

## Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity

“The Apostolate of Suffering:  
as seen by Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity”

by Fr Juan Debono, ocd, Malta



Suffering is a part of our day to day lives even though we know that God did not create suffering, and even though we believe that suffering is a direct consequence of sin, we may think, or else the devil may make us think, that suffering is a punishment from God for the sins of men. The fact is, God can only create good things, and he never uses His power to punish us. Suffering therefore entered the world, only as a direct consequence of sin.

We can easily understand this through an example. Imagine a youth who decides to go and rent a home for himself; it is true that by doing so, this youth will be more free than when he was still at his parent's home, but after a month of living alone, he starts to understand what this decision really meant for him. He has to start paying his electricity, water and telephone bills, he has to do his shopping and prepare his daily meal, he has to clean his home, and many other day-to-day errands. When this youth was still living with his parents, he never had to think of all these worries. On the other hand, we can never say that his parents, whose only wish is to have their child back, sent these worries to him. By choosing to live an independent life, this youth had to endure some consequences.

The same with sin, we can never say that suffering was sent by God as a punishment for the sins of men, suffering entered our system only because we freely accepted to go and live an independent life from our God.

Choosing suffering as His preferential path, Jesus of all, that suffering is not God's punishment. Jesus, the of the Holy Trinity, not only suffered just like everyone accepting suffering, Jesus showed us that it is through can free ourselves from sin and pass on to a new life in way, Jesus showed us that suffering has a meaning. We deactivate our computer anti-virus program installed by accept the devil's suppositions, but when we do this, we difficult to run our computer, thinking that it was God motherboard, in other words, we find it difficult to understand the real meaning of suffering.



showed us first Second Person else, but by suffering that we Him. In this are still free to Christ, and will find it more who ruined our

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity suffered a lot in her short life. From the first, she was eager to accept suffering, thinking that this will 'console' Christ's heart. Later on -especially after understanding "*that sacrifice is only love put into action*"<sup>1</sup> - she started to wish once again for suffering, but this time only because she wished to repay her God with her love, doing always His will, walking side by side with her Christ. She writes:

*"I cannot say I love suffering in itself, but I love it because it conforms me to Him who is my Bridegroom and my Love. Oh, you see, that bestows such sweet peace, such profound joy on the soul, and you end up putting your happiness in everything that is irritating. Little Mama, try to*

*put joy -not the joy you can feel but the joy of your will- into every irritation, every sacrifice, and say to the Master: 'I am not worthy to suffer that for you, I do not deserve that conformity with you.' You'll see" she continues, "that my recipe is excellent, it puts a delightful peace in the depths of the heart and draws you closer to God." 2*

Saint Elizabeth only lived 26 years, but she encountered suffering from the beginning of her existence. Elizabeth had to suffer due to her grandparent's death first, and later especially due to her father's death in 1887, who died of a heart attack in Elizabeth's arms. This pushed her to try to do her best to win over the bad part of her character. She managed to do this after four years of continual struggles.

In her youth, Elizabeth had to suffer because her mother was against her vocation for Carmel. From the age of 17 not only could Elizabeth not speak with her mother about her vocation, but she couldn't even speak to her confessor, Fr Golmard, because he also happened to be her mother's confessor.<sup>3</sup> Entering Carmel, Elizabeth had to suffer greatly during the 18 and a half months of her Novitiate, because her mother still was of the idea that her call was not for Carmel and Elizabeth had felt her Mother's opinion as God's will for her. Finally Elizabeth suffered due to her illness, Addison's disease, that reduced her into 'a skeleton, covered by a thin layer of skin', as she was later described, and as we can notice from her last photos.

Even though Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity suffered so much, she considered suffering as a gift from God that purified her, bringing her to a new reality with a new name, having Mary as a model and living everything with Christian joy.

Saint Elizabeth considered suffering as a gift from God. In a long letter written to Françoise de Sourdon, she writes:

*"Have you ever seen those pictures depicting death reaping with his sickle? Well, that is my condition; I seem to feel myself being destroyed like that. Sometimes it is painful for nature and I can assure you that if I have to remain at that level, I would feel only my cowardice in the face of suffering. But that is looking at things from the human point of view! Very quickly 'I open the eyes of faith'. And this faith tells me that it is love who is destroying me, who is slowly consuming me; then I feel a tremendous joy, and I surrender myself to Him as His prey." 4*

Suffering is considered as a gift from God, because it gives us the opportunity to do that which we so much need to do, and that we are afraid to do. Through suffering, God gives us the opportunity to assimilate ourselves more to Him.

Even though suffering -as already said- is not God's but a direct consequence of sin, through suffering God helping the soul advance in its spiritual walk. She writes, her mother

*"Suffering has done God's work her soul, and I am filled with thanksgiving and gratitude. What mercy, what love the shows His little bride by sending her this illness; sometimes I say to myself that He acts as if He had no one but me to love!"*



punishment, purifies us, referring to

with Master

[L 276]

Suffering also has a pedagogical value because it increases the faith of those who *"believe in His love. The more" they are "tried, the more" their "faith increases because it passes over all obstacles, as it were, to go rest in the heart of infinite Love who can perform only works of love."* [HF 20]

Suffering also has a pedagogical value because it transforms and unites the soul with her Beloved. In this way, Christ, *"doesn't need the Sacrament to come to me! 5 because everything will be a sacrament that will give God to me."* Suffering helps the soul to live in a *"kind of continual communion with the Holy Spirit"* [L 252] in *"the royal palace where I live with my crucified Bridegroom."* [L 323 a]

The more the soul is purified, the more it will resemble Christ and participate in His same mission, living in an existential way the Eucharist.

*"Your mother's heart should leap for divine joy in thinking that the Master has deigned to choose your daughter, the fruit of your womb, to associate her with His great work of redemption, and that He suffers in her, as it were, an extension of His passion."* [L 309] Elizabeth felt that her mission was to be 'another humanity' and *"become like a flame of love spreading into all the members of the body of Christ, the Church."* [L 250] Elizabeth speaks of *"the apostolate of suffering."* [L 259]

But Saint Elizabeth profoundly believed that by her suffering, she was 'participating' in the Eucharistic Mystery. For this reason she demands the ordained priests to *"consecrate me so completely that I may no longer be myself but Him."* [L 294] She asks to be placed *"in the chalice so my soul may be wholly bathed in the Blood of my Christ for which I thirst."* [L 131] Mother Germaine is considered by Saint Elizabeth as her priest, the one that will offer her to the Father, while she considers her bed as her altar. Elizabeth so much understands and lives this truth, that Fr Conrad De Meester, defines her as 'Elisabeth de l'Eucharistie', that is 'Elizabeth of the Eucharist'. 6

A soul that accepts suffering with this spirit, will become a 'praise to His Glory'. As Fr Philipon notices, we need to distinguish between the internal glory of God, that is that glory that no human being, or even not even anything created by God, can add or subtract anything to it, and the external glory of God, which reveals the greatness of the internal glory of God. By aiming at becoming a saint, Elizabeth *"gives glory to her adored Master"*, [L 299] and by bearing *"this state of powerlessness with fidelity, with love"*, she felt she would *"cover Him with glory."* [L 220]

On this road, especially at the foot of the cross, Christ left us His Mother *"standing, full of strength and courage... teaching me to suffer as He did, to tell me, to make me hear those last songs of His soul which no one else but she, His Mother, could overhear."* [LR 41] This is the reason why Saint Elizabeth wished the small statue of our Lady of Lourdes she had at her home, be kept always near her during her last suffering, calling her 'Janua Coeli', that is 'Gate of Heaven'

Those who accept suffering internal joy. *"I am tasting, the joy of pain... before I die, I Crucified, and that gives me so* [L 324] So the joy in suffering from the fact that one is suffer, and the One with whom *happy I am in the solitude of me, and we live night and day*



with this spirit, live everything with *experiencing unknown joys*", she writes, *dream to be transformed into Jesus much strength in suffering.*" derives not from suffering in itself, but conscious of the reason why he has to he has to carry his cross. *"If you knew how my little infirmary, my Master is here with in a sweet heart-to-heart."* [L 267]

Summarizing, one can say that for Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, suffering is a gift from God that purifies the soul, pushing it to a new reality, with a new name. On this path, the soul is guided by Mary, and is called to live every moment with Christian joy.

But even baptism is a gift from God that purifies a soul from the Original sin and pushes those who receive it to a new reality, with a new name. Even these souls have Mary as their companion and everything becomes for them a fountain of internal joy.

Therefore not only is there a certain parallelism between suffering and baptism, but suffering becomes in itself God's gift to live today the baptismal vows. In this way, those who do not have the opportunity to receive Baptism, because they never heard of Christ, can reach eternal glory by accepting suffering as a positive gift from a Divine being. United to Christ's death and Resurrection, therefore as Saint Elizabeth shows us in her writings, a share in that suffering, can save everyone. It is through suffering that every human being not only can be saved, but also will be saved.

*Fr Juan Debono, ocd*

---

1 L 250, The Complete Works of Elizabeth of the Trinity, Volume II, p. 232.

2 L 317, Ibid, p. 338.

3 Her mother did not wish her to change confessor (cfr., D 5).

4 GV 7, The Complete Works, Volume I, p. 126.

5 Intimate notes 10.

6 C. Meester De., "Regards du Carmel sur l'Eucharistie" in Revue du Carmel 25 (1982) p. 50.

L = letters of Bl. Elizabeth

HF = Heaven in Faith

GV = The Greatness of Our Vocation

LR = Last Retreat

Labels: [article](#), [winter 07 flos](#)

Posted by John Michael

---