabeth of the Trinity wants to lift us to a higher level, instilling in us an awareness that will keep us ever united in God. There is only one way to a life of continual prayer and that is to live in God, abiding always in his holy will. Recalling the words of Christ, 'Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am' (Jn. 17:24) she tells us:

Such is the last testament of Christ, His ultimate prayer before returning to the Father. He desires that, where He is, we also may be; not only in eternity, but now in this time, for our eternity has already begun ... the Trinity is where we are to abide, to make our abode, our 'home', the Father's House from which we must never depart.

Blessed Elizabeth's correspondence, adapted to persons and circumstances, speaks continually of the presence of God. It is always the same theme: to find true life one must abide with God in the very centre of one's being. To be a person of prayer and to seek holiness is to keep oneself ever united within the Trinity. Intellectual understanding of this is not enough. It must be lived. It is our calling to strive to live always in the presence of God, yet we cannot go the way alone. Our help is found in the Holy Spirit. In a letter to her mother, Elizabeth wrote:

I ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you this Presence of God in you of which I have spoken: you can believe my doctrine, which is not actually mine. If you read the Gospel according to St John, you will see that the Divine Master insists on this commandment: 'Abide in me and I in you'. And again, the beautiful thought which I placed at the head of my letter, 'If anyone loves me ... my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him' (Jn. 14:23).

'No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor. 12:3). God the Holy Spirit is respectful of our freedom. He does not force himself upon one who has not first come to him in love, humbly desiring always to please him in word and deed. We are caught up so often in our own needs and we may fail to grasp the actual reason for prayer which is the glory of God and the bringing forth of his kingdom on earth.

To prove to Our Lord how much you love Him, learn to forget yourself always ... and be very faithful to all your duties and all your resolutions [Elizabeth tells us]. Live by will rather than by imagination. If you feel your weakness, God wants you to make use of it in order to make acts of the will which you will offer Him as so many acts of love ... He so loves you and He so wants you for His own, whatever may be the path whereby you must follow Him here below. Does not your soul need to turn to prayer in order to gain strength? Above all, your prayer must be heart to heart conversation with God in which the whole of your soul flows into Him and in Him you are transformed.

The Holy Spirit cleanses the heart and renews in us a spirit of love: 'God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit' (Rom. 5:5). He purifies our soul, breathing into us the thoughts of God: 'The Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God' (1 Cor. 2:10). He unites our will and longings to the will of the Father, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God' (Rom. 8:14). Blessed Elizabeth wrote:

Live always with Him 'within'. That implies great mortification, for in order to be thus ceaselessly united in him, one must know how to give Him everything. When a soul is faithful to the least desires of His heart, Jesus, on His side, watches over it faithfully and establishes a sweet intimacy with it ... I am asking Him to be always the Master, teaching you in the secret of your soul. Be very attentive to His voice, and remember that when He thus takes His place in a heart, it is to dwell there alone and apart. You understand what I mean ... I am not referring to the religious life, which is the great break with the world, but to that detachment, that purity of intention which, as it were, throws a veil over all that is not God and enables us to cling to Him unceasingly by faith.

The Holy Spirit comes to us as one who inspires. It is he who teaches us the ways of a Son of God and who forms our prayer, in inexpressible groaning interceding for us, moving our heart to cry 'Abba, Father' (Gal. 4:6).

May the Father overshadow you [wrote Elizabeth] and may that shadow be as a veil that covers you and sets you apart. May the Word imprint His beauty upon you, so that He may recognize His own likeness in you; may the Holy Spirit, who is Love, make your heart a little furnace, the ardent glow of which may rejoice the three Divine Persons! But do not forget that if love is to be genuine, it must be sacrificed. 'Who loved me and delivered Himself for me'. There is the term of love.

THEOLOGICAL LIFE

When Sister Elizabeth knew that her death was near, she wrote to a Carmelite, 'It seems to me that I now see all things in the light of God and if I were to live my life over again, I wouldn't want to waste a minute of it'. Her vocation is to 'cling to God by a perfectly simple and wholly loving movement'. The more the life of grace takes root and blossoms in her soul, the more the movement of faith and love responds within her. 'Each moment is given us so that we may become more rooted in God, according to St Paul, in order that the resemblance with our Divine Model may be all the more striking, the union more intimate'. Elizabeth surrendered her human way of seeing in order to view everything in the light of Christ.

Elizabeth's life within the three divine Persons was one of faith. When the way seemed hard, dark and empty, she lived with God hidden in the centre of her soul in silent adoration, faith being 'the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (Heb. 11:1). Even when the veil appeared impenetrable, she would not allow herself to be discouraged.

One must erase the word 'discouragement' from one's dictionary of love [she wrote to her sister] ; the more you sense your weakness and meet with difficulties in your recollection, the more Our Lord seems hidden — all the more you ought to rejoice for then you are giving to Him.

Influenced by the doctrine of St John of the Cross, she believed that at the end of her way she would indeed contemplate without veils the All-Holy Trinity which had been for her here below such a comfort. On earth she had to come to God in simple, childlike faith. 'It is that alone which can give us true light on the One whom we love, and our soul must choose it as the means for attaining to blessed union. It is by faith [she continues] that all spiritual graces flow freely into our innermost being'.

In faith, Blessed Elizabeth became so attuned to God's presence that her life became an 'anticipated heaven', a fellowship with God in her soul which was not inert but radiated through her whole being: 'I leave you my faith in the presence of God, a God all-loving, abiding in our souls; I entrust it to you; it is this inner fellowship with Him which has been the radiant sun giving light to my life, making it already an anticipated heaven'.

If we do not recognize God in our daily activities, how can we hope to live in fellowship with him? How can we be on familiar terms with someone with whom we have no contact? This is why we need to place ourselves in God's presence at the very beginning of our prayer. Even if most of the prayer time is taken up with seeking this presence, it is not time lost and will set the tone for the rest of our day.

How can I imitate, within the heaven of my soul, the unceasing occupation of the blessed in the heaven of glory? [questions Elizabeth]. How can I maintain this constant praise, this uninterrupted adoration? St Paul enlightens us when he writes to his disciples: ‘May the Father grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened ... unto the inward man; that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts, that being rooted and founded in charity ...’. That seems to me to be the necessary condition of worthily fulfilling the office of Praise of Glory. The soul that enters into and abides in these ‘deep things of God’ and in consequence does everything in Him, with Him and for Him, with that purity of intention which gives it a certain resemblance to the One Simple Being — this soul by its every movement, every aspiration, all its actions however commonplace they may be, becomes more deeply rooted in Him whom it loves. Everything within it renders homage to the Thrice-Holy God. It is a perpetual Sanctus, a perpetual Praise of Glory.

He desires to be my peace [wrote Elizabeth], so that nothing can distract my attention or draw me forth from the impregnable fortress of holy recollection. There, He will give me access to the Father and will keep me as stable and tranquil in His presence as though my soul were already in eternity.)

God invites us to share with him a life of intimate fellowship. We want to abide in his presence not only during our times of prayer, but throughout our whole day.

To live in God’s presence: is not that a heritage left by St Elias to the children of Carmel? He who, in the ardour of his faith cried, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand!’ (1 Kings 17:1). When Elias perceived that Yahweh was approaching, he left the cave where he had hidden himself, and stood upright. Thus it is, that at the door of oneself, in silent respect, the soul must stand in the presence of God.

Elias’ disposition is one of availability, an attitude of a servant waiting to hear the desires of his master. It is not a passive attitude, but a movement of adhesion to the Word of God. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity understood the prophet Elias’ mood:

On St Elias’ feast day, we ask him for that gift of prayer which is the essence of the Carmelite life, that heart to heart dialogue which never ceases, because when one loves, one no longer belongs to oneself but totally to the Object one loves and one abides more in Him than in oneself.

Elias stands in Yahweh’s presence to be of service, and ‘before whom I stand’ may be interpreted as whom I serve’. The prophet shows by his deeds that which he declares in his speech: he is obedient and swift to respond to God’s commands.

Here is the fine point of the soul — the bond of fellowship within the Trinity; and it is love alone which brings us to this decisive step. Theologians teach us that the soul is always capable of growing in love and, according to Sister Elizabeth,

... the moment the soul, in all its strength, knows God perfectly, loves Him and enjoys Him entirely, it will have arrived at the innermost centre of itself that it is able to reach in Him. Before arriving there, the soul is already in God who is its centre, but it is not in its deepest centre, since it is able to go even further. As it is

love that unites the soul to God, the more intense this love, the more profoundly the soul enters and is concentrated in God. When it possesses a single degree of love, it is already in its centre; but when this love has reached its perfection, the soul will have penetrated to its deepest centre; it is there that it will be transformed to the point of becoming a very likeness of God.

‘If anyone loves me!’ It is Christ himself who explains this indwelling of the three divine Persons in the soul of each Christian. It is love that attracts and draws the creature to God. It is not enough to possess God in the centre of the soul; one must also abide there in fellowship with Him’, as St John so aptly says (1 Jn. 1:3). God is a consuming fire of love, destroying and transforming into himself all that he touches. We should not draw back from this furnace of love, but plunge ourselves into it freely. In the Trinity it is the link between the Father and his Word. We enter into a fellowship with him in faith, letting ourselves flow into that movement of love which joins the Father to the Son.

Blessed Elizabeth was entirely given over to contemplating the mystery of the Trinity within her and from this she received special graces. In her last illness and near death, she was visited one morning by her Prioress:

Oh, Mother! A little longer and you would not again have found *Laudem Gloriam* on earth!

How’s that? [asked her Prioress] .

Last night [continued Elizabeth] my soul was in a sort of stupor when all of a sudden I felt myself being overwhelmed by love. There is no other way that I can explain what I experienced; it was a fire of infinite sweetness and at the same time, it seemed that it would cause me to be mortally wounded. Had it been prolonged, I think I would have succumbed.

This is a very special grace, the nature of which we leave to contemplative theologians to explain; but it is certainly not far from the wound of love spoken of by St Teresa of Jesus and St John of the Cross (*Living Flame of Love*, stanza 1). This grace could be compared with another that Elizabeth had received on Ascension Day 1906. Her Prioress, delayed on her morning visit to the infirmary, was greeted with,

Mother! It doesn’t matter! God has given me such grace that I’ve lost all notion of time. This morning these words were spoken to me in the interior of my soul: ‘If anyone loves me, my Father will love him; We shall come to him and make our home with him’. At that very moment I understood how true it is. I cannot say how the Three Divine Persons revealed themselves, nevertheless I have seen them, holding in me their counsel of love and it seems that I can see them still! Oh! how marvellous God is and how much we are loved!

Elizabeth’s being ‘held captive’ by the Trinity was a prelude to a union of love. On 1 November 1906, a few days before she died, she told her sisters who were gathered around her deathbed, ‘All passes! In the evening of life, love alone abides ... all must be for love, one must without ceasing, forget oneself ... Oh, if only I had always done so!’ At last Elizabeth of the Trinity had received what she had desired as a young postulant in Carmel: ‘I should want to die of love and thus fall into the arms of my Beloved’.

To understand Elizabeth’s prayer, one must first consider the movement of love which places her from the very beginning within the heart of God:

Prayer is a repose, a relaxation. One must come in total simplicity to the One whom one loves, holding oneself near to Him as a small child in its mother's arms, allowing one's heart to go out ... there is only one occupation for a Carmelite and that is to love and to pray.

This is the ultimate goal and the foundation on which all prayer rests. When we regret that we do not have time for prayer, it usually stems from our lack of motivation and love!

When we love someone, we find ourselves often thinking about that person. There is a bond of love uniting us, even when we are separated. He who truly desires God with all his heart, soul and strength, knows that the irresistible need to free this impulse of love can be satisfied only in prayer. If we find that our prayer is overshadowed by worries and anxieties and that focussing our attention on anything seems next to impossible, let us listen to Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity:

Will you allow your little Carmelite, who is so fond of you, to say something on the part of Our Lord? It is what He said to St Catherine of Siena, 'Think of Me and I will think of you'. We look at ourselves too much ... we do not have enough trust in Him who enfolds us in His love. We must not stand in front of our cross and examine it in itself, but withdrawing into the light of faith, we must rise above it and consider that it is the instrument of Divine Love.

[She continues] That better part, which seems to be my privilege in my beloved Carmelite solitude, is offered by God to every baptised soul. He is offering it to you, amid your cares and your ... anxieties. Believe that He desires only to lead you on ever further into Himself. Yield yourself to Him, with all your worries, and since you think I am a good advocate at the King's court, I ask you also to confide to me all that you have most at heart. You can imagine whether your cause will be warmly pleaded!

In our prayer and at those times when everything seems so difficult, we need to make every effort simply to be present to our Lord, even if only to repeat to God our love which is in essence drawn from the very heart of Christ; we are assured by Blessed Elizabeth, 'Believe that He desires only to lead you ever further into Himself ...'

It is love alone that binds us to God. Our prayer does not have to have a utilitarian purpose. Friends share what they have in common and in this giving of themselves to one another are all the more enriched in mind and heart. When talking with a friend, we do not have to exert ourselves to be profound; our friendship is simply a bonding of two souls in God. Prayer as a dialogue with God should be the same. We come to the Lord in an attitude of openness and readiness to do his will. Speaking of prayer and of how our problems may be a stumbling-block in our path, Elizabeth wrote:

There is no wood like that of the Cross to kindle the fire of Jove in the soul, and Our Lord so wants to be loved, to find in the world ... souls that are completely surrendered to Him and to His good pleasure ... I tell you from Him that He thirsts for your soul.

God thirsts for our soul and there is a longing deep within us which thirsts for God and which can be satisfied only in him. Elizabeth did not become aware of her special witness all at once. Yet in finding her way, she was not scattered here and there. She was

integrated by a continual deepening of the mystery of the Trinity as a fundamental truth in her life and found that the soul which returns within itself, abiding in the presence of this mystery, is totally given over to it in adoration.

In the evening of her life, love is all that counts.

What does it matter to the soul that is recollected in itself, enlightened by this Word, whether it feels or does not feel, whether it be in light or in darkness, in sensible joy or not? It is, as it were, ashamed to make any distinction between such things, while it feels that it is still affected by them and heartily despising itself for its want of love, it quickly turns its gaze upon its Master that He may deliver it. 'It exalts Him upon the highest summit of the heart', that is, above the sweetness and sensible consolations that flow from Him, for it is resolved to pass all else by in order to obtain union with Him whom it loves.

CHAPTER TWO

'A Praise of Glory is a silent soul'

MOVEMENT OF ELIZABETH'S RECOLLECTION

In Carmel Elizabeth of the Trinity found a tradition of silence and solitude. Carmel's roots stem from the monks of the second century who fled worldly life for the solitude of the desert in Egypt and Palestine. Their desire was to make a 'pilgrimage to the place of the heart' and find God there dwelling within them. A group of these monks made their way to Mount Carmel and hidden away in little cells among the rocks near the cave of their spiritual father, St Elias, they lived 'in silence, night and day, to give themselves to prayer'. From these Middle Eastern monks, Carmel received inspiration for its Rule 'of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel'. In the 11th and 12th centuries many European monks feeling drawn to the eremitical life of those early monks, returned to the Holy Land and established again on Mount Carmel a monastic community. Because they wanted a more formal outline for their life, a Rule was written, probably in the latter part of the twelfth century by Albert, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem. In the sixteenth century, when St Teresa of Jesus felt led to reform Carmel, she too returned to the Order's origin and the *spirit* of St Elias in drawing up her Constitutions, and with the help of her 'half friar', St John of the Cross, the Discalced Carmelites brought forward their particular witness in the Church. Today Carmel continues to live in the spirit of its foundress, St Teresa of Jesus.

St Teresa knew that in her religious community, the condition of silence was necessary for an authentic life of prayer and ultimate union with God. In our day, silence is not so easy to come by, either for those in the world or those in the cloister. Most of us are not immune to blaring transistor radios, the overhead roaring of planes with their sonic booms echoing behind them, car horns and vendors along with the din of other street noises. Even in the 'quiet' of one's home there is the TV, the stereo, the electric mixer or the vacuum cleaner! This makes us aware that essentially our silence must come *from within ourselves*. To enter into this interior silence, even in the midst of outward confusion, requires a discipline of our thoughts, feelings and outlook in general. It requires a real effort on our part to put silence into our life and to guard jealously whatever silence we already have.

He wants you to go out from yourself [wrote Blessed Elizabeth] to leave all preoccupations, in order to retire into that solitude' which He is choosing for Himself in the depths of your heart. He is always there, even when you do not feel Him. He is waiting for you to establish with you ... an intimate union ...

The Dominican priest, Father Vallée, wrote, 'The saints are always attentive. "They remain silent, they are recollected and their only activity is to be beings who *receive*"'.

St Teresa of Jesus, verbose, witty and charming, was a born conversationalist. She spent many long hours in her monastery's parlour. She enjoyed those little tête-à-têtes, and perhaps too much so, as one day she heard our Lord speak to her interiorly, 'From now on, I no longer want you to converse with men, but only with Me and My angels!'"⁰ As St

⁰ *The Collected Works of St Teresa of Avila*, Volume One, Chapter 25, p.161. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez,

Teresa grew in prayer, she realized the need to cultivate an *interior disposition which would free her* for an encounter with God in a colloquy of prayer. 'For such favours', she tells us, 'God wants the soul exclusively, pure and inflamed with a desire to receive them'. St John of the Cross also roots this silence within the Trinity by saying that a soul must stand in silence before the Lord in order to be united with him: 'The Father spoke one Word which was His Son, and this Word He always speaks in eternal silence and in silence it must be heard by the soul'.⁰ Elizabeth, deeply impressed by the doctrine of her spiritual parents in Carmel, discovered in the silence of the Trinity her own ideal: 'The soul must maintain within itself a deep silence, echoing that which is sung within the Trinity'.

When Sister Elizabeth speaks of recollection, it is always from an eschatological viewpoint, predisposing her to see the fulness of God in his creatures and they in him, '... in order that my life may become but a reflection of your life, come into me as Adorer, Redeemer and Saviour'. It was in the Trinity dwelling within her soul that she perceived that her vocation in heaven would be to draw and awaken souls to an attentiveness to the divine presence within them, guiding them in their interior struggles towards integration, and maintaining them in that great and healing silence where God alone abides.

'My citadel is God Himself' (Ps. 59:9). My rule tells me, 'Your strength will lie in silence and hope'.⁰ It seems to me that to keep our strength in the Lord is to establish a unity of our entire being by interior silence, to gather together all our strength so as to engage it in a single act of love; to have that simple eye which permits the light of God to enlighten us.

As Elizabeth became aware of God's presence within her, she realized that her 'pilgrimage to the place of the heart' would be a long and tedious spiritual journey. For her, the silence of prayer is the silence of God. Love moves her to silence:

'For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things' (Phil. 3:8). Because of Him, to adore Him always, I isolate myself, separate. strip myself of all things, regarding both the natural and the supernatural in relation to the gifts of God; for a soul not thus stripped, delivered of itself, will be at a certain point banal and earthly, which is not worthy of a daughter of God, a spouse of Christ, a temple of the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth's prayer was an integration and harmony of her whole being in which she became transparent and open, allowing God to take possession of herself the movements of grace. Grace, gradually touching one's inmost self, makes one become more and more focussed on God, at the fine point of the soul where God has begun even now his transfiguration of gifting the mind with faith and the will for charity.

God's image, stamped on the soul [wrote Elizabeth] is, in fact, manifested by reason, memory and will and in so far as these faculties do not bear the perfect image of God, so do they not resemble Him as on the day of creation. The exemplar of the soul is God, who must be stamped thereon as the seal on the wax, as the stamp on the object. Now that is fully realized only if the reason is completely enlightened by the knowledge of God, the will riveted into the love of the sovereign Good, and the memory totally absorbed in contemplating and

OCD. ICS Publications, Washington D.C., 1976.

⁰ *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, Maxim 21, p.675. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, OCD. ICS Publications, Washington D.C. 1973.

⁰ Rule of St Albert in Discalced Carmelite Nuns, Rule, Constitutions, Declarations, p.22.

enjoying the eternal happiness. And since the glory of the blessed is none other than the perfect possession of this state, obviously the beginning of the possession of these good things constitutes perfection in this life. In order to realize this ideal, we must remain recollected within ourselves, keep silence, remain in the presence of God, while the soul plunges itself into God and is dilated, enkindled and united with Him in a fullness that is unlimited.

Grace touches us at the very root of ourselves, determining and influencing all that we do. The more we find our home within the divine presence, the more our life as a whole will become filled with grace.

A Praise of Glory is a silent soul, which remains like a lyre beneath the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit, so that He may call forth divine harmonies from it. The soul knows that the string of suffering sounds more sweetly still, so it loves to have it in its instrument so that it may be more pleasing to the Heart of God.

Much there is that distracts us from responding to grace and God who made the human person an integrated whole, has seen his work devalued by sin. Split and divided as we are in our intentions and motives, and in spite of the disruption of our inner harmony and balance because of our fallen nature, there still remains, metaphysically speaking, a unity between body and soul.

I really think that God wishes you to live your life in a sphere where we will breathe the atmosphere of the divine. I am very sorry for those souls who do not live above the world and its futilities [wrote Blessed Elizabeth]. I think they are slaves and would like to say to them, 'Shake off the yoke that is weighing upon you. What are you doing with these bonds which shackle you to yourself and to things that are beneath you?'

Sin weakens or breaks our bond with God and others and we become divided within ourselves. This inner division is deep and St Paul speaking of it remarks, 'For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate' (Rom. 7:15). We so easily succumb to the whims of our false self and our insecurities, seeking gratifications in worldly attitudes, and the good opinion of others. Our imagination and intelligence are too much influenced by human views and we seek pleasures inconsistent with what is really good for us. Our senses are far from being purified. 'A soul at war within itself, which is preoccupied with its feelings, which pursues useless thoughts or any sort of desire, is a soul sapped of its strength: it is not entirely focussed on God ... there is too much of the human'.

We are complex and multiple and it is only through grace that we can come to the gradual unification of our inmost self.

The soul that still keeps something for itself in its interior kingdom, whose powers are not all enclosed in God, cannot be a perfect Praise of Glory, and it is not prepared to sing unceasingly the *Canticum Magnum* of which St Paul speaks, as it is not in unity. Instead of its praise passing through all things with simplicity, it is continually forced to re-tune the off-key chords of its instrument.

Grace demands our co-operation and by its movements within us, we shall become our true selves, mature, unified and whole.

He hungers to consume us absolutely. He enters in, even to our very marrow, and the more we lovingly allow Him to do so, the more we savour His Presence. He knows that we are poor, but He does not mind that and He spares us nothing. He also takes us into Himself, first burning away in His love all our vices, failings and sins. Then, when He sees that we are quite pure, He comes. He wants to consume our life in order to change it into His ours so full of faults, His full of grace and glory.

We find in Sister Elizabeth's prayer all the ascetic qualities leading to divine union, as taught by the spiritual masters. To enter into this life of union with God by continual prayer, we need to accept a death and resurrection in our contact with others and within ourself, placing before God all our human loves and attachments.

If we thought more about our 'origin', dependence on created things would seem so futile that we should only despise them. In one of his Epistles, St Peter writes that we 'have been made partakers of the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4) and St Paul exhorts us to 'hold the beginning of his substance firm unto the end' (Heb. 3:14, Douai). The soul that is aware of this greatness enters into the holy freedom of the children of God, that is, it passes beyond all created things and beyond itself.

Elizabeth the Trinity is not saying that we should despise all created things. We see God in what he has created. She asks that our presence to the world keep in view the divine presence: 'It is through Him, beneath His radiance, that I must see everything and approach everything'. Her concept of silence is not limited to externals. It assumes a deeper meaning and takes in all those acts of will leading us to our inner reconciliation, our ultimate coming into the presence of God. For this reason, we think of recollection as a 'movement' and although Blessed Elizabeth herself never applied to it this term, she often spoke of clinging to God by 'a perfectly simple and wholly loving movement'. She impresses upon us that to find God within, we must be alert to the movement of returning to our centre. To regain our inner balance we must sink to the deepest part of ourselves and there we must bring together and unite all our energy.

Seeing the silence which reigns in His creature, observing how it is wholly recollected in its interior solitude, the Creator greatly desires its beauty. He leads it into the immense, infinite solitude, into that spacious place of which the Psalmist sings, which is His very self. 'I will enter into the powers of the Lord' (Ps. 71:16 Douai).

As the movement of abandonment was special to St Thérèse of Lisieux, so too the movement of recollection is characteristic of Elizabeth of the Trinity. The need to be recollected cannot be minimized if we are to find peace within ourselves and live in fellowship with the three divine Persons. A Christian's inner unity is constructed round a presence found within and from which one's intimate interior glance becomes an act of love, fruitful and positive.

My Divine Master said to me ... as Zaccheus, 'Make haste and come down, for today I must abide in your house' (Lk.19:5). Make haste and come down! But where to? Into the innermost depths of my being, after having forsaken self, been separated from self, divested of self, in a word, without self.

The teaching of St John of the Cross on interior prayer is often misunderstood, some believing his idea of recollection to be a denial and negation of all our senses. That is not

what he means. Recollection is to go into the deepest part of oneself, letting go of distractions so as to reach out of oneself more fully and live in the present. It is a movement of attention, freeing us of multiplicity and directing our energy towards a single goal. 'Then, all the soul's movements become divine, and although they are God's movements they are equally those of the soul, because Our Lord produces them in it and with it'. From this movement of recollection comes a silence, opening the soul to the divine presence. It is not an empty or void silence, but a sharpening of one's perceptions, freeing one in abandonment from the clamour of anxieties and inner tensions.

I think that to belong to the household of God, I must abide in the bosom of the tranquil Trinity, in the centre of my soul, in the impregnable fortress of holy recollection described by St John of the Cross ...how transparent is the creature thus stripped, freed from self! ... it rises, ascending above the senses, above nature, above self. It passes beyond all joy and sorrow ... never to rest until it has penetrated *within* Him whom it loves.

Living in God's presence requires simplicity and openness, and Blessed Elizabeth descends into her heart to listen and unify all her senses in an act of love. With this total giving of herself, plunged to the very depths of her soul, she arrives at the summit of God.

How indispensable is this precious interior unity to the soul desiring to live here below the life of the blessed, of simple beings, of spirits, Was it not this which the Divine Master wished to imply to Mary Magdalen when He spoke to her of the *unum necessarium* (Lk. 10:42)? How well this great saint understood Him! Enlightened with the light of faith, she recognized Him as God under the veil of His humanity, and in silence, in the unity of her strength, she listened to the word which, He spoke to her and was thus able to sing, 'I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law'.

Our response to divine grace is expressed in continual renewal and it is in silence that we come to a restored intimacy with God, which enables us to go out to others. To those who question the value of a 'pilgrimage to the place of the heart', perhaps because of a fear of becoming too introspective, we say that such hesitation is unnecessary if one is truly seeking an encounter with God and an integration of one's whole being. We are not trapped in a web of narcissism when we are united within our inmost centre. We become instead more open and able to discern God's will. It is in the solitude of meeting with God that one comes to recognize one's true identity.

When a soul is happy, living in close union with God, so as to make its life an intimate friendship with the Divine Master, when it knows how to find Him in its inmost depths, then it is never lonely again, and it feels the need of solitude in order to enjoy the Presence of the Guest it adores. You must give Him His rightful place in your heart, which He has made capable of loving so passionately; if you realized how good He is, how He is all love!

Elizabeth of the Trinity did not think of the soul's unity as a stoic or passive indifference, but rather as an exchange of love with God in whom we find our real self. In her *Last Retreat*, using Psalm 45 which is so often a source of inspiration to the person of prayer, she illustrates that being centred in God is to forget oneself and that in abandonment we find favour with the King:

‘Hear, O daughter, consider and incline your ear, forget your people and your father’s house, and the king will desire your beauty’. It seems that this appeal is an invitation to silence; ‘listen ... incline your ear ...’. But to hear, one must forget the house of one’s father, that is, all that binds one to the natural life, that life which was spoken of by the apostle when he said, ‘...if you live according to the flesh you will die’ (Rom. 8:13). ‘Forget your people’: that is the most difficult, it seems, because by people it means all that world which is a part of ourselves, feelings, memory, impressions, etc. ... in short, self. One must forget it, leave it, and when the soul has made this rupture, when it is liberated of all that, the King is smitten with its beauty, for its beauty is in its unity! At least, it is God’s beauty.

With all life’s pressures and tensions, time may become so packed that there seems hardly a moment left even to catch one’s breath! No matter who we are or what we do, we all need moments of silence. How do we obtain this silence and, once we have it, what do we do with it? If we want the silence we shall find the time. What we do with it depends on our own disposition. Some wonder how they can become recollected when they have so many obligations. How can one come to an inner harmony with so many outside forces tugging and pulling in all directions, keeping one on the surface of life?

‘Prayer, the heart to heart communing with Him, should never cease. I feel so strongly that He is living in my soul! I have only to recollect myself to find Him within me, and all my happiness lies in that ... I think we ought to be so simple with God’. One of Elizabeth’s Carmelite sisters once confided to her how difficult she found it to concentrate and to keep her thoughts from wandering while in prayer. Sister Elizabeth replied,

Oh, to avoid that we must be very watchful throughout our whole day. Once or twice, when I saw the sacristy seamstress very busy, I rushed feverishly over my work, but God does not want His brides to do that. When I went to my prayer, try as I might, I could not rise above my ‘rags’.

Our Lord wants us to be available to him and shed the ‘rags’ of our busily hurrying-about attitude, our hustle and bustle of unnecessary activity, to put on the tranquillity of a disposition read and receptive to his presence, To ‘rise above our rags is to have our heart reside singularly and simply in the Lord; the inner and outer noises of the senses cannot uproot the deeper silence of one’s being in God. We bring to our spiritual life our own individual temperament, but even if one is upset, the waves from the storm are only on the surface; in the depths there is calm. We need to cultivate a disposition of openness in our prayer, to be quiet in ourselves and to listen. This comes with grace and takes time, perseverance and patience. It is a sanctification of all our thoughts, so that all we say or all that passes through our mind and heart may become for us an unceasing prayer.

In order to reach the ideal life of the soul, I believe we must live in the realm of the supernatural and be persuaded that God dwells in our innermost being, and go to everything with Him. Then nothing can be trivial, no matter how commonplace in itself, for we do not live in those things, but soar above them. A supernatural soul does not stop to deal with secondary causes, but solely with God. And how life thus becomes simplified! ... then the soul is truly great, truly free, for its will is ‘enclosed’ in that of God.

This inner presence of the divine may be seen in people who are swamped with commitments and yet are maintained in peace and stability. They move freely from their

centre in God to their contacts with others, remaining always in God's presence and in this they become even more present to the person with whom they are speaking. Such persons appreciate the value of outward silence as an aid to interior silence. They cultivate the fine art of listening to others and protect themselves from superfluous chatter, too much TV or radio or anything else that might hinder their spirit of recollection and dialogue with God. Elizabeth of the Trinity was well aware of this:

What is then this descent which is required of us, if not to enter all the more deeply into our innermost being? This is not so much a separation from outward things, an exterior separation, but a spirit of solitude, a disengagement and detachment from all that is not of God.

Our inner movements towards God do not function apart from our everyday life, nor should there be any conflict between our day to day chores and our desire for interior silence. 'Since Our Lord dwells in our souls, his prayer is ours and I would share in it unceasingly, remaining like a little pitcher at the fountain of life, so that I may then be able to give life to others by letting the inexhaustible streams of His love overflow'.

Through grace and an overflowing of God's love in our life, we come to be present to the world with a refined sensitivity which determines our responses to others. We shall possess a degree of receptivity giving substance to our inner unity when we are brought into contact with persons or ideas different from our own, or which we may or may not want to accept as a part of our faith. This asks of us a delicate awareness, an ability to see beyond the 'front' which others may present or project, the facades which mask their true intentions, and an effort to meet others on a level entirely focussed on God. We become less influenced by a person's mannerisms, seeing the person more fully and simply as a child of God. If we are able to receive all things and persons within our own centre, we need not fear being dispersed ourselves. We shall find ourselves completely concerned with the other and our centre will remain fixed in God.

Our divided self must be purified and healed. This asks for a poverty of spirit and a going out of ourselves. 'Here we have the measure of the sanctity of the children of God, to be holy as God is holy. To be holy with His Holiness ... by living in contact with Him in the fathomless abyss "within"'. This poverty of spirit loves unconditionally and without self-seeking and it is what Elizabeth refers to when she says we must forget 'all that world which is a part of ourselves'. St John of the Cross wrote that one must give up all, not to be contemptuous of things, but to possess them in the truthfulness of their being, in a balanced perspective and in a manner that binds them to God: 'Be hostile to admitting into your soul things that of themselves have no spiritual substance, lest they make you lose your liking for devotion and recollection'.⁰ In our poverty of spirit we become rich in all goods, that is, these 'goods', spiritual or material, take on new meaning, for 'all good is given to him who no longer desires it from self-love'.⁰ Blessed Elizabeth echoes St John of the Cross: 'To attain this love the soul must be wholly given up to Him, its will must be sweetly lost in His will, so that its inclinations, its faculties, may no longer be moved save in and for this love. I do everything lovingly, I suffer everything lovingly'.

We are not born integrated spiritually and psychologically; it is a lifelong process of growing. We have our personality characteristics and temperament which may, along with our life experiences, influence our responses. Some, therefore, may come to an

⁰ *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, Maxim 12, p.674. Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, OCD. ICS Publications, Washington D.C. 1973.

⁰ *ibid.*

interior silence more easily than others, but essentially it is God's grace touching and healing us. If our personality weaknesses sometimes get in our way, we should remember what Elizabeth told her little sister, Marguerite: 'You must erase the word "discouragement" from your dictionary of love', and with humility turn your gaze again towards Jesus. We are each called to inner unity and that is why we must faithfully set aside time each day for God alone. Placing oneself in silence at a regular time before the presence of the Lord will bring with it insight and healing.

Are you not passionately fond of listening to Him? [Sister Elizabeth asked a young seminarian]. Sometimes the need to be silent makes itself so strongly felt that one would wish not to know how to do anything else save remain at the Master's feet with Magdalen, eager to hear everything, to penetrate ever more deeply into the mystery of love which He came to reveal to us. Do you not find that when working, even though we are apparently carrying out Martha's functions, the soul can always remain buried in contemplation like Magdalen, thirsting at the fountain of life?

When protected by the interior silence crystallized around God's presence, prayer becomes easier and more fruitful, in that it creates in us the receptivity and openness spoken of by the mystics as the crystal of pure prayer. The person who carries this crystal within his or her centre is able to live a fulfilled and unified life. Prayer and decisive action are not in opposition.⁰

Interior silence needs to become the fabric of our whole personality, mind and heart. What does one 'do' in this silence? Simply give oneself to God's presence. Be open, resourceful and prudent. The Holy Spirit will be one's guide, giving wisdom and discretion, and presenting to the mind positive acts of humility and love for God. Perseverance and courage are needed for this quieting of the soul, along with a strong faith and God's grace.*

Sister Elizabeth found that as her interior prayer became more integrated into her life, her prayer often took on a passive attitude and she desired to remain quietly in God's presence without any attempt at formal prayer. 'She sometimes felt a doubt as to her constantly passive attitude. Ought she not to 'do' more at prayer? Her peace of mind, thus momentarily disturbed, was always restored by him who willed her to remain recollected beneath his direct and personal action'. 'There is no need [in prayer] of beautiful thoughts', said Elizabeth, 'only of letting one's heart speak'.

On solitude Elizabeth wrote:

'God' says Dionysius, 'is the great solitary'. My Master asks me to imitate Him in His perfection, to render Him homage in being a great solitary. The Divine Being abides in an eternal, an immense solitude; He never leaves this solitude while He is interested in all the needs of His creatures, for He never leaves Himself and this solitude is not different from His divinity. So that nothing can make me leave this beautiful silence within, always the same condition, same isolation, same

⁰ P. Elie de Jesus-Marie, OCD, *Les Principes de l'Oraison*, pp.232-233.

*For those who seek practical help and guidance on methods of entering into the prayer of interior silence, we recommend Sadhana, *A Way to God*, Anthony de Mello S.J., published St Louis 1978. This is an excellent book on methods and exercises in prayer. The author's aim is to teach how to pray, through a series of practical exercises drawn from the tradition of the Church, the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, and oriental techniques stemming from sources such as yoga, Zen Buddhism and modern psychology.

separation, same stripping. If my desires, my fears, my joys or my sorrows, if all the movements proceeding from these four passions are not perfectly ordered in God, I shall not be a solitary; within myself will be commotion. Appeasement is therefore necessary; my powers must sleep if I am to have unity of being.

It may seem strange that a mystic of the All-Holy Trinity as was Sister Elizabeth, should endorse a passage of Pseudo-Dionysius which praises the 'solitude of God' and the idea that 'He never leaves Himself'. Elizabeth of the Trinity actually does not have the same thing in mind as Pseudo-Dionysius. He is thinking of the absolute self-containment and autonomy of God's being, denoting that God is incommunicable in his activities *ad intra*. Elizabeth uses the passage thinking of the silence within the Trinity in which she finds the stimulus and example for her own silence. 'My desire is to remain ever with Him in whom all mysteries are known, so that I may hear everything from Him. "The Word speaks to us by infusing the Gift into us". Yes, that is just how He speaks to one's soul in silence. Blessed is this silence!'

The recollected soul becomes uncomplicated, transparent and simplified. In a single, unique movement which proceeds often without words, it adores, gives of itself to God, relies on and rests in him. It is the silence of eternity, a uniting of oneself to God, '... a silent soul, which remains like a lyre beneath the mysterious touch of the Holy Spirit so that He may call forth divine harmonies from it'.

CHAPTER THREE

'A Praise of Glory is a soul ever gazing upon God'

CRYSTAL OF LOVE

God's call to each is unique and no two persons respond in the same way. Each soul has its own special purpose in the eyes of the Lord. It is perhaps better, therefore, not to over-emphasize stages or to place oneself or others in spiritual categories. It is useful to know what the great spiritual masters have written on prayer, but in discerning one's own spiritual growth it is best to leave interpretations to an experienced guide. We are all asked, however, to enter into a 'night' of the soul so as to be purified and transformed into a pure crystal reflecting God's love.

The way of prayer is to be lived. We cannot say to ourselves, 'I'm going to be a contemplative', and then seek out a book on 'How to be a contemplative in six easy lessons'! Contemplation is a God-given gift. What we seek in our prayer is closeness and communion with God, his holiness working in our life. Contemplation itself might be thought of as a gazing at the splendour of God, an adoration in which the soul is touched and held captive in God's presence in a special way. Or it could be thought of as an experience of God's presence too intimate to describe and, if one wanted to, it would be like quicksilver slipping away through one's fingers. God is too unfathomable for our understanding. We are but his little creatures and he is our God who will always be for us a mystery. We may, in our desire for holiness and union with God, become contemplative in our outlook and in our manner of meeting and reacting to events. We then take on a ready disposition to know and respond to God's will for us. In fidelity and love, we become humble in spirit and it is souls who have such a disposition that God selects to enter into the inner chambers of his presence through contemplation. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity wrote,

Glorified souls ... contemplate God in the simplicity of His essence. They know Him by intuitive vision: the simple gaze, and they are transformed into the same image from 'glory to glory' as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:18). They are an incessant Praise of Glory to the Divine Being, who contemplates His own splendour in them.

'Certain souls', wrote Father Vallée, 'are like some wonderful crystal through which the light passes unbroken; once the divine imprint has been received, the impression remains. Elizabeth echoes: 'In His image and likeness. Such was the Creator's design, that He might reflect Himself in His creatures and manifest there some of His perfection, His beauty, as in a pure and flawless crystal. Is not that a kind of extension of His own glory?' To be pure and transparent crystals reflecting God's glory, we must first be cleansed of selfishness.

Whatever be our state in life ... every one of us ought to be holy unto God ... How can these requirements be met? ... by keeping oneself simply and lovingly turned to Him, so that God may see His own image reflected in the soul as the sun is reflected through a pure crystal.

The saints experienced purgatory here on earth, being transformed by the purifications of their daily life, often painful but a necessary preparation for eternity. It is a process of dying to self, becoming more acutely aware of God and sharing with Christ in his redemption of all mankind. It is a participation in the transformation of the whole world, revealing God's glory both on earth and in heaven. We too share in this ever-continuing transformation by our own sufferings, by sharing in the cross of Christ. Sister Elizabeth wrote to a priest friend,

I know that you pray for me every day at Holy Mass. Do put me into the chalice, so that my soul may be bathed in the Blood of Christ, for whom I thirst and wish to be all pure, transparent, in order that the Trinity may be reflected in me as in a crystal, 'The Three Persons delight to contemplate their beauty in a soul and they are thus drawn to fill it more completely and they lavish still more gifts upon it so as to accomplish the great mystery of love and unity.

Elizabeth of the Trinity did not place obstacles in the way of her soul's purification, but allowed the useless branches to be cut away, thus freeing her soul to respond to God's will for her. She knew that for Christ to live on in her, she must disappear and, as did all the saints, she possessed a fidelity so heroic that the divine life given her at baptism had become the very fabric of her being.

So let us be renewed in our innermost souls, stripping ourselves of the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new ... according to the image of Him who created us (Col. 3:9-10). It is to be done gently and simply, by withdrawing ourselves from all that is not God. Then the soul no longer fears or desires anything. Its will is completely lost in God's will and since that is what constitutes divine union, it can say, 'I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me' (Gal. 2:20).

Father Louis of the Trinity, OCD, summarized the life and theology of Elizabeth in a letter to Mother Germaine of Jesus, Elizabeth's prioress and beloved 'priest' in whom she had confided with total confidence. He said,

Sister Elizabeth ... knew how to remain in interior peace and then to wait, despite the void, the cold of the Nights with their glacial winds. She could wait fully awake in faith, wholly in an attitude of adoration, wholly given up to His creative action. She could submit to the divine cauterizing, to the delicate treatment of Him whom the liturgy calls a 'burning fire', a 'spiritual unction'. In a word, she could bury and lose herself as the Praise of His Glory, while waiting to depart and be forever with 'Light, Life and Love'.

A Praise of Glory is a soul ever gazing upon God in faith and simplicity. It reflects all that He is; it is like a fathomless abyss into which He may flow and overflow; it is also like a crystal through which He can shine and behold His perfections and His own splendour. A soul that thus allows the Divine Being to satisfy in it His need to communicate all that He is and all that He has, is truly the Praise of Glory.

FAITH AND SIMPLICITY

Elizabeth was baptized on 22 July 1880. Born on a Sunday, the 18th, a day honouring the Holy Trinity, she would complete the cycle of her destiny within this mystery. Divine life became for her in baptism an indelible seal and a sign of sanctifying grace, renewing in

her the ‘inherent righteousness’ of a child of God. Her baptism was a beginning in grace, leading her progressively to her Triune God, ‘to be holy and spotless and to live through love in his presence’ (Eph. I). Baptism is a sacrament given only once, yet as we mature in the intensity of our baptismal promises, the graces received will add to the glory of God’s kingdom both here and in the life to come.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ ... to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:1-6).

Baptism brings us into the communion of saints in which our life becomes a continuum from earth to eternity, uniting us to all of God’s creation as members of his mystical body, ‘for he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth’ (Eph. 1:9-10).

At baptism it is the totality of our person which is graced in the fine point of the soul, yet we need to allow faith, hope and charity to penetrate the whole of our life. We ‘receive the spirit of adoption as sons in which we cry, Abba, Father’ (Rom. 8:15) and become true adorers such as the Father seeks.⁰ It was Elizabeth’s predestination to become a Praise of Glory, a true adorer, singing in eternity her unending canticle of love to the All-Holy Trinity.

To live in God, ‘to reflect all that He is and to be a fathomless abyss into which He may flow and overflow’, we must die to self and pass through a ‘night’ of purifying love. ‘Sister Elizabeth plumbed the depths of the love of God’, wrote Father Vallée. ‘She was in touch with the Giver of all gifts, and at the fountain of love she found the overflowing grace that made her, so to speak, die in God, by being continuously and completely given over to Him’.

There is a Being who is Love and who desires to have us live with Him. Oh! It is delightful! He is there, keeping me company, helping me to suffer, making me rise above my suffering to rest in Him. Do as I do, and you will see how everything becomes transformed.

God draws his saints from all walks of life and their personalities are as varied as the colours in a rainbow. When we look over the spectrum of God’s chosen ones, we can marvel at his mercy and love, taking confidence in the knowledge that none are excluded from his grace if only they respond. Elizabeth of the Trinity died when she was only twenty-six. Another French saint of the same period, who was also very young when she died and whom most of us know, is St Thérèse of Lisieux. She wrote her autobiography under obedience and we find in it many colourful examples of her daily life. In the writings of Elizabeth of the Trinity, we do not find such lively accounts as, for example, when St Thérèse speaks of the nun who rattled her rosary in choir, rattling too the nerves of the saint! Or the grouchy old nun, just a bit demanding, whom St Thérèse nursed with much patience and love. These little accounts are given to us so that we may learn virtue from them and grow in our love, patience and compassion towards others.

⁰ Vatican Council II, *The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, General Editor, Austin Flannery, OP, Chapter 1, p.4.

Elizabeth of the Trinity was never asked to write her life story and the only information we have of an autobiographical nature is a few accounts left from her diary before she entered Carmel. Most of this pre-Carmel diary was carefully destroyed by Elizabeth. The depths of her spirituality and personality may be found, however, in her correspondence and in the wealth of her retreats written as her illness slowly overtook her.*

Sister Elizabeth evidently did not feel compelled to give details of her contact with others. This, in itself, teaches us something. We learn from her very silence and find in it a purity of heart, a continual gaze towards the Eternal and an abandonment to the loving providence of God. The little ways in which we may annoy or give pain, our imperfections and infidelities are the lot of us all and the result of our human condition and thus we learn much from the vivid descriptions of St Thérèse, whose saintly life becomes for us a veritable model of her 'little way'. Elizabeth of the Trinity was seeking to be 'in tune' and to follow the rhythm and vibrations of God's call within her. Her witness of silence helps us to rise above our impressions. It is so easy to let our emotions and impressions become exaggerated and obscure the truth. In the perspective of eternity, all these little things become but particles of dust to be wiped away and cleared from one's consciousness. They only clutter the heart and muddle the mind. Elizabeth directly and explicitly tells us always to fix our eyes upon the Lord in faith and simplicity, resisting inappropriate curiosity, and to preserve modesty with a joyful and tranquil heart.

As soon as God sees that, having co-operated with His initial grace, we are capable of receiving His grace, His free goodness is ready to bestow upon us the gift that makes us resemble Him. Our aptitude to receive grace depends upon the interior integrity wherewith we move towards Him, and when He brings His gifts, God can also bestow Himself, stamp His likeness upon us, absolve and deliver us.

In her desire for spiritual perfection, Elizabeth saw her prayer in relation to her love for others. During her illness, before she was confined to the infirmary, she loved to help with little chores like watering the plants in the sacristy and sewing the habit of a young postulant, all of which she did with much love and care. She wrote to a friend,

The hour is drawing near when I shall pass from this world to my Father ... in the light of eternity we see things very clearly. Oh, how empty is everything that has not been done for God and with God! I beg you to set the seal of love upon everything; for only that which is so marked will last ... every minute is given us in order that we may become more deeply rooted in God ... in order that our resemblance to our Divine Model may become more striking, our union with Him more intimate.

Blessed Elizabeth wrote her Prayer to the All-Holy Trinity on an old sheet of paper, giving it no title. It was found, undated, after her death among her papers. From her 'unchanging' God, as expressed in this prayer, we have an expanded vision of God's truth and justice in contrast to our inherent human weakness. God's love is without measure and inspires in us a longing for the transcendent.

It seems to me that the weakest soul, even the one that is most blameworthy, is the one that has the best grounds for hope. By forgetting itself and throwing itself into the arms of God, it glorifies Him and gives Him more joy than by all its falling

*For a comprehensive study on Elizabeth see *Elizabeth of the Trinity, The Complete Works*. Conrad de Meester, OCD.

back upon self, and all the self-examination that makes it live within its infirmities, while all the time it possesses at the centre of itself a Saviour who wills to purify it every moment.

God continually draws us to himself and we, in all our weakness, respond to him through Christ Jesus., 'Do not say 'that ... you are too wretched for, on the contrary, that is all the more reason for your going to Him who saves. It is not by looking at our own miseries that we shall be cleansed, but by looking upon Him who is all purity and all sanctity'.

God created the human will in perfect harmony with his own. The loss of unity between creature and Creator brought about a falling back of the soul upon itself, blemishing its original beauty. Adam's fall caused the loss of our first innocence and that is the reason we do not possess the wholeness with which we were created. The Holy Spirit guides us in restoring our unity so that we may want only what God wants for us.

St Paul says that 'our God is a consuming fire' (Heb. 12:29). If we remain continually united to Him by means of a simple, loving gaze of faith, if, like our adored Master, we can say at the end of each day, 'I do always the things that please Him' (Jn. 8:29) He will know well how to consume us and, like two little sparks, we shall go and lose ourselves in the immense fire, there to burn at our ease throughout eternity.

Sanctifying grace given to us at baptism imparts to our soul an inclination towards all that is of God and it can be lost only by our own deliberate rebellion in an act of mortal sin. This saving grace instils into our soul an unceasing movement towards an inner vision of God's majesty and glory. 'Oh, my unchanging Lord, that each moment may take me further into the depths of Your Mystery'.

As we plunge further into the depths of God's mystery, allowing faith to penetrate our attitudes, we sense our need to put on the mind of Christ.

A soul that would live in faith, beneath the eyes of God, that would have the 'single eye' of which Our Lord speaks in the gospel, which is to say that purity of intention that looks only to God; that soul, I think, would also live in humility. It would know how to recognize the gifts it has received, for humility is truth; but it would take nothing of them to itself, referring all to God.

We shall be recognized as Christ's disciples, wrote the beloved disciple John by our love for one another. Each soul is a unique being whose name God called at the moment of its conception. As we become united with God in mind and heart, so too our affections become supernaturally oriented. Supernatural love is not without human warmth, but it is unselfish, it does not possess. It simply allows the other to be. It is a love which sees beyond human limitations to the hidden potential of divine goodness. It refrains from judgments, aggressiveness and criticism. It graciously surrenders itself in simplicity, and with prudence and humility seeks God's presence within each moment. 'No one can trouble the humble soul ... for it has cast itself into an abyss so deep that no one can follow it!' Supernatural love builds up and is supportive of others: '... never a day goes by but that I pray for you. You see, I feel that all the treasures of the soul of Christ are mine and so I feel so rich! How happy I am to draw upon this source for those I love and who have helped me so much'.

Elizabeth passed through a phase in which she had to check self-complacency and the

danger of regarding others with a too critical eye. In the *Reminiscences* we read:

... having herself overcome all her difficulties by the efforts of her will and through the graces received in prayer, she was occasionally astonished to sense in other souls certain states less freed from self and, without being aware of it, she might have yielded to some secret self-complacency, or let herself give way to some uncharitable judgments. It is true she had been warned against these subtle forms of self-love, but 'what doth he know that hath not been tried?' In the school of interior trial, Sister Elizabeth was to acquire more quickly this self-knowledge which is the foundation of humility no less than its perfection.

Elizabeth's reactions as a young novice tell us that we are not always going to like everyone. There will be those who irritate us, whose mentality and cultural background may be quite different from our own and whose ways we find difficult to accept or understand. There will be some who snub us and who may even try to harm us by unkind words or slander. We can be grateful to experience this suffering as it gives us the opportunity to become aware of our own limitations and need for growth. 'I am aware that my will is developing and being strengthened by suffering', wrote Elizabeth. When someone pinches us, figuratively speaking, by their behaviour or attitude, they may be saying, 'Look at me!' When we look at them do we see Christ? Are we able to surrender ourselves enough to break down the barriers of our own fears? Is Christ so truly present in our own life that we can step forward in grace and meet the other in an embrace of acceptance? Being 'as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves' demands a refinement of our senses which can be given to us only by the Master himself.

Let us sanctify ourselves for the sake of souls and since we are members of one and the same body, in the measure in which we possess abundantly the divine life we shall be able to impart it to the great body of the Church. For me, all apostleship is summed up in two words: union and love. Pray that I may fully realise them in my life and therefore that I may live buried within the Most Holy Trinity.

He strengthened in faith; believe that He loves you, that He wants to help you Himself in the struggles which you must undergo; believe in His love, His *exceeding love*! Feed your soul on the great truths of the Faith, which reveal to you all His riches and the end for which He created you. Yes, we are weak. I will even say we are nothing but wretchedness, but He knows that well. He so loves to forgive us, to raise us up and carry us away into Himself, into His purity, His infinite sanctity. It is by His continual contact with us that He will cleanse us. He wants us to be so pure and He Himself will be our purity. We must allow ourselves to be transformed into one and the same image with Him and that quite simply, by loving all the time with the love which makes those who love permanently one.

Sister Elizabeth is asking us to take a leap from our insecurities and abandon all in faith to God's loving care. In this faith we are drawn to simplicity.

Simplicity is the beginning and the end of the virtues, their splendour and glory ... it treads underfoot all that is evil in our nature, it gives peace and silences the vain clamours that arise within us. It is simplicity that, hour by hour, increases our resemblance to the divine ... which bears us always into the depths wherein He dwells ... simplicity gives us the inheritance prepared for us from all eternity.

The impurities of our egoism will gradually be purified and transformed as we begin to see everything through the eyes of Christ. We accept our imperfections as a process of our refining.

He hungers to consume us absolutely. He enters in, even to our very marrow, and the more we lovingly allow Him to do so, the more we savour His presence. He knows that we are poor, but He does not mind about that and He spares us nothing. He also takes us into Himself, first burning away in His love all our vices, failings and sins. Then, when He sees that we are quite pure He comes. He wants to consume our life in order to change it into His: ours full of faults, His full of grace and glory.

Our weaknesses may be the means of our sanctification if we allow God to work through them. Christ himself will give us a new heart — his heart — that in him we may come to love the Father and others with a heart that is simple and pure. ‘Ask God that I may live my life fully as a Carmelite; to be the fiancée of Christ implies such a close union! Why has He loved me so? I feel so little, so poverty-stricken; but I love Him. It is all I can do. I love Him with His own love.

A SOUL’S ‘NIGHT’

As we start out on our journey in prayer, we may receive satisfactions and pleasure from our devotions. Our appetite for pleasant feelings is whetted by spiritual exercises which may be a source of comfort to us. We are diligent and take our prayer seriously. A time may come, however, when all does not seem to be going so well and we are not sure just where we are. Uneasiness begins to take hold of us and we feel lost. It may be a soul’s ‘night’.

St John of the Cross loved the out-of-doors and often took long evening walks. In the night-time he found many analogies corresponding to one’s experience in prayer. Elizabeth of the Trinity, his spiritual daughter, also found in the night a comparison with the nights of her soul. When St John of the Cross metaphorically uses the term ‘night’, he does so to draw us into the darkness of our soul, placing before us our need for the purification of our appetites or senses, so that we may grow and mature in our faith and be united with God.

The nights of purification fall generally into two categories: an *active night* where the soul strives towards God by its own efforts to live in faith, hope and charity, and a *passive night* in which God himself takes the initiative, working through the soul’s spiritual faculties. The passive night is obscure and dark, and as a mother weans her little one from the tenderness of her breasts, so too God draws us to venture beyond ourselves and leave the sweet warm milk of the child for solid food.

In the night of our soul, we begin to respond more fully to God’s touch of grace upon us. The many ways in which our bad habits have become entangled in our soul are gradually loosened and removed as God withholds those things in which we previously found much pleasure.

How people delude themselves as to the real meaning of union with God! There are those who think they have reached it because they enjoy sensible consolations;

they make one think of children playing with ashes which the wind blows away.
No. no! True union lies not in enjoyment, but in self-abnegation.

When Sister Elizabeth could no longer take part in the Office of Matins because of her illness, she would nevertheless give up her much-needed sleep to sit by her window and, looking out into the night, she would be united with her sisters in their prayers for all mankind. 'She spent the earlier hours of the night in prayer and at her window ... Gazing into the starry sky, she allowed her soul to be borne away on the wings of the sacred canticle, into the bosom of her 'Three'.

Elizabeth wrote to her mother:

As I could not sleep, I settled myself at the window and remained alone there until nearly midnight, in prayer with my Master. I spent a heavenly night! The sky was so blue, so calm, the monastery so silent ... and, in retrospect, I went over these five years [in Carmel] so full of grace.

A breeze passing her window cooled her fevered cheeks and gave her a moment of relief from the pain in her diseased body. In the night of her soul, a light breeze of grace cooled and comforted her interiorly, renewing within her a deep silence and peace. Praying at her window under a full moon, she sensed God's mystery as she sought in the night, objects softly outlined as the harsh contours of the day became obscured. In the darkness of a soul's night, our attitudes take on different dimensions. Perhaps as she gazed into the vastness of the night she felt in her soul the immensity of God dwelling within her. 'There we have the great act of our faith. It is the means whereby we render God love for love ... it does not stop at preference or feelings; it matters little to it whether it feels or not ... it believes in His love'.

The nights of a soul ebb and flow as one responds to the Holy Spirit. We cannot think of these nights as being only psychological. Psychological passivity often results from a lack of direction, a drifting out to nowhere. The passivity one may experience in a spiritual night is focussed on God; it surrenders and lets itself go, so that God may possess it. "Night to night shows knowledge" (Ps. 19:2). How consoling this is! My helplessness, my repugnances, my ignorance, even my faults, declare the glory of the eternal. And my sufferings of soul or body proclaim the glory of my Master'.

Elizabeth felt the night's hiddenness and in its blackness sensed loneliness. Fear hides in darkness. Night may have been void, dark and penetrating, as a mysterious and unknown voice calling Elizabeth, beseeching her and drawing her forth into the unexplored depths of her own soul.

I shall remember our conversations ... our walks in the evening in the moonlight ... [she wrote to the Canon who had been a close family friend, and recalled her vacations with him in the country] up there, close to the church, it was so lovely in the silence and serenity of the night! Did you not feel that my whole soul was being carried away by God?

Night holds many secrets and one's thinking tends to seep into another level of consciousness.

Rising up by the strength of its interior gaze, the soul that is simple enters into itself, and contemplates in its own depths the sanctuary where it is touched by the

Holy Trinity. The soul at this deep level has thus penetrated even into that centre which is the gate to eternal life.

We discover that, although a soul's night may be painful, it is also positive. Whether the night is affecting one's prayer or the circumstances of one's life, it has become an uprooting from the old self.

'You are dead and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3). There is the condition: we must be 'dead', otherwise we may be hidden in God sometimes, but we do not *live* habitually in Him; for all our sensitiveness, our self-seeking and such-like, causes us to depart from Him.

In the night of our soul we may become starkly aware of our limitations. No longer are there any consolations and all props seem to be knocked out from under us. We have hit rock-bottom and all that we can do is willingly to give ourselves over to God's love and mercy. 'It is at the bottom that we shall find the divine "shock", the abyss of our poverty, our nothingness, confronted with the abyss of the mercy, the immensity, the All that is of God!'

In her soul's nights, Elizabeth remained at peace within the embrace of faith.

Who could have thought, seeing her so calm and peaceful ... on some of those Sundays and feast days which she spent in the oratory without depriving Our Lord of a single moment, that she had suffered so much that she had been 'tempted to run away'?

Very often [wrote Blessed Elizabeth] I spent all these times in the 'dark night', but sometimes He compensates me at evening prayer and still more the next day. Then I reap the reward of the Acts and silence of the day before.

Union with God cannot be reached without experiencing a purifying night of love, the dark night of the senses. The intellect may undergo inner conflicts, doubts casting shadows on one's faith and darkening one's hope by discouragement; but in this testing, one is strengthened and able to stretch out to take hold of a renewed hope, in spite of the emptiness one feels, or the awareness of one's insufficiency before God.

As a novice, Elizabeth had experienced dryness in her prayer, uneasiness and strange whims of the imagination. These purifications became themselves a prayer as she became separated from more sensual influences by her growth in love and faith.

The times of mental prayer did bring some relief to the Novice, even though spent without consolation. Even so, her prayer, so simple and still more interior through her growing faith, kept her always in the attitude of a little child nestled in the arms of Him whom she loved without feeling Him, in whom she believed without seeing Him and of whose love she remained confident, even though she may have experienced only the severity of His Divine Jealousy.

Up to this point her prayer had been a pleasure, a perceptible sense of union with God. Now the Lord wanted to wean her of these comforts and detach her from herself.

There were times when the divine star was eclipsed [said her Prioress] but she remained steadfast in her faith as in her hope and lived upon the grace from the

words of St John of the Cross, 'Faith means seeing God face to face in darkness, possessing Him though He is hidden.'

In October 1902, Sister Elizabeth took part in a retreat given by Father Vallée. Her Prioress wrote,

It brought only more suffering to her, because at the time she was unable to find any attraction in those things which previously had been such a delight in her life. The teachings which she had received with ineffable joy when she had first met the distinguished Dominican, now seemed to augment the distress of her painful night of testing, so much so that those eight days had become a veritable agony.

Reflecting upon this difficult period, Elizabeth wrote, 'Let us believe in love with the beloved Apostle, John (1 Jn. 4:16) and since we possess Him within us, what matter the Nights which may darken our sky? If Jesus seems asleep, let us rest near Him; let us be very calm and silent and not wake Him, but wait in faith'.

While on this earth, we see Jesus through the eyes of faith. At death we hope to see him face to face, as glory is the normal continuation of grace. For those in whom grace had not become an integral part of their earthly life, this meeting may not be immediate. They never sank deep enough into their inmost depths, but remained on the surface of life, tossed easily by the winds of fashion, pleasures and passing delights. For them a time of expiation is needed which the Church calls 'purgatory'.

When, for us also, the decisive moment comes, [wrote Elizabeth] since we shall be fixed forever in the state in which God finds us, ... we should not think of God confronting us to judge us, but that we have been delivered from our bodies; our souls will be fitted one day to see Him as He is, without the veil between, just as we possessed Him all through life, only we could not behold Him face to face.

Being both soul and body within time and space, we cannot measure time in the after-life as we do on earth. We have no way of knowing how long this time of expiation may be — perhaps a second, or even years. The chief function of purgatory is to be a time after death in which the soul may continue to become free of its egoism and sinfulness. The gift of graces received in earthly life will continue to flourish in eternity, but will no longer grow in intensity.

When we contemplate our eternal predestination, visible things seem so contemptible ... Baptism made you His adopted child who signed you with the seal of the most Holy Trinity; 'and whom He called, them He also justified' (Rom. 8:30). How many times have you been justified by the sacrament of penance, and by all those touches of God in your soul of which you were not even aware! 'And whom He justified, them He also glorified'. That is what awaits us in eternity; but remember that our degree of glory will be the degree of grace in which God finds us at the moment of death. Allow Him to complete His work of predestination in you ... 'As therefore you have received Jesus Christ, walk in Him'.

In fixing the moment of our death, God has given us all the time necessary for the interiorization of grace. Many souls always remain within the realm of the Active Night or first stage of their spiritual life. Their development is arrested and may never reach full maturity. Others have tried to open themselves to the Holy Spirit, making some progress in perfection, but when the shadow of the Passive Night hovers over them, they hesitate.

They cannot come to the point of losing their life in order to find it and, inhibited from responding to grace by their egoism, they remain locked within themselves. Other souls, resisting grace, deny that they have even been sinful. For them, life was simply enjoying the pleasures of the moment. There was no spiritual combat for them and they are the ones most in need of purification after death. 'I no longer fear my weakness [wrote Blessed Elizabeth]. It is what gives me confidence, for the Strong One is within me and His power is almighty, working, as says the Apostle, beyond all that we could hope for'.

Response to grace is a participation in God's divine plan, allowing divine life to transform us. We cannot judge others nor really know their motives. The secrets of the heart are known only to God and he alone determines the extent of sin in a life. We depend upon his mercy. 'How sweet and easy death is for souls who have loved only Him and who ... have sought not the things which are seen, "for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal"'.

Purifications remove the obstacles which keep grace from acting in us. The saints experienced purgatory on earth, but it was different from the purgatory after death which is without merit. For the saints, and maybe for us, these trials become meritorious before death.

I want to be a saint in order to make Him happy ... ask Him that henceforth I may no longer live save by love; that is a vocation. Let us unite to make our days a continual Communion; let us awake in love, and all day long let us surrender ourselves to love by doing the will of God, under His eyes, with Him, in Him, for Him alone; let us give ourselves uninterruptedly and in whatever way He wills. Then when night comes, after a dialogue of love which has never ceased in our hearts, let us fall asleep still in love. It is a consuming fire; let us do our Purgatory in this fire!

There is an interaction between our body and soul which affects our free will and which cannot possibly exist after death when we shall have become pure spirit. Earthly purifications are normal responses to our baptismal grace. After hearing a sermon on death, Elizabeth reflected,

Oh Jesus! Why should I tremble to appear before You? Can You condemn one who, notwithstanding her weakness, her innumerable sins, has lived only for You? True, she is a miserable creature who has deserved hell a thousand times over, but Lord, she has so earnestly loved You that surely You would not refuse to know her! Let her then follow You, singing the virgins' canticle and thus be inebriated with the joys of Your Presence! O Death, if I did not hope to suffer and do a little good upon earth, how I should cry out for You! ... Jesus! To suffer well, to endure all, but never to cause You sorrow! Keep me; my heart is there, close to Yours. Watch over it, protect it well and consume it in the fire of Your love!

Through the night of her soul, refined and purified, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity arrived at a deep peace. No matter what aspect of it we consider, night, by its very obscurity becomes a time of faith. Darkness implies sightlessness, yet the absence of sight may develop other senses. An unsighted person hears, smells, tastes and feels things with an astuteness that the sighted person may fail to possess. Faith, hope and charity may then grow in strength as one's exterior eyes are dimmed to trivialities and one's interior eyes are opened to the eternal. 'Let us raise the veil by faith and follow Him who has gone far away into those realms where all is peace and light and where suffering is

transformed into love’.

A FATHOMLESS ABYSS

‘A Praise of Glory ... is like a fathomless abyss into which He may flow and overflow’. Elizabeth of the Trinity wanted to be a little vase at God’s disposal, to be filled to the brim and overflowing with his goodness and love. As we come to see God at work in our life, recognizing his love in the hidden corners of our soul, we become all the more aware of our need for purification, especially of our imagination. The imagination is intrinsically good, a gift from God and a source from which we may draw from stored impressions and with the use of the intellect and memory, create afresh the value contained in an event. Constructively used, it is a rich source of inspiration. With grace, the imagination may give a viability and clarity to our life. A negative imagination is destructive and only leads to confusion. In the *Reminiscences* of Elizabeth we read:

Her efforts to remain thus recollected within herself all day long, despite the tumult of her imagination and her over-sensitiveness, enabled her to find help in her troubles and to remain fixed in her ideals ... no one who saw her suspected the extent of her inward suffering.

A key to Elizabeth’s proper use of the imagination is found in her simplicity. A negative imagination is not rooted in simplicity, it weaves complicated webs of intrigue. Sister Elizabeth was ‘an exceptionally simple soul and completely freed from self by this simplicity’.

A positive imagination is transparent. A negative imagination is dark and clouded. When our fears and doubts are based upon suppositions, we must not feed them with a negative imagination which only spreads them like an insidious cancer. We must cut out these cancerous thoughts with the sharp knife of faith. From faith and trust will blossom forth simplicity and abandonment, from which will come a freedom to be fully as God intended us. We discipline our imagination by not allowing it to dwell and elaborate upon intrigues or fears which draw us further into delusion. We direct our imagination to usefully aiding our intellect and will. Imagination, nourished in faith and simplicity, will open the window of the soul to a spirit of goodness, kindness and charity, letting the fresh air of forgiveness fill it with a tenderness and mercy coming only from God

As we pass through our spiritual night, we find ourselves being drawn into a desert. All the self-awareness gained in the night becomes as nothing within the bleak emptiness of the desert. In this wasteland, the smallness of the creature stands out so clearly against the majesty of the Creator. Elizabeth tells us, ‘The soul falls down ... plunges itself into the abyss of its own nothingness, so sinking into it that it finds the true, invincible and perfect peace that naught can trouble, for it has cast itself so low that none will descend to follow it!’ In the isolation of the desert, one comes to realize one’s total dependence on the Almighty.

God’s love, like the burning bush before Moses, is a consuming fire which destroys and burns all obstacles to union with him. Cleansed in this fire of love, our impurities emerge from the shadowy depths to the daylight of our soul and we begin to see ourselves in all our wretchedness.

In the light of eternity, God is making me understand many things and I come to

tell you, as from Him, not to fear sacrifice and struggle, but rather to rejoice in it. If your nature provides you with ... a battleground, do not be discouraged ... love your wretchedness, for it is upon that that God exercises His mercy! When the sight of it plunges you into sadness, or drives you in upon yourself, that is self-love. In your hours of weakness, go and take refuge in the prayer of the Divine Master. On the cross He saw you and He prayed for you and that prayer is eternally living and present to His Father, and it is that which will save you from your human miseries. The more you feel your weakness, the greater should be your trust, for it is upon Him alone that we are leaning. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new spirit within me (Ps. 51:10). God will take us at our word and place us in a crucible of testing, refining us as gold in the crucible of fire, the crucible of love. 'Love has only one measure and that is to love without measure' [wrote Elizabeth].

When the desert of one's soul seems overwhelming, one may experience at the same time a deep sense of union with God: 'the abyss of his love surrounds you as a garment'. The soul suffers yet it knows it is loved by God and this gives it immense joy even in the midst of misery. 'Always believe in love [Elizabeth wrote to her younger sister]. If you have to suffer, it means that you are all the more loved'. Elizabeth, purged and renewed in a humble spirit of gratitude before God, was able to exclaim, 'I ought to be an instrument from which the Divine Master can draw the melodies He prefers, effacing myself so as to give Him all the glory, only seconding His action by co-operating with His grace.

The desert lays bare our human condition and all that keeps us from wholeness.

God made use of temptations to show her clearly the abyss of her nothingness and safeguard his own glory in this soul which He willed to load down with the riches of His grace [wrote Elizabeth's prioress]. Thus He permitted that the devil should stir up many motions in the sensual part of the soul ... and cause other vexations, both spiritual and sensual, from which it is not in the power of the soul to free itself until the Lord sends His angel, as in the psalm, round about them that fear Him and delivers them.

From reading St John of the Cross and St Teresa of Jesus, Elizabeth knew of the trials awaiting one who desires union with God. She had been blessed with understanding and supportive superiors. Not everyone is so fortunate, and one's spiritual life could vegetate. As Elizabeth became disciplined and purified, she was in a position to help others. Her advice came from her own experience and the secret of her sanctity was always to forget oneself and abide in the All-Holy Trinity.

During these painful times when you feel a terrible void, think how He is enlarging the capacity of your soul so that it can receive Him, making it, as it were, infinite just as He is infinite. So, as far as your will is concerned, try to remain perfectly joyous beneath the hand that is crucifying you ... look upon each pain as a token of love coming to you directly from God, in order that He may unite you to Him. I will tell you my secret. Think of this God who abides within you, whose temple you are ... little by little, the soul becomes accustomed to abiding in His loving company. It understands how it supports within itself a little heaven where the God of Love has made His abode and then it breathes, as it were, in a divine atmosphere ... the body remains on earth while the soul lives beyond the veil of Him who is Unchangeable. How necessary it is to suffer if God's work is to be done in the soul! He desires immensely to enrich us with His

graces, but it is we who fix the measure in proportion as we can let ourselves be sacrificed by Him.

St John of the Cross wrote of ‘the dark night through which a soul journeys towards the divine light of perfect union with God’.⁰ Interior renewal is not easy, yet transfiguration is necessary for transforming union. Elizabeth’s night of the soul included not only the spiritual, but also a physical Calvary. When she was near death, her stomach would no longer accept food. Finally, she could not even sip water without excruciating pain and could no longer receive the Eucharist, not even a tiny fragment of the Sacred Host. As her sisters helplessly stood by, one of them in sympathy mentioned this to Elizabeth and she replied, ‘I find Him on the cross; it is there that He is giving me life’. When Elizabeth was only two months away from death, it was a consolation for her to speak once more with her admired spiritual friend and guide, Father Vallée, who told her to surrender herself simply and entirely to God, leaving him free to act, without defining his ways of dealing with her. ‘I feel love beside me [she would say] like a living being, telling me “I wish to live in your company, and for that reason I wish you to suffer without thinking you are suffering and simply surrender yourself to My actions”’.

Of her illness she said, ‘... it seems a bit mysterious to me, I call it the illness of love’. And again, ‘There are exchanges of love which can only be made on the cross’. Elizabeth’s trials had become redemptive and apostolic. She no longer felt banished from God, but identified with the suffering of Christ who saved the world by the Cross. ‘Never has my happiness been so great since God has deigned to associate me with the sufferings of my Divine Master’.

‘I no longer have any desire but to reach heaven as pure as an angel, transformed into Jesus Crucified’, Elizabeth confided to her Mother Sub-Prioress. Love had hollowed out such great capacities in her soul that Christ was able to relive in her his mystery at Gethsemane. ‘I love it because it allows me to be conformed to the One who is my Spouse and my Love’. Even the desire to win merits was no longer important; Jesus is all that counts.

If Our Lord were to offer me a choice between dying in ecstasy or in the loneliness of Calvary, I would prefer the latter, not for the sake of the merit, but to glorify Him and be like Him. If I had died in my former state of soul, it would have been too easy! It is in pure faith that I now leave and I prefer it that way. I am thus more like my Master and more in truth.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity attained to a maturity in which all that had been imperfect in her disappeared, her soul overflowing with a deep joy. This joy was not human, but was the joy of God himself. The peace of her soul was the fruit of the Holy Spirit, forged and wrought out of her purgative sufferings, transforming her into a ‘Praise of Glory ... a fathomless abyss into which He may flow and overflow’.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘A Praise of Glory is a being ever in thanksgiving’

⁰ *The Collected Works of St John of the Cross*, Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, OCD, ICS Publications, Washington D.C. 1973, p.62.

ELIZABETH'S PRAYER

Blessed Elizabeth's only desire was to be in union with her divine Master and it was this that led her to Carmel.

I loved prayer so much and God so much [she wrote when she was fourteen] that even before my First Communion, I could not understand how one could give one's heart to any other. From then on, I was resolved to love none other than Him and to live for Him alone.

Her soul had been so deeply touched by grace that God's presence became the pivot of all her hopes, uniting her love to his divine love. God's love took her out of herself, giving her a perspective of eternity which enlarged the whole meaning of her earthly life and its ultimate destination in eternity. As a Carmelite she would say, 'I have found my vocation ... since I shall be eternally a Praise of Glory, I want to be *Laudem Gloriam* here on earth'.

Prayer was a natural part of Elizabeth's life. She never left any systematic essays, but from the *Reminiscences* we have an outline of her prayer and, as mentioned above, Conrad de Meester OCD has uncovered other notes and details which reveal her spiritual growth and expression. Her whole life was enclosed within the Trinity, the source from which she derived her purpose. On Sundays, traditionally dedicated to the Holy Trinity, she would remain rapt in recollection.

This feast is especially mine [she wrote to her sister, Marguerite] and for me there is none like it. At Carmel it is a feast of silence and adoration. I never understood until now how my name so expressed an entire vocation. I invite you to meet me in this great mystery, so that it may be our centre, our home.

One of Elizabeth's sisters in Carmel appropriately summarized her life, 'To me she was a personification of prayer'.

When asked to define a Carmelite's vocation for a prospective postulant, Elizabeth unknowingly drew her own portrait.

A Carmelite is a soul who has observed the Divine Crucified One, has viewed Him who offered Himself as a Victim to His Father, and recollecting herself under this great vision of Christ's Charity, has come to understand His passion of love and has willed to give herself as He has done. On the mountain of Carmel, in solitude, in a prayer which is never finished, which continues unceasingly in the midst of all things, the Carmelite abides, as if already in heaven, for God alone.

Sister Elizabeth realized the value of her prayer within eternity and wanted to make her earthly life 'a prayer which is never finished'. She knew that in eternity she would continue without interruption her mission of praise and adoration and had therefore already begun it on earth. In this sense, contemplative prayer is never separated from intercession. In her own unique way and yet in a similar fashion, Elizabeth could have said with St Thérèse of Lisieux, 'I will spend my heaven doing good on earth'. She shares with Christ in his redemption of all mankind by becoming eternally a soul of intercession, adoration and praise.

A Praise of Glory is a being who is ever in thanksgiving ... in the heaven of her soul the Praise of Glory already begins the office which will be hers in eternity ... ever singing, ever adoring. She has, so to speak, gone forth from herself and become absorbed in praise and love, in her passion for the Glory of her God.

PRAY CONTINUALLY

‘Pray continually and never lose heart’ (Lk.18:1). Even if God does not seem to be answering our prayers, if we look below the surface of events, we see that he really is responding to our needs in ways we least expect. God always hears those who ‘cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them’ (Lk.18:7).

One is so happy living in intimacy with God, making one’s life a heart to heart exchange of love with the Divine Master and knowing that He will be found in the centre of one’s soul. One is then never alone and one’s greatest need becomes a solitude in which to abide and appreciate the presence of this Adored Guest.

A ‘heart to heart exchange with the Divine Master’ is to ‘pray continually and never lose heart’ and takes us immediately to the essential, namely, making one’s life a continual prayer. ‘... I pray for you and keep you in my soul, entirely near God, in that inner sanctuary where I find Him each hour of the day and night. I am never alone: my Christ is always there, praying in me and I pray with Him’. Sister Elizabeth came to realize that prayer is not restricted to a set time but is a state of mind affecting one’s whole day.

The life of a Carmelite is a communion with God from morning till night and from night till morning. If He did not fill our cells and our cloisters [with His presence] how empty they would be! ... in all things we see Him, for we carry Him within us, and our life then becomes an anticipated heaven.

In prayer, one’s receptivity to God’s presence gathers into a unity one’s deepest self. To pray continually is to direct one’s attention to God’s presence. This awakening began in Elizabeth as she was ‘captured’ by the Trinity.

By the simplicity of the gaze which it fixes upon the divine object, the soul is withdrawn from all around it and above all from self. Then it is resplendent with the *Light* of the knowledge of the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6) because it allows Him to reflect Himself in it. Such a soul is truly a Praise of Glory of all His gifts.

Elizabeth’s life within the Trinity became one of simplicity and trust. ‘The Trinity! That is our dwelling-place, our home, the Father’s House from which we should never depart!’ God wants us to come to know him and he extends to us an invitation; but many respond, ‘I haven’t time to pray! My work is my prayer!’ The attention of Jesus was on his Father and not on himself: ‘Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?’ (Lk. 2:49). Our work should be a prayer, but it could very easily become simply ‘my’ work, a selfishness hindering our progress to God. Work is a prayer when there is an awareness that it is performed in God’s presence, and this asks of us an active participation in responding to God’s loving embrace.

It is the Master Himself who comes to voice His desire to see the fire of love enkindled within us [wrote Elizabeth]. The fact is that in itself, all our work, of whatever kind, is nothing in His sight. We cannot give Him anything, nor can we

satisfy His one desire to raise up our souls to their original dignity. Nothing so pleases Him as to see those souls developing and nothing can raise them so high as to become, in some way, equal with God. That is why He asks of the soul the tribute of its love, since it is the property of love to equalise, as far as possible, the lover with the beloved.

Continual prayer is an encounter of love between the creature and the Creator, a disposition of placing before the Father all of our life, enabling us to understand his will for us. Our love becomes an impetus thrusting us forward into a deeper fellowship within the Trinity. 'One must communicate with God throughout the whole day. Surrender ... to love, occupy oneself in such a way as to discover the will of the One who first submitted Himself in order to give us an example'.

God's presence so touched Elizabeth that she was able to find him in all things, each moment becoming a sacrament of God's presence.⁰ Her readiness to do God's will did not remain theoretical as it so often does for most of us. We experience many difficulties in binding ourselves unceasingly to conform to God's good pleasure for us. Our intentions are often too weak and diluted to stimulate within us a genuine openness to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. Our fears, envy and resentments, jealousies, dark spiritual and psychological shadows obscure our freedom, cloud our single eye and our purity of heart. As we place ourselves in God's presence, everything becomes united in him. 'There you have the whole of the Carmelite life: to live in Him. Then all the sacrifices, immolations become divine. In everything that happens the soul sees Him whom it loves, and everything leads it to Him. It is a continual heart to heart communing'.

Christ, our divine model, often withdrew himself from the crowds to go off into the mountains and pray. Christ wants us to place ourselves before the Father even in the midst of our daily activities. 'May love be your cloister. You will carry Him about with you everywhere and even amidst the multitude you will find solitude'.

We must constantly nourish our desire for God as it weakens when we become absorbed in daily chores. In God our intentions become purified, refined and holy, allowing us to return to our centre, knowing that all we do is for God's glory.

Happy the soul that is sufficiently alert and recollected to hear these words of the Word of God! Happy the eyes that in the light of living, deep faith can be present when the Master comes to its inner sanctuary! But what is the meaning of this coming? It is an unceasing generation, an unceasing enlightenment. Christ comes with His divine treasures, but such is the mystery of the divine journeyings that He is continually coming, always for the first time as though He had not come before; for His arrival is independent of time, and takes place in an eternal now; and an eternal desire renews eternally the joys of that coming. The joys He brings are infinite since they are Himself. It seems as though the capacity of the soul is enlarged by His coming, so that it can go forth from itself and pass beyond its limits into the immensity of Him who comes and this phenomenon takes place: God who is in the depths of our being receives God who comes to us, and God contemplates God! God, in whom beatitude consists!

God, ever present in our soul, renews us unceasingly with his mercy and love, bringing us forth in grace to abide in the eternal now of his presence so that 'one may find Him in

⁰ P. de Caussade, *L'Abandon a la Providence Divine*, pp.109-110.

one's sleep as well as in one's prayer, since He is in all, above all, everywhere and always'.

ELIZABETH AND CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity was predestined to be a Praise of Glory.

St Paul makes known to us this divine choice — St Paul who so deeply penetrated into the secret hidden in the heart of God before all ages. He will now enlighten us as to the vocation to which we are called. 'God', he says, 'chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in love' (Eph. 1:4-5).

We want to become souls who contemplate God's love and, like Elizabeth, we wish to be ourselves a Praise of Glory.

Let us be for Him a superadded humanity in which He may renew His mystery. I cannot tell you what peace it gives me to think that He supplies for all my weakness, so that if I fall every moment He is there to lift me up and carry me far away into Himself.

Although Elizabeth's prayer developed gradually, even at a very early age she had received many graces. Her Prioress related, 'She received a spirit of prayer which would have held her for hours in church. A friend of her mother one day asked her what it was that she could say to God for such a long time. "Oh, Madame! We love each other!"'

It was in Carmel's fertile soil that Elizabeth's spirit of prayer would flourish. Here she would find a milieu conducive to her desire for fellowship with her divine Master. The structure of Carmelite life with the Mass, two hours of mental prayer each day, seven Divine Offices, spiritual and scriptural reading, all enriched her intellect, will and affections. Yet this was not enough for her soul so athirst for God. Elizabeth confided to a friend that she spent another hour of prayer between Compline and Matins. 'At a quarter to eight, Compline; after which, until Matins at nine o'clock, we may pray if we want. It is only about eleven o'clock that we leave choir for our night's sleep'. Even during the extreme cold of winter, she included an extra hour of prayer in the evening! 'What a number of matches I had to dispose of', she murmurs, 'in order to avoid curious enquiries!' (There was no electricity in Elizabeth's time and each sister had a small lamp with a candle, to carry through the cloisters at night or in the early morning.) To stay awake during this evening hour after a hard day and then, without a break, go directly to Matins, an Office which was almost two hours long (before the liturgical changes of Vatican II) shows without doubt her capacity and love of prayer. She did indeed find in prayer a 'relaxation and repose'.

It is unfortunate that some consider prayer, especially when the word 'contemplative' is associated with it, as esoteric and inaccessible. Its purpose is not grasped and the veil behind which its mysteries are hidden remains closed. Prayer brings about a transformation of our attitude and we see the ordinary circumstances of our life in a new and transparent way. The natural becomes supernaturalized. We come to discover unknown depths in ourselves. We begin slowly to take on the mind of Christ.

Never mind whether you are all aglow or whether you are downcast; it is the law

of our exile to pass thus from one state to the other; believe that He never changes and that in His loving kindness He is ever bending down to you to carry you away and establish you in Himself.

Not everyone can give two hours a day to mental prayer as did Elizabeth. One may not be free because of other commitments and for some, long periods of prayer might not be advisable. With regard to nutrition, we each differ in what we can eat and how much. Even a short period regularly given to prayer each day is very beneficial. 'How good it is to talk to Him, and rise above all that is transitory and comes to an end! Above suffering and separation, there where all abides forever!' If all our time is spent in preparation for our prayer, that in itself is of value and strengthens our attitude to be receptive to God.

You want to know what I do? [replied Elizabeth to a friend who wondered what cloistered nuns did all day.] I might reply that a Carmelite has only one thing to do and that is to love and to pray. But since she is still on earth, although living already in heaven, while still giving herself wholly to God she must work in order to do His will who first submitted to labour in order to set us an example.

We cut off a vital source of strength in our life when we neglect to pray.

Oh, would that I could tell everyone what sources of strength, of peace and also of happiness they would find if they consented to live in this intimate union with Him [Elizabeth wrote to her mother]. Only they do not know how to wait. If God does not bestow Himself in a manner they can feel, they leave His holy presence and when He comes to them, laden with graces, He finds nobody there. The soul has gone away into exterior things; it no longer dwells in its centre. Recollect yourself from time to time.

The strength of God's presence quiets all the crying voices of inner disturbances and although these may continue from time to time, their influence is weakened. Inner silence is a disposition of our heart, a profound peacefulness which remains even when the surface of life is ruffled. It gives a resilience to bounce back when life gives us a knock. It is an attentiveness ever alert to hear the word of the Lord.

Many words or many acts are not necessary to prove our love for God, as if we somehow wanted to clutch him in the palm of our hand. Even before we have placed ourselves in prayer, God has already begun to work in our heart, inspiring our love.

Let us gaze upon our Master and may this gaze of simple, loving faith separate us from all else, and place, as it were, a cloud between us and the things of the earth ... let us keep everything for Him alone, and sing to the Lord with David, 'I will keep my strength in thee' (Ps. 58:10).

In prayer we recover that deep current of faith within ourselves and it was this awareness which led Elizabeth out of herself and into a total absorption in the holy. 'Who could speak of the bliss of these heart to heart communications in which one can no longer believe one is on this earth, no longer see, no longer hear anything but what is of God — God speaking to the soul, speaking to it of things so sweet'.

God usually speaks through events and especially in the holy scriptures.

We ought to receive everything as coming directly from our Father's divine hand,

who loves us and who, in all our trials, is working out His own end — that of uniting us more closely to Himself. Launch your soul upon the sea of courage and holy abandonment to Him! Remember that nothing that troubles you and makes you afraid comes from God, for He is the Prince of Peace and has promised peace to men of good will.

‘God speaking to the soul of things so sweet’ does not mean that one should always accept as God’s word what may really be a product of one’s imagination. We need to discern those signs which the Lord may inspire in the soul, and the Holy Spirit will help us to know if such signs are of ourselves or of God.

Elizabeth’s prayer was not restrictive, but an ever-expanding consciousness of the Trinity within her.

Let us empty our souls so as to allow Him to ‘leap down’ into them; to come and impart to each of us that eternal life that is His. For that, the Father has given Him power over all flesh, the gospel tells us. Then, in the silence of prayer, let us listen to Him. He is the ‘beginning’ who speaks within us.

God our loving Father knows our every need. The more we become present to Him, the more we are at ease and at home with him, bringing before him all our cares and hopes. We come before the presence of the One loved, in all our poverty and sin, begging that he himself be our holiness. ‘The saints grasped so well the true knowledge that makes us go forth from all earthly things and, above all, from ourselves in order to cast ourselves upon God and live only in Him. He is in us in order to sanctify us, so let us ask Him to be Himself our holiness’. In our weakness, God our Father draws us back to himself, if we faithfully live His life, associating ourselves with all the movements of His soul, we shall no longer have to fear our weaknesses, for He will be our strength, and who can snatch us out of His hand?’ As we keep ourselves attentive before God, little by little we enter into prayer and the Holy Spirit becomes our guide. ‘It belongs to love never to seek itself, to keep nothing for itself, but to give everything to Him it loves. Happy the soul that truly loves, for the Lord has become its captive!’

Those who knew Elizabeth confirm that her prayer was one of simplicity, a prayer of the heart in which she centred herself repeatedly on some event within Christ’s life, such as Christ on the cross or the presence of the Trinity within her soul. ‘Our soul needs to drink from the Strength of prayer, especially of contemplative prayer, that heart to heart intimacy in which the soul flows entirely into God, while God Himself enters into the soul so as to transform it in Him’, She brought herself into the presence of Jesus in a very simple way, imploring him to be the pivot of her whole life. She possessed this simplicity even before entering Carmel and the Prioress who accepted her as a postulant, Mother Marie of Jesus, commented:

What can I tell you about the visits to our grilles? ... it goes without saying that we spoke of prayer: hers was totally simple and all of a piece. The Master was there within, fashioning her to His will. She complained of having nothing to do, overjoyed that it was God who did all in her prayer.

Elizabeth’s prayer was an activity of will and intellect drawn down into the depths of her soul, absorbed and transformed into a loving awareness of her Master. ‘Her soul is so simple, its movements are so deeply hidden that they cannot be detected. She seems to reproduce on earth the life of that Being who is divine — the Simple Being’. Blessed Elizabeth is referring to the most holy Mother of God, yet we could apply her words to

her own life. Who could be a better example of the contemplative soul than Mary, the Mother of God? Elizabeth's gaze focussed on the 'Simple Being' is one of love more than of thinking, for it is not so much the mind as the heart which moves her to love. Her prayer is not an intellectual process, but a humble gazing upon God in all his glory, listening and loving. As Mary at Bethany, Elizabeth had become one who 'chose the better part', who was totally absorbed in God by an intuitive glance embracing all of reality in one and the same act 'Her prayer seemed to simplify itself even more after this retreat tin 1904]: "One must look to Him always" she said speaking of the divine Master; "It must be done in silence, it is so simple". This was her only desire'.

Her prayer at this time was still influenced by human activity, but it was a simplified prayer and there was still that co-operation with grace in which one chooses to distinguish and react according to one's own will. As one spiritually matures, activity recedes into the background. This is spoken of by spiritual authors as 'mystical or infused prayer' in which God's activity predominates and one can do little but submit to it.

To what a height of glory we are called! I understand that silence, the recollection of the saints, who could no longer emerge from their contemplation. The good God led them to the summit of the mountain, where union between Himself and the soul that has become His bride is consummated.

The prayer of simplicity usually precedes infused contemplation, predisposing the soul to be ready always to leave to God the freedom of granting his gifts to whom he chooses and when he deems it useful for his glory and the good of the soul.

Although Elizabeth had experienced infused prayer before entering Carmel, this does not mean that she was fully given to the prayer of contemplation. She experienced the empirical awareness of God spoken of by St Teresa of Jesus and in 1899 she wrote:

How I love the way [St Teresa of Jesus] treats of this subject when she speaks of contemplation, that stage of prayer in which it is God who works, uniting our soul so intimately to Him, so that it is no longer we who live, but He who lives in us ... I have recognized there that which the Master deemed worthy of offering me so often during this retreat and since. What can one render to Him for such blessings? Following these times in which the soul forgets all and sees only God, how hard and painful ordinary prayer seems. How painful it can be striving to unite all our faculties, how costly it is and how difficult it appears.

God remains free in his gifts and, after giving many graces, he may withdraw them for a time. He may want to purify a soul, drawing it ever more deeply into his love. Elizabeth herself had experienced this 'taking away' and she lived in faith. She identified with the sacrifice of Christ, saying, 'Let us ask Him to make us sincere in our love, to make us sacrificed souls ... for it seems that sacrifice is only love in action.'

Even if we ourselves have not reached such heights in prayer, we can turn to Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity and imitate her attitude of simplicity, her disposition of openness to the Lord, and with patience we may kindle the embers of a love ever 'hidden with Christ in God' within the centre of our soul for '... there lies the secret of sanctity, and it is so simple. Just to think that we have our heaven within us'.

PRAYING CONTEMPLATIVELY ON THE HOLY SCRIPTURES

Blessed Elizabeth had been refined as gold and silver, the successive nights of her soul purifying her faith and love. Her prayer reached beyond the surface of words and feelings and in the barrenness of her soul she could say with the spouse of the Canticle, 'I am very black, but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem ... do not gaze at me because I am swarthy, because the sun has scorched me' (Cant. 1:5-6). Stripped bare, in the desert of her soul she finds new hope. It is in this way that God works with those he specially loves and wants exclusively for himself, taking from them all human supports, so that faith and love might be their only guide.

Then, when the hour of humiliation comes, when one is brought to nothing, she will remember that short sentence, 'But Jesus made no further answer', and she too will be silent, keeping all her strength — that strength we draw from silence — for the Lord. When she is abandoned, forsaken, in anguish — anguish such as that which drew from Our Lord the great cry, 'Why hast Thou forsaken me?' (Mk. 15:34) — she will remember that prayer, 'That they may have my joy fulfilled in them' (Jn. 17:13) and draining to the dregs the chalice prepared by the Father, she will find a heavenly sweetness in its bitterness.

In the desert of her soul, discovering her own emptiness, she comes to meet her divine Master and finds in his word a fresh source of hope and grace. Christ becomes present in his word.

Up to this point, the need for recourse to scripture reading was less felt by this soul who, in prayer, filled herself with long draughts from the source of living water; at that time, however, the sense of holy scripture and especially the admirable Epistles of St Paul truly nourished her, as is evident in those luminous commentaries on the great Apostle so abundant in her correspondence.

As one reads Elizabeth's 'Retreats', it might seem at first that they are merely scriptural commentaries: but they are actually the means by which she discovered her vocation. The Bible became for her a living source: 'Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light on my path' (Ps. 119:105). Praying upon the holy scriptures assured her that God was watching over her, confirming and strengthening her in the living out of her Trinitarian life. God calls her, through Christ, to enter and live within the heart of his word. Mother Germaine of Jesus wrote of Elizabeth:

Beneath this apparent commentary on holy scripture, there is in reality the secret of her holiness which the servant of God entrusts to us, her ideal fully realized in the evening of her life.

These pages written during her illness, when she suffered from insomnia ... appear at first to be nothing more than simple recollections of her reading in holy scripture, accompanied by personal reflections, but they are actually much more ... in this small collection she tried to express how she had envisioned her function as a Praise of Glory, how she had understood that one is able, here below, to live a life in heaven. That this was the meaning of her entire religious life is the dominant theme of her retreats.

Elizabeth's desire to pray continually found solid food in the word of God. She was

above all else a contemplative and recognized her mission within the heart of the Church as a call to adoration. 'Yes, I have found Him whom my soul loves ... I would like to be quite silent, buried in adoration, in order to penetrate ever more deeply into Him, to be so filled with Him that I can give Him by prayer to those poor souls who know not the gift of God'. It was from St Paul that she was inspired to take her new name, 'Praise of Glory', and she writes: 'The Apostle says that "we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12). There it is that I have found my vocation ... I want to begin now, here below, to be a Praise of Glory'.

In prayer, we reach out from within the heart of the Church to participate with Christ in uniting all into one for the praise and glory of the All-Holy Trinity. Elizabeth's vocation embraces all humanity. 'We are not separated', she tells us, 'our grilles will never come between our hearts ... I forget no one. You see, at Carmel one's heart grows wider and can love more than ever'.

'Every day He makes me feel more how sweet it is to be His, His alone, and my Carmelite vocation plunges me into adoration'. Praise, the very highest form of prayer, is often neglected as we do not realize its value at each moment, not possess it in a spirit of gratitude. We may be aware of God working within an event yet we may not see God present in his word. It is Christ himself who is speaking and by his word our views become assimilated into his. Indeed, we cannot hope to follow Christ if we are not willing to yield our views to his, contemplating his presence in the history of salvation. We enter into an event in response to his word and find God himself.

'Walk in Christ' ... that means to go out from self ... in order to enter more deeply into Him at every moment; to enter so deeply that one is 'rooted' in Him and may boldly challenge all events with the great cry, Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ?' (Rom. 8:35). When the soul is so deeply rooted in Him, the divine sap flows freely through it, and everything that is imperfect, commonplace, unspiritual, is destroyed ... the soul that is thus divested of itself and clothed with Jesus Christ, need no longer fear anything either from relations with the external world or difficulties from within, since far from being a hindrance, these things only root it more firmly in its love for its Master. No matter what happens ... it is a condition wherein it can adore Him always for His own sake, since it is free, delivered from self and from all else.

It is Christ the Redeemer who speaks to us, and Christ in each event establishes his salvific bond with mankind.

As we see our life eschatologically, we become more open to the Holy Spirit within us. In eternity, our life will be entirely directed towards thanksgiving and praise. It is therefore natural that our life's work should begin here on earth. Those who, during their earthly pilgrimage have failed to take the time to adore God, will not be ready for their work in eternity.

Let us each make for Him in our souls a 'home of rest' wherein the song of love and thanksgiving never ceases in that great silence which is an echo of the silence of God Himself. May our life be a continual communion [wrote Elizabeth] a perfectly simple movement towards God! ... I pray for you and remain with you in adoration and love!

Elizabeth's prayer was sustained and enriched from the Bible, drawing strength from

God's word especially during times of trial and temptation. She imitated St John of the Cross in her way of slipping under or going through an event to emerge above it. She abandoned herself freely to God's will in her life. St Paul also directs her towards a spiritual orientation, enabling her to transcend all. She guides us to the essential as, in silence, she passes under all that is secondary.

I tried to use above or slip under it. I took up St Paul, who for me is always a means of grace, although I assure you that at such times it was very much a matter of faith. I would read again certain trusted passages, or I would ask my Master to lead me to greener pastures and reflecting upon what I had thus found, I ended by transcending all.

As she grew in faith, Elizabeth's intentions became purified, and outward and interior irritations became less and less disturbing. That is not to say that she never felt frustrated, but her strength was in her disposition of silence. 'Build a little cell within [she wrote to a young friend] as I do and think how God is there and enter into it from time to time.

When your nerves are on edge or something upsets you, quietly take refuge there and tell the Lord all about it'. In faith she becomes more accepting of herself and of others and her slipping under an event could also be called a going through or entering into the event to its very core. The core is Christ himself, in which she finds his humility.

When aglow with love, the soul ponders within itself God's immensity, His faithfulness, the proofs of love He has shown us, His benefits to us ... the humble soul will never put God high enough nor itself low enough. But this is the wonderful thing: its powerlessness will be turned into wisdom, and the defeat of its humility — for never will it be sufficiently humble in its own eyes — will become the greatest source of sweetness in its life.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity wished to make Christ's humility her own. She became more and more immune to life's superficialities which carry little importance in the context of eternity. In faith she recognized God's grandeur, his light illuminating all the shadows of any lingering self-seeking. In her abandonment she was given the grace of a true detachment, not a harsh or uncaring sort of detachment, but one free from self, enabling her to be more freely attached to God. In slipping under, in silence, she goes through an event to the very heart of God himself, there to dwell everlastingly within the Most Holy Trinity, praising and adoring him through all eternity.

Adoration fills us with awe and we realize that all we have we owe to God: our life, health and all our capacities. Each moment God breathes into us the breath of life for without his love we would cease to be. We need to experience in our prayer the kinship binding us to God, as it is the source of our adoration. We owe to God both our natural and supernatural being and, by his grace, we are given the dignity of being his sons and daughters. In prayer we ought to express this bond by our gratitude and thanksgiving, which is simply to give back to him the divine life which he never ceases to increase in us. 'A Praise of Glory is a being always in thanksgiving; each of its acts, its movements, each of its thoughts, its aspirations, while the more deeply rooting it in love, are but an echo of the eternal Sanctus'. Adoration is not a fearful submission to an overpowering, omnipotent God, but a loving response of the creature to the Creator.

Adoration! It is a word from heaven ... an ecstasy of love, love overwhelmed by the beauty, strength and immense grandeur of the Object loved; it falls ... into a

deep silence of which David spoke when he exclaimed, 'For God alone may my soul wait in silence' (Ps. 62:1). Yes, that is the most beautiful praise as it is sung eternally within the bosom of the peaceful Trinity.

'For the Word of God is living and active ... discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Heb. 4:12). It is this Word itself [wrote Blessed Elizabeth] which will finish the task of stripping the soul ... The soul must keep the Word and by this keeping, it is sanctified in truth, according to the desire of the divine Master ... To those who keep His word, He has promised, 'My Father will love them and we will come to them and will make our home in them' (Jn. 14:23).

As Jesus said, 'In my Father's house are many mansions', we find diversity in the many manifestations of God's creation. Unique before God, we each possess our special way of responding which makes our development and growth in prayer completely individual. During her final illness Elizabeth wrote to a friend, 'Before I depart for heaven, I feel I must assure you that when I am in my Father's house, I shall pray much for you. I invite you to meet me in that centre of love, for that is where I shall spend my eternity and where you can begin yours already here on earth'.

PRAYING IN THE PRESENT

Love opens us to God's presence, enabling us to respond and to act upon his will. If our prayer is real, it will be known by our charity towards others. We offer back to God all he has given us, leaving ourselves open to the inflow of his love. We cannot become a contemplative soul without making this gift of self. 'Let us live by love [said Blessed Elizabeth] so that we may die of love and glorify God who is all love'. In faith we come to realize the existential quality of our vocation and, in awe of his splendour, come before God to adore him.

In spirit adore Him! This is to have the heart and thoughts fixed on Him, a spirit fully knowing Him in the light of faith. Adore Him in truth, which is to say, by our works, for it is above all else by our actions that we prove true; to do always that which is pleasing to God our Father, for we are His children.

We may find ourselves in situations which weaken our love and test our faith. The impact of negative influences may cause us to waver from our good intentions and shake our resolve of abandonment. Since we live in time and space, we are not capable of visualizing within a given moment or by a single act the full intent of God's will and at times we find it difficult even to imagine what God's will might be, as our suffering is so intense. All we can do is to live in faith, believing in God's divine plan for us. We contradict ourselves by our actions and words, and we may live in a continual tension between past and future, nursing old and slow-healing wounds, or jumping to the future and living our life as a daydream. Life pushes us on, ever involving us in new events. In the newness of each occasion, we desire happiness and satisfaction of all kinds. We may hope for union with God based on our own terms and efforts. This unproductive dreaming only pulls us further from God's will for us. Our life fades into delusion and we cannot grasp the reality of the moment. We may experience the present as too painful and we would rather obscure its impact by memories of the past or dreams of the future. We cannot ease these tensions by ignoring them. We need to enter willingly into an event and there find God breaking through it to send shimmers of piercing light to the earth of our soul, drawing us forward to a fresh start.

We must enter continually more deeply into the Divine Being by means of recollection. 'I press on' cried St Paul (Phil. 3:14). Thus, every day we must go down deeper along the path of the abyss that is God, letting ourselves slide down the slope in a confidence that is full of love.

God wishes to penetrate into history and be discovered and adored, beginning with his Son and in the life of each one of us.

God, who loves us immensely, is the starting-point and balance of our life. It is in him that we begin our search for ourselves and in him that we find ourselves. The past is useful to us if we have learned something constructive from it; but we want neither to cling to cherished memories, linger over that which might have been, or dwell on those experiences which were painful. We offer up our past in a spirit of abandonment, entrusting ourselves entirely to God's mercy.

When my Master makes me hear this sentence in the depths of my soul, I think I am right in understanding that He is asking me to live, like the Father, in an 'eternal present', without before or after, but entirely in the unity of my being in an eternal 'now'. What is this presence? David tells me, 'They shall adore Him continually for His own sake'. This is the eternal present in which a Praise of Glory shall abide.

We abandon ourselves to the future, knowing that divine Providence will supply all our needs: 'Therefore do not be anxious saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" for ... your heavenly Father knows that you need them all' (Mt. 6:31). Leaving the past and giving the future to God is not to isolate the present. 'The present', said Thomas Merton, 'is a meeting of past and future in which we enter in hope and abandonment this moment'. The present is held within the bond of our love and fidelity as we encounter God. Since God is the Creator of time, he is outside it. God is the eternal present who, at each moment, intervenes in history, breathing into us the gift of life and creating us anew in grace. 'Nor will the soul leave it [the place] where at last it lives, like the unchangeable Trinity, in an eternal present, adoring God eternally for His own sake'.

In speaking of an 'eternal present', Blessed Elizabeth is saying that we meet and are united with God within each moment. God expresses his will for us in all the seemingly mundane aspects of our life, as well as in those moments on the summit when his presence may become vividly apparent. Wherever we find God's will, we shall find God himself. Our fidelity to whatever we are doing within a given moment, places us in a continual presence of the Lord.

'Day to day pours forth speech' (Ps. 19:2). All the supernatural light, all the communications from God to my soul are this day, which tells forth the message of His glory to the next ... Consequently, my fidelity to His every command, to every interior prompting, enables me to live in His Light; it is also a speech which utters His glory.

Jesus led a humble and simple life. He was a faithful Son to Mary and Joseph. God is present within the humble and ordinary.

In the garden, the cloisters, everywhere [wrote Elizabeth] He is so present that it

seems as though only a thin veil separates us and that He is about to appear.

Let us draw courage from our union with Him. The soul that lives in the presence of God is clothed with His strength and is valiant under suffering.

We ask for grace to be freely abandoned to God's plan for us and not to be overwhelmed by anxieties. This gives us a resilience stemming from a faith which sees God working within each moment. 'He so loves to see a soul recognize its powerlessness! Then, as sang a great saint, the abyss of God's immensity is confronted with the abyss of the nothingness of the creature, and God clasps to His heart this nothing'.

God's design is not always immediately clear. He reveals his desire for us as we become ready to receive it. As he did with the chosen people, God asks us to participate in his salvific plan within the history of mankind. Reflecting upon our life, we remember both the pleasant and the unpleasant. We wonder how all these episodes of our past could be connected. Why did they happen and did they have any real purpose? All our past experiences are, in faith, hidden within the shadow of God's presence. They have been means by which God has called us, leading us step by step towards him. How often we have gone astray and tried to hide within the crevices of our egoism, fleeing here and there in the hollowness of our being, yet God was always with us! In all our wanderings his shadow embraced us. In all these life experiences, God calls us to respond to his plan of love. 'I feel encompassed by the Mystery of God's love [wrote Elizabeth]. And when I look back I see how He has divinely pursued my soul. What love! I feel overwhelmed beneath its weight and then I remain silent and adore!

Imagine a stained-glass window which has been dismantled so that all the pieces are on the floor in total disorder. Seeing no discernible image in all this confusion, we do not know just what the artist is trying to say. If someone clever succeeded in reconstructing a unity of this collection of scattered pieces, we might discover its beauty and meaning. Our life is like a stained-glass window and God is its Artist-Creator. Each colour has its place in the totality of our life. All these experiences are brought together through our faith in God's design for us:

... of the divine plan, eternally unchangeably, I conclude that if I am worthily to find my office of *Laudem Gloriam*, no matter what happens I must keep myself in the presence of God.

The Divine good pleasure ought to be one's nourishment, one's daily bread; one ought to abandon oneself to be immolated by all the intentions of the Father, in the image of His adored Christ, and each incident, each event, each suffering, as each joy, is a sacrament given by God. Then one does not make more of the differences between them, one surmounts, surpasses them so as to abide above all in the Master Himself.

By the word 'sacrament', Elizabeth invites us to probe more deeply beneath outward and human appearances to find a hidden reality. She applies the word 'sacrament' in a broad sense and without theological significance, using it to emphasize the divine life of Christ in all things. Strictly speaking, 'sacrament' means those tangible signs chosen by God which seal within us the divine life and fix our identity in Christ. God speaks to us through people and circumstances. We could infer from this that the entire concept of salvation is sacramental because through these effective signs God gives us the wealth of his divine life.

‘Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect!’ ... That means never to let myself be led by my impressions, by the first movements of nature, but to control myself by my will. For my will to be free, it must be ... ‘enclosed within the will of God’ ... All that I do will partake of the divine, the eternal, and like Him who changes not, I shall ever dwell here below in an ‘eternal present’.

What subjective values do we learn from an event? What attitudes do they provoke in us? Have we come to know ourselves better? Have we been stimulated intellectually or spiritually? What zones of our being have been touched? Have our responses been only skin-deep, or have they reached down to the very roots of our life? Objectively, have we, through events, come to love our neighbour better? Are we more aware of the world’s needs? Finally, how do we determine God’s action within an event and how do we come to be united with him?

‘Father, I give you thanks!’ (Jn. 11:41). That was the canticle of my Master’s souls and He wishes to hear it echoed in mine ... This soul remains beneath His touch like a lyre, and all His gifts are as so many strings which vibrate day and night to hymn the Praise of His Glory.

Abandonment! It is this which sets us free for God! ... Oh! when all was in confusion, when the present had been so sad and the future seemed even worse, I closed my eyes, I abandoned myself as a child in the arms of its Father who is in heaven.

In our difficulties [Elizabeth told a novice] we should rather accept them than desire to be freed from them; it is the acceptance that delivers us.

Our response at this moment determines the conditions of tomorrow. We must let ourselves go and open our soul in abandonment to the Holy Spirit. To pray always, there is no other secret. ‘Everything that comes to me is a message or an assurance of God’s *exceeding* Love [wrote Elizabeth] and I can no longer live on anything else’.

THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH: CARMEL’S MISSION

Like St Teresa of Jesus, Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity was a ‘daughter of the Church’. The meaning of her Carmelite vocation was to be united and hidden in love within the Trinity. Her life in Carmel was a preparation for eternity and a means for the salvation of her soul. As a cell within the mystical body of Christ, she knew that her own spiritual health affected the health of the whole Church. In seeking her salvation, she became a working-force for the salvation of all, and as a Carmelite, her life was especially given to the sanctification of priests.

The Trinity is a continuous meeting between the Father and the Son and the breathing forth of the Holy Spirit within the unity of a single life of love. When Christ said, ‘I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men to myself (Jn. 12:32) he wanted us, through him who is our salvation, to be partakers in this life of love and to live in society within the Holy Trinity.

The joys of the divine embrace [wrote Elizabeth] are renewed in the depths of our soul by an activity that never ceases. It is the embrace of love in a mutual and

eternal delight. It is a renewal of the bond of love that takes place every moment. There are souls who have chosen this abode there to rest forever ... this same love which, in the Trinity, is the link between the Father and the Word. They enter into Him by means of living faith ... and transformed into the divine image, they live, as St John says, in a fellowship with the Three Divine Persons.

‘They live alone with Him above in unspeakable fellowship, willing to lack what others own, and to be unlike all so that they may be only like Him’, wrote the English theologian of the last century, Cardinal Manning. Throughout one’s pilgrimage on earth, this union will be lived in the obscurity of faith and then one day grace will blossom in the glory of the soul’s contemplation of God and ‘It is there that the deep peace of the divine changelessness which is beyond our understanding awaits us’.

The Trinity contains the Church and is its most impressive image. We cannot possibly live in deep fellowship with the three divine Persons without wanting at the same time to be united with all humanity: ‘... may all be one, even as you, Father, are in me and I in you’ (Jn. 17:21). Within the Trinitarian vocation there is an ecclesial vocation, the Prayer of the Church, and it is within this that we find Carmel’s witness.

We can be united only through Christ. In giving himself to the Father as victim, he gained for us the forgiveness of our sins, and divine life: ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ (Jn. 15:5). In Christ is our salvation and from this we come to understand the role of humanity and the world’s redemption. Christ does not take our free will from us, but asks for our co-operation. He communicates his grace to us by means of his glorified humanity, as ‘Him who is the head ... from whom the whole body is supplied in love’ (Eph. 4:15-16) and ‘I am the vine, you are the branches’ (Jn. 15:5). Nor in this work of sanctification are we merely objects to be used. Our prayers, good works and sacrifices all unite to win us grace which is gained exclusively by the merits of Christ. ‘Here we have the measure of the sanctity of the children of God [wrote Elizabeth], to be holy as God is holy, to be holy within His holiness and that by living in contact with Him in the fathomless abyss within’.

While desiring to enter into the fellowship of the Trinity, Elizabeth wanted to imitate Christ offering himself to the Father as victim. She allowed Christ to use her humanity by living out his mystery of redemption in the very ordinary circumstances of her life. ‘I fill up in my flesh that which is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his body which is the Church’ (Col. 1:24). She suffered constant pain from her illness and, in her suffering, the thought of humanity’s salvation was an immense comfort to her and she united her own suffering with all the suffering of mankind. As a Trinitarian soul, Elizabeth opened herself to the total witness of the universal Church whose interests and intentions became her own. She wrote to a friend,

How intensely one feels the need to sanctify oneself, to forget oneself in order to be wholly taken up with the needs of the Church! How sublime is the Carmelite’s mission! She ought to be an intermediary with Jesus Christ, an addition to His humanity, as it were, wherein He may continue His life of reparation, sacrifice, praise and adoration.

Christian prayer consists essentially in listening attentively to the Holy Spirit and reflecting upon the Word of God, all of which is nourished by the sacraments and especially the Holy Eucharist: ‘... nothing shows forth the love which the Heart of God bears for us as does the Eucharist’. Carmel focusses on liturgical prayer or the Prayer of the

Church.

Each Christian has a unique call before the Lord. A Carmelite is a witness to faith. Faith has a potential deep within one, linking one in mystery with God, all life, the past, present and eternity; it is a mystery, far-reaching and extending beyond all human reason and vision, a gift given by God which grows, evolves and develops within us. Perhaps one is aware of faith working in one's life and the lives of others, yet never really knowing what it will bring or what its meaning is in tom, for oneself or for others, except that it is an integrating and unifying force which brings us closer to the presence of God. 'I am so ambitious for your soul [Elizabeth wrote to a friend] that it does me good to suffer in order to draw down grace upon you superabundantly'. A Carmelite's life is a witness to this hidden aspect of our faith and to the hidden potential of the Holy Spirit working in each of us — the unlimited and infinite power of God's healing and redemptive love. A Carmelite's witness is one of praise, worship, adoration. It is a reminder that all good works are fruits of our communion with the Lord and for his glory and not our own. The Carmelite does not hide from life, but in 'hiding' herself, she witnesses to the hidden aspect of one's own life and faith in God. She is not so much walling herself off from people by her enclosure as she is in a very real way, placing herself in the midst of life and its activity as a 'garden enclosed', and in this way she demonstrates to all that we need to be set apart for God alone. 'How good God is! [wrote Elizabeth] Here [in Carmel] there is no longer anything but He. He is all. He is all-sufficing and we live by Him alone. We find Him everywhere'.

Although a Carmelite's apostolate is not active, by her hidden life of prayer and holiness of life she reaches out beyond the walls of her cloister in ways she may never know. Carmel's silent witness to the presence of God is all-embracing and universal. Perhaps somewhere, at some time, God has used a Carmelite as an instrument in touching a soul, bringing back or closer to him one of his children. It is not important for a Carmelite to know those ways in which, through Christ, she may have touched a soul. She simply knows that her vocation is not for herself alone, but for all mankind. By participating in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, she unites her prayers to him who lives 'for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he lives to make intercession for them' (Heb. 7:25).

His Holiness Pope John Paul II, in preparing for the 400th anniversary of the death of St Teresa of Jesus, in a letter to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, the Very Rev. Felipe Sainz de Baranda, stressed the fruitfulness of the contemplative life:

When she was dying, St Teresa exclaimed, 'I am a daughter of the Church!' Thus she clearly showed her spiritual way of thinking, according to which the contemplation of God in Christ becomes the loving contemplation of His Church. The desire to devote oneself to God becomes the desire to give oneself to the Church. The sacrificing of oneself for the sake of Jesus is transformed into completing those things which are lacking in His Passion for the sake of His Body, that is, the Church ... In prayer we surrender ourselves to the love which the Holy Spirit pours into our hearts, uniting us as brothers and friends to Jesus as He cries, 'Abba, Father!' ... any kind of supernatural contemplation worthy of the name, arising from faith and love, whether in the sacred Liturgy, or in listening to the praises of God, or in silent adoration — by which the Father is glorified and union with Jesus Christ is established — is at the same time 'a help to my beloved Jesus' offered in the Church, as the holy virgin and doctor asserted ... St Teresa said, 'All of us who wear this holy habit of the Carmelites are called to practise

prayer and contemplation'. Indeed, the Discalced Carmelites, both men and women, must be faithful to prayer, and be consistent in it so that they may experience the living God, which gives them title to their dignity, their special vocation and their saving mission. They should strive more and more each day to become the adorers in spirit and in truth whom the Father seeks, being convinced, as the Holy Mother wrote, that the journey they have undertaken in this 'Way of Perfection' is of benefit not only to themselves but many souls.⁰

In purity of heart, our prayer becomes efficacious before the heart of God. This is essential for our participation in the world's redemption and through our prayers, graces are obtained. A few intercessions now and then are not enough. One's life must become a continual prayer.

There is so much to make reparation for [said Blessed Elizabeth] so much to ask, that I believe to fulfil such needs one must become a continual prayer, one must love much. The power of a soul given to love is so wonderful as we see from the beautiful example of St Mary Magdalen; one word was enough for her to obtain the resurrection of Lazarus.

One may at first feel a conflict between adoration and intercessory prayer, as if one were placed in a position of begging for God's graces or taking away from what should rightly belong to adoration; yet God's glory and the salvation of souls are not to be separated. This makes us aware of the poverty of our prayers and the need to unite them with those of others. We discover that prayer, of whatever kind, places us before the Lord. In prayer we embrace all mankind: sinners, souls in purgatory, the persecuted and all life's suffering. As the needs of humanity are unlimited, so will our intercessions be, and the more fervently we pray, the more united we shall find ourselves with those for whom we pray: 'As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me' (Mt. 25:40).

'I am going to Light, to Life, to Love!' These were Elizabeth's last words at the moment of her death. They are a banner for us to carry as we too continue our pilgrimage here below. God is love and, in love, we who are lost are found. God is light and in his light we are transformed and given life. 'All that came to be had life in him, and that life was the light of men' (Jn. 1:4). Elizabeth knew that as she approached the threshold of eternity, her participation in Christ's saving mission had only just begun. Her vocation in eternity would be to draw souls to interior prayer, to dwell and unceasingly live within the Holy Trinity.

Carmel is a silent way. A Carmelite's calling is to *listen*. 'Ever hungering for God, she knew how to "listen"', wrote Father Vallée about Elizabeth. 'Her great eyes drank in the light which she received in its fulness and depth; her whole soul was wide awake, yet, as it were, immersed in the peace of God'. Elizabeth's love of solitude was not a selfish withdrawal, but so that she could listen to God better. 'I keep silence; I listen ... it is so good to listen to Him, and then I love Him'. To *listen* is to be a contemplative. Interior prayer is the most cherished of prayers and the centre from which we find ourselves. 'O Eternal Word, Word of my God, would that I could spend my life listening to You!'

It is impressive to meet persons of prayer. Their life may get ruffled, yet they possess a resilience, returning always to their centre where they find God and it is this which steadies them in the waves on the surface of life. One sees in them a gentle humility, a

⁰ 'Virtutis exemplum et Magistra', St Peter's, Rome, 14 October 1981.

total lack of defensiveness. They do not push themselves compulsively on others. They listen and one feels the intensity of their concern. We cannot help but admire, and we perceive in them a hidden dialogue and union with God, reflecting itself in their joy and peace. Since human motivations cannot be found in their attitude, one senses only a deep love of God and holiness of life.

Elizabeth struggled with herself, but in love she responded to grace and was transformed. The lives of the saints give us many examples of holiness. St Augustine and St Mary Magdalen wandered far, coming to the Lord only after passing through the experiences of sensual darkness. Other saints were given special graces at an early age. These untarnished souls seem to us like earthly angels, their lives were so pure. Yet even they had areas within themselves which needed refining. Elizabeth had been bothered by an extreme sensitivity. When she was about eleven she wrote in her diary:

Today I had the joy of offering Jesus several sacrifices with respect to my dominant fault, but how much they cost me! There I recognized my weakness. When I am unjustly reprov'd, I feel as though the blood were boiling in my veins. My whole being rises in revolt! ... but Our Lord was with me. I heard His voice deep down in my heart and then I was ready to bear everything for love of Him.

A friend, some years later recalling a childhood incident, remarked:

I felt very shy [at a party] on hearing the noise of all the children behind the door which was about to be opened for us. Upon entering, I was at once struck by Elizabeth who, as I very soon saw, was the mistress of the revels. It was not long before I learned to know and appreciate her. As I was naturally very eager and wanting in self-control, her even temper and gentleness astounded me. I envied her for being so calm, able to throw herself so thoroughly into everything and yet always ready to efface herself and give way to others. When I realized that this self-possession was in her case the work not of nature but of grace, my envy was changed into intense admiration and I also understood that I ought to follow in her footsteps.

Another friend of the family wrote:

Elizabeth had all the more merit in that she was naturally lively, ardent and passionate. Born in an army camp, the daughter and grand-daughter of officers, she felt the soldier's blood, hot and generous, coursing through her veins. She might easily have been hot-headed, self-willed and fiery-tempered. Happily, in her case, the vivacity was counterbalanced by a twofold love: love of her mother and love of God.

We are divided and must struggle with our inner darkness, but we take heart knowing that we also have the capacity, through grace, to bring forth that side of us which is light.

What struck me above all [said a childhood friend] was her recollection when at prayer, the purity of her ardent gaze and a truly remarkable energy in overcoming her impressions. Already she knew how to fight against her temperament, and tried to avoid causing the slightest trouble to her mother. She was very quickly roused given her spontaneity; how often I have seen her bite her lips so as not to answer back when reprov'd, or to repress a lively sally, or to wait until others had expressed their opinions before giving her own!

By the time Elizabeth was ready to enter Carmel, these tumults of her youth had been entirely vanquished. Her personality was now in order. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that one among a series of questions presented to her when she was a postulant, asked, 'What is your chief characteristic?' to which she replied, 'Sensitiveness'.

As Elizabeth was preparing to enter Carmel, an acquaintance remembered,

I shall never forget how edifying I found Miss Catez during a regular retreat. The truly moving piety with which I saw her make her Stations of the Cross impressed me so much that I felt more devotion in watching her than in making the Stations myself. Something kept me irresistibly near her, simply united to her, and making her feelings mine in offering them to Our Lord'.

One of her Carmelite sisters wrote, 'During the simple housecleaning, while she performed a task perfectly, the profound, serious recollected expression on her face greatly impressed me and was at the same time edifying. All that she did seemed a continual prayer'.

Elizabeth abandoned her fiery disposition to grace; her temper cooled and her pride was surrendered to the Lord. Later, in Carmel, she would write to a young friend:

I see my little X is scarcely any better and I assure you it pains me! I used to overlook your outbursts of temper, but now you are no longer a baby and these scenes are ridiculous. I know you allow your Elizabeth to say anything and so I'm, going to speak my mind. It is absolutely necessary that you take yourself in hand! Your temperament is like mine and so I can really understand. If you knew how good it is to love God and give Him what He asks, above all when it costs us something, you would not be so slow to listen to me. At first you will be aware only of the sacrifice, but later you will experience a delightful peace. That is what I want for you!

In her genuine openness to others, Elizabeth always found just the right word to say. On days when Carmelites have permission to visit one another (and Carmelites love this!) the elderly nuns enjoyed their conversations with her and were amazed at her insights. 'This dear Sister, so well advanced along spiritual ways, had gladly made herself a disciple; one would have to admit that she had learned much. Although she was divinely instructed in prayer, I saw her listening, full of interest, putting it all to profit, without showing that she knew more'.

All who knew Sister Elizabeth agreed on the depths of her spirituality and, through the intensity of her holiness, she drew others to prayer. To be apostles of prayer, we too must pray because only then can we bring others to taste interiorly its meaning for themselves. Nothing can replace the living experience of prayer. On this 'pilgrimage to the place of the heart', the Holy Spirit will guide those disciples who are humble and simple enough to awaken in others their hidden desire for God. To open a soul to prayer is the beginning of holiness.

JANUA CAELI, MARY THE MOTHER OF GOD

Blessed Elizabeth often mentioned how her prayer had found its full development and

blossoming in Mary. She had always had an affection for the Blessed Virgin, but it was in 1906 that she began to reflect more upon Mary's interior disposition of waiting upon the Lord. As Elizabeth became aware of her own sufferings in union with Christ, she experienced a greater need for recourse to Mary, the Mother of Sorrows. It was also around this time that she named the Virgin, '*Janua Caeli*' or 'Gate of Heaven'. Mary had been with her at the beginning, upon her entrance to Carmel, when Elizabeth had entrusted her vocation to the Blessed Virgin while on a pilgrimage to Lourdes in 1901. Mary would also have been there to greet her as she entered heaven above, a beautiful continuity of a vocation passing from earth to heaven under the protection of Mary, the Mother of God, and to Elizabeth especially she was *Janua Caeli*.

The sacrifice is about to be consummated and cannot do without the priest [said Elizabeth to her dearly-loved prioress and 'priest', Mother Germaine of Jesus]. I need you to help me climb my calvary. To think that a time will come when I must cross that mysterious frontier that is so awe-inspiring, alone!

[Mother Germaine, looking upon her frail daughter, replied] But Our Blessed Lady will be there, and it is she who will stretch out her hand to you: you will have nothing to fear with so loving a mother. Yes, that is true [Elizabeth responded]. *Janua Caeli* will surely let her little *Laudem Gloriam* pass ... but what a solemn hour I have reached! There is something awe-inspiring about the world beyond.

The Mother of God is most especially reflected upon in Elizabeth's life of deep intimacy with God, and from her she received all her will to love, even during those most crucifying and trying of times. Mary was inwardly composed; she always stood before God, her interior gaze fixed continually upon him, her heart in union with his heart. 'The Queen of Virgins [wrote Elizabeth] is also the Queen of the Martyrs, yet it is in her heart that the sword pierces; with her, all takes place within'.

Mary is the model of contemplative souls and Carmel belongs to her: 'By God's grace we belong to the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel ... the presence of the Mother of God pervades our monasteries and stamps our life of prayer'.⁰ Mary, our Mother, understood fully; the unity of her being and all the movements of her heart were directed to the will of God. The soul of the Mother of God is so simple:

She seems to reproduce on earth the life which is that of the divine Being, the Being who is *simple*. Thus she is so transparent, so luminous, that she might be taken for light itself; yet for all that, she is but the mirror of the Sun of Justice. She seems to me more imitable than any other saint, for her life was so simple. Just to look at her makes me feel at peace.

Mary, becoming aware of the fulness of grace within her, no longer lives on the surface of herself, but at each moment accomplishes the pilgrimage which calls her heart and holds her, all adoring and surrendered to God's creative action.

The Virgin [wrote Elizabeth] kept all these things in her heart ... Her entire history can be summed up in these few words; it was within her own heart that she abode and so deeply did she enter therein that no human eye could follow after her.

⁰ *Rule, Constitutions, Declarations of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns* 1977, Roma Curia Generalizia, OCD, chapter 3, no.76.

It seems to me that, during the months intervening between the Annunciation and the Nativity, Our Lady's attitude exemplified a model for interior souls for those whom God had chosen to abide 'within', in the abyss of unfathomable depths. With what peace, what serenity and recollection Mary rendered and gave herself to all things! How the most commonplace events were divinized by her, for she remained ever in adoration of the Gift of God. Nothing kept her from giving of herself outwardly when it was a question of performing charity; the gospel tells us that Mary went with haste into the hill country of Judah in order to be of help to her cousin, Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39). The ineffable visions which she contemplated within her will never diminish her exterior charity.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus and therefore the Mother of the Church, has as her prayer the prayer of Christ. Her prayer cannot be separated from Christ's prayer, as her identity with him is such that he prays in her and she in him. With Mary, and under her maternal care and guidance, we too may enter into the prayer of Christ. In making clear this community of feeling and prayer between Christ and his Mother, Sister Elizabeth wrote, 'Like Him, the Word of God, Mary's prayer was always, Ecce! Here I am! Who? The handmaid of the Lord, the least of His creatures, she, His Mother!' We may also draw a comparison between the words that the author of the Letter to the Hebrews places on the lips of Christ, 'Lo, I have come to do your will' (Heb. 10:7) and the response of Mary at the Annunciation, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word' (Lk. 1:38). In these responses we find an attitude of receptivity to God's will. In faith, Mary came to know God's will for her. This becomes clear at the Annunciation when she strives to discern through events God's plan for her. Mary is the true contemplative, the faithful Virgin and model of souls of prayer, for whom faith is a continuous desire for God's good pleasure.

Blessed Elizabeth recognized anew the Virgin at the foot of the Cross where Mary is seen not only bound intimately because of this to the Church, but also as our prototype. Elizabeth, in her own death agony, understood that since Christ was not able to suffer more than he already had for mankind, he wished to continue his passion in his members, and for this she gave of herself generously on the cross for his Church. It was in sharing the cross of Christ that Elizabeth met Mary who, as a guiding mother and example revealed to her the secret of redemptive suffering which would undergo in her a purification, rendering her conformed to Christ himself.

There she is at the foot of the Cross, standing with courage and strength and my Master says to me: '*Ecce Mater tua*', 'This is your Mother'. He gives her to me for my Mother! And now that He has returned to the Father, He has put me in His place on the Cross, so that I may suffer in myself that which is wanting to His sufferings for His Body, the Church. The Virgin is once more there to teach me to suffer as He, to tell me, to let me hear the last canticle of His soul which no one but His Mother could have heard.

The Carmelite contemplates the holy Mother of God as

the ideal of the Order lived to perfection. Her example inspires us to follow in her footsteps and to be content among 'the poor and humble of the Lord'. It makes us untiring in our service of love and steadfast in continual meditation on the Word of God. In this way our life is made like hers and she leads us deeper and deeper into the mystery of Christ and his Church ... we belong to her, we wish to be

clothed in her virtues and mirror in our lives the beauty of her holiness.⁰

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity offers to us an invitation:

Let us draw near to the Virgin most pure, who is all lightsome, so that she may lead us to understand Him whom she understands so deeply. May our life be a continual communion, a perfectly simple movement towards God! Pray to the Queen of Carmel for me ... I pray for you and remain with you in adoration and love!

⁰ *ibid.* chapter 3, no.41.

EPILOGUE

'In the Heaven of our soul'

It is in that little heaven which He has made for Himself in the centre of our soul that we ought to seek Him and to live ... the Father seeks true adorers 'in spirit and in truth' ... let us be those great adorers ... by and with Jesus, for He alone is the True Adorer.

Here is the expression of the interior bond between Elizabeth's prayer and her supernatural life. Her prayer was never an isolated act, but the breath of her whole being as it is of the divine Being given to each of us at baptism.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity speaks to us today. Her baptismal graces came to full bloom in Carmel yet her charism is not limited to the cloister. It reaches out and touches the central reality of each Christian's life. 'Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world' (Jn. 17:24). Through prayer we receive the divine presence into the whole of our life and we want to submit ourselves entirely.

'Be holy, for I, Yahweh your God, am holy' (Lev. 19:2). I am going to recollect myself thinking upon that sentence [wrote Elizabeth]. It is the light in the ray of which I am going to walk during my spiritual journey ... 'He chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in His sight in love' (Eph. 1:4) gives me the secret to that virginal purity; to abide in love, that is God, for 'God is love'.

We are each of us called from baptism to live within the fellowship of the Trinity. The fruits of our prayer are to be shared. Prayer is a vital essence in our life and we cannot cooperate in God's salvific plan for mankind if we do not give of ourselves freely to God's presence within us.

One cannot be an apostle if one is not first a contemplative, [wrote Evely]. To contemplate is to become. To that end it is impossible to stay a contemplative without becoming a missionary. How can we contemplate God without welcoming and sharing in His anguish to have the world reconciled to Christ?⁰

Of this supernatural love, Elizabeth wrote, 'It rises, ascending above the senses, above nature, above self. It passes beyond all joy and sorrow ... never to rest until it has penetrated within Him whom it loves and who will Himself give it the "repose of the abyss"'.⁰

Elizabeth's interior disposition was one ever alert and present to God within her. The spontaneity of her heart went beyond mere words. She tells us to recollect ourselves in the centre of our being and become again united in the prayer of Christ within us. This demands that we go out from ourselves and be 'an intermediary with Our Lord, a super-added humanity ... wherein He may continue His life of reparation, sacrifice, praise and adoration'.

⁰ Evely, *Vivre en Fraternite*, p.18.

Prayer was not a pious reverie for Elizabeth of the Trinity, dissociated from the rest of her life. As persons of prayer we have to enter into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. 'The soul who wants to serve God night and day ... this soul ought to be resolved to participate effectively in the passion of its Master'. Our spiritual purifications and trials are means towards our sanctification: 'If we are to live continually in contact with God, we must be entirely sacrificed and immolated'. Elizabeth again assures us,

Do not say that this is not for you, that you are too wretched, for on the contrary, that is all the more reason for your going to Him who saves. It is not by looking at our own miseries that we shall be cleansed, but by looking upon Him who is all purity and all sanctity.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity draws us into interior silence:

Think how Our Lady must have felt when, after the Incarnation, she possessed within her the Incarnate Word, the gift of God! In what depths of silence, of recollection, of adoration, she must have lived in the centre of her soul, in order to embrace that God whose Mother she was! He is in us. Let us keep close to Him in that silence, that love of the Virgin Mother.

We want to know and live God's will, but to do this we must be willing each day to put aside some time for God alone. Elizabeth's own heroic fidelity to daily prayer, even during those times when she was under such stress, gives us an example to follow: 'I think that to be equal to so many needs one must become a continual prayer'.

Elizabeth lived in faith and simplicity, leaving us as a sign of her prayer her immense love of God and of her fellow human beings. When we examine where we are in life, we may reflect upon the words of our Lord, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word' (in. 14:23). We are asked to listen within ourselves for the inspiration of the Holy Spirit during each moment of our day: 'By this love you have for one another, will everyone know that you are my disciples' (Jn. 13:35). Our fraternal love is the criterion of our prayer. 'You may ask, perhaps [wrote Elizabeth] how I can be happy, seeing that in order to enter this dear solitude I have left those I love. I have everything in having God, and in Him I find again all those whom I have left'. Elizabeth draws us to the graces of prayer: 'Would that I could tell everyone what sources of strength, of prayer and also of happiness they would find if only they would consent to live in this intimate union with God'.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity beckons to us to come with her and to be for all eternity a Cantic to Love, a soul that remains 'beneath His touch like a lyre, and all His gifts are as so many strings which vibrate day and night to hymn the Praise of His Glory'.

I leave you my devotion to 'the Three'. Live within, with them, in the heaven of your soul. The Father will overshadow you ... He will give you power, so that you may love Him with a strong love ... The Word will imprint Himself in your soul, as in a crystal, the image of His own beauty, so that you may be pure with His purity, lightsome with His Light! *The Holy Spirit will transform you into a mysterious lyre which, in the silence, beneath His divine touch, will give forth a marvellous cantic to Love.* Then you will be 'the Praise of His Glory' as I dreamed of being on earth. It is you who will replace me. I shall be *Laudem Gloriam* before the throne of the Lamb and you *Laudem Gloriam* in the centre of your soul.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY TRINITY

O my God, Trinity whom I adore, let me entirely forget myself that I may abide in you, still and peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity; let nothing disturb my peace nor separate me from you, O my unchanging God, but that each moment may take me further into the depths of your mystery!

Pacify my soul! Make it your heaven, your beloved home and place of your repose; let me never leave you there alone, but may I be ever attentive, ever alert in my faith, ever adoring and all given up to your creative action.

O my beloved Christ, crucified for love, would that I might be for you a spouse of your heart! I would anoint you with glory, I would love you — even unto death! Yet I sense my frailty and ask you to adorn me with yourself; identify my soul with all the movements of your soul, submerge me, overwhelm me, substitute yourself in me that my life may become but a reflection of your life. Come into me as Adorer, Redeemer and Saviour.

O Eternal Word, Word of my God, would that I might spend my life listening to you, would that I might be fully receptive to learn all from you; in all darkness, all loneliness, all weakness, may I ever keep my eyes fixed on you and abide under your great light; O my Beloved Star, fascinate me so that I may never be able to leave your radiance.

O Consuming Fire, Spirit of Love, descend into my soul and make all in me as an incarnation of the Word, that I may be to him a super-added humanity wherein he renews his mystery; and you, O Father, bestow yourself and bend down to your little creature, seeing in her only your beloved Son in whom you are well pleased.

O my 'Three', my All, my Beatitude, infinite Solitude, Immensity in whom I lose myself, I give myself to you as a prey to be consumed; enclose yourself in me that I may be absorbed in you so as to contemplate in your light the abyss of your Splendour!

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity

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