

Followers of the Troubadour

Reflections on the lives and spirituality of the followers of Francis of Assisi

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Louis of France: Patron Saints of the Third Order Regular and Secular Franciscan Order

The year 2010 marks the 100th anniversary of the Province of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, Third Order Regular of Saint Francis. It is a fitting time to highlight two saints, Elizabeth of Hungary and Louis, King of France, and the reasons they are considered patrons of both the Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order. For centuries, both have been venerated as examples of the Franciscan way of life and intercessors between God and His people.

The following is taken from an article written in 2007 by the Most Reverend Michael J. Higgins, TOR, Minister General of the Third Order Regular, on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the birth of Saint Elizabeth.

The concept of patron saints is based on the dogma of the Communion of Saints and on the Pauline doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ. “Individual patron saints are those who through ancient tradition or through legitimate election are venerated with a particular cult by the clergy and people of a location as special protectors and advocates before God” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 2). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1997) states that the saints were “put in charge of many things,” including to “... contemplate God, praise him and constantly care for those whom they have left on earth” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 2). In their roles as examples of faith, intercessors before God, and protectors of the faithful, they are considered “patron saints.”

From the first mention of Sts. Peter and Paul as “...great patrons and friends of our Lord Jesus Christ” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 2) in a 2nd century text, to the 6th century

widespread practice of collecting relics of the saints and the custom of setting aside special days to venerate them and ask for their intercession, to the continuing practice of designating particular saints as having a special connection to churches, cities, towns, occupations, or human interests, patron saints have served as objects of prayer, inspiration, and intercession between God and ourselves and our world.

Research will yield no official document from the early centuries of the Franciscan movement that clearly identifies Elizabeth and Louis as patron saints of the Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order. The reason for this is that popular devotion to the saints is not often written in official documents, but rather grows from tradition, formal election, or a sense of identification with them and a desire to emulate their examples.

Francis himself appointed the Blessed Virgin Mary as the Advocate of the Order, and, Celano states, “placed under her wings the sons he left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end” (2C 198). She retains the special place of honor in the Franciscan family and is revered as its principal Advocate and Patron. Chapter 1 of the *Third Order Regular Constitutions*, entitled The Charism of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis, Title 1, Our Identity, concludes by stating that the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis is placed under the protection of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, its heavenly patron. The friars also venerate as their patrons Saint Louis, King of France, and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary” (*Franciscan Constitutions*, Art. 6). The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan

Order also highlights the two patron saints in the section entitled, “Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order: Within the Mass,” indicating that when the profession is part of a Eucharistic celebration, the Mass can use the liturgy of the day, or choose a votive Mass of Saint Francis or Saint Louis King or Saint Elizabeth of Hungary. Thus, the connection of these saints to the history and tradition of the Franciscans is clear.

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary

Elizabeth, canonized on May 27, 1235, in the Church of Saint Dominick of Perugia, was the third person – after Francis in 1228 and Anthony of Padua in 1232—to be canonized by Pope Gregory IX. Though there has been some debate as to whether she was an “official” member of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis, recent scholarship clearly affirms that Elizabeth was “indeed a Franciscan in every sense of the word—spiritually, canonically, and intentionally—and that she can clearly be numbered among Franciscan tertiaries” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 1). The secular and religious canonical structures of the Third Order were still evolving during Elizabeth’s life and not delineated until long after her death. However, in both her secular life as wife and mother and in her widowhood and profession of vows under the direction of the Friars Minor, she lived the Franciscan way of life, moving closer to religious life in the years before her death. Pope Gregory IX presented her as a model of the penitential life.

Regardless of her “official” standing as a professed Franciscan, Elizabeth of Hungary embodies what both secular and religious tertiary Franciscans strive to emulate: “a woman so deeply in love with her Lord and her Church, and so open and willing to follow the Divine will, that she exemplifies everything it means to be a Franciscan penitent” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 2).

Saint Louis, King of France

Louis, beloved King of France, was honored by the Franciscans even before his death. It is doubtful that he was a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, but his love of and generosity to them and to other mendicant groups, including the Dominicans, is clear.

Saint Bonaventure, at the General Chapter at Narbonne in 1260, proposed that suffrages for the King be celebrated by the Order on a yearly basis. That proposal was approved by the Order at the General Chapter of 1263 in Padua. It is an indication of the regard in which Louis was held by the Franciscans that the only other people to receive a similar honor in the 13th century from the Friars minor—after their deaths—were Popes. Since his death in 1270 and his canonization on August 11, 1297, Louis has continued to be honored by Franciscan tertiaries and received by the Third Order as one of their own.

There are many instances in which Elizabeth and Louis are lovingly portrayed in art, honored in song and story, and included in the official legislation of the Orders, even in the early centuries of the Franciscan movement. Their example remains in today’s world as fitting as it was during their lifetimes. “Both of them in their own way demonstrate the five elements of penance that Francis encouraged the penitents to embrace: love of God, love of neighbor, hatred of sin, reception of the Eucharist, and lives that produce ‘worthy fruits of penance’ (1LtF 1-4)” (as cited in Higgins, 2007, p. 6).

By Kathleen Gilmour

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary and Saint Louis of France Significant Dates

Date	Saint Elizabeth of Hungary	Saint Louis of France	Church & Franciscan Events
1204			1204/05 - Francis has a dream in Spoleto and returns to Assisi
1207	Princess Elizabeth, daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary and Queen Gertrude, is born		(1205/06) Francis of Assisi repairs to Church of San Damiano 1209 - Innocent III gives verbal approval to a rule of life for the Order of Friars Minor, begun by Francis of Assisi
1211	Betrothed to Ludwig IV, son of Duke Hermann of Thuringia and Duchess Sophia of Bavaria; brought to Warburg castle in Thuringia	1214 - Louis is born at Poissy, son of King Louis VIII and Queen Blanche of Castille	1212 - Second Order of Franciscans, Poor Clares, founded 1215 - Ecumenical Council of the Lateran IV 1216 - Portiuncula Indulgence granted by Holy See at request of Francis of Assisi
1221	At age 14, married to Ludwig (age 20); three children: Hermann, Sophia, and Gertrude		Cardinal Ugolino gives a rule of life, the Memoriale propositi, to the lay penitents who are part of the Franciscan movement. This is the first juridical rule for the Third Order
1227	Ludwig dies in Italy on way to Crusade in the Holy Land	1226 - Crowned King of France in Rheims on November 29 upon death of father	1226 - Death of Francis of Assisi
1228	Public profession in Order of Penitents on Good Friday, March 24	Regency of Blanche of Castille until Louis is of age (1226-1234)	Canonization of Francis of Assisi
1231	Elizabeth dies on November 17		Anthony of Padua dies and is canonized one year later.
1234-5	Commission for canonization appointed	1234 - May 29, at age 20, marries 13 yr. old Marguerite of Provence, sister of Eleanor, wife of Henry III of England	
1235	Elizabeth canonized on Pentecost, May 27, at Church of St. Dominic of Perugia		
1235	Remains moved to new shrine; Emperor attends	1238 - Built cathedral of St. Chapelle to house Crown of Thorns and other relics	
1236		First Crusade of Louis IX to Egypt - failed; Louis captured & pays large ransom	1245 - Council of Lyons: excommunication & deposition of Emperor Frederick II
1270		Second Crusade of Louis IX: he contracts plague epidemic enroute Louis dies near Tunis on August 24 1271 - Louis buried at the abbey of St. Denis	Birth of Duns Scotus, Franciscan philosopher and theologian (1265/66)
1297		Louis canonized saint by Pope Boniface at Orvieto, body exhumed and transferred to Sainte Chapelle	Death of Margaret of Cortona (22 February)

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Prayer to Patron Saints of the TOR and SFO Elizabeth of Hungary and Louis of France

Enlighten, O God of compassion, the hearts of your faithful servants. Through the prayers of Elizabeth and Louis, assist us to recognize and honor Christ in the poor of this world and empower us to serve our brothers and sisters in time of trouble and need. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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