Exercise of Authority Must be Service to Justice and Charity
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ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY: INTENSE LOVE FOR GOD AND NEIGHBOUR

VATICAN CITY, 20 OCT 2010 (VIS) -

In the general audience, held this morning in St. Peter's Square, the Pope dedicated his attention to St. Elizabeth of Hungary who, he remarked, "is also known as Elizabeth of Thuringia".

The Holy Father explained how St. Elizabeth was born in the year 1207. She lived the first four years of her life in the Hungarian royal court before being promised in marriage to Ludwig of Thuringia. "Although their match was decided for political reasons", said the Holy Father, "a sincere love arose between the two young people, animated by faith and by their desire to do the will of God".

Elizabeth, who "behaved before God as she behaved towards her subjects", is "a true example for everyone who holds positions of leadership", said Pope Benedict. "The exercise of authority at all levels must be practiced as a service to justice and charity, in the constant search for the common good".

Having highlighted the fact that the saint "assiduously practiced works of mercy", Benedict XVI spoke of the "profound happiness" of her marriage. "Elizabeth helped her spouse to elevate his human qualities to a supernatural level while he, for his part, protected his wife in her generosity towards the poor and in her religious observances. ... This is clear testimony of how faith and love for God and for others strengthen family life and make the marriage bond even more profound".

Elizabeth found support in the Friars Minor, something which helped her "become even more resolute in following the poor and crucified Christ, Who is present in the poor".

Following her husband's death in 1227, Elizabeth "had to face another trial: her brother-in-law usurped the government of Thuringia, declaring himself Ludwig's heir and accusing Elizabeth of being a pious woman, incompetent to rule. The young widow with her three children was driven from the castle of Wartburg and had to look for refuge elsewhere. ... During this ordeal, which she bore with great faith, patience and dedication to God, some relatives who had

remained faithful and considered her brother-in-law's government illegitimate, re-established her good name. Thus, at the beginning of 1228, Elizabeth was given a pension and retired to the family castle at Marburg".

The Holy Father indicated that "Elizabeth spent her last three years in the hospital she founded, serving the sick and attending the dying. She always sought the most humble and repugnant tasks. She became what we could call a consecrated woman living in the world ('soror in saeculo') and formed a religious community with a number of grey-clad companions. It is no coincidence that she is patron of the Third Regular Order of St. Francis and of the Secular Franciscan Order".

In November 1231 she fell into a high fever and died a few days later. "The testimonies of her sanctity were so many that just four years later Pope Gregory IX proclaimed her a saint. In the same year a beautiful church was built in her honour at Marburg".

"In the figure of St. Elizabeth", Pope Benedict concluded his catechesis, "we see how faith and friendship with Christ, create a sense of justice, of universal equality, of the rights of others, and foment love and charity. From this charity comes hope, the certainty that we are loved by Christ, that the love of Christ awaits us, thus making us capable of imitating Christ and of seeing Him in others".