

St. Elizabeth of Portugal (O.F.S.)

[1271 – July 4, 1336]

(Feast Day: July 5 in the United States)

Elizabeth is usually depicted in royal garb with a dove or an olive branch because she worked for peace. She was named after her great-aunt, the great Elizabeth of Hungary, but is known in Portuguese history by the Spanish form of that name, Isabel. The daughter of Pedro III, King of Aragon, and Constantia, grandchild of Emperor Frederick II, she was educated very piously, and led a life of strict regularity and self-denial from her childhood: she said the full Divine Office daily, fasted and did other penances, and gave up amusement. Elizabeth was married at the age of 12 to Diniz (Denis), King of Portugal, a poet, and known as *Rei Lavrador*, or the working king, from his hard work in its country's service. His morals, however, were extremely bad, and the court to which his young wife was brought consequently most corrupt.

Diniz does not appear to have reformed in morals till late in life, when we are told that the saint won him to repentance by her prayers and unfailing sweetness. They had two children, a daughter Constantia and a son Affonso. The latter so greatly resented the favors shown to the king's illegitimate sons that he rebelled, and in 1323, war was declared between him and his father. St. Elizabeth, however, rode in person between the opposing armies, and so reconciled her husband and son. Diniz died in 1325, his son succeeding him as Affonso IV.

Elizabeth then retired to a convent of Poor Clares at Coimbra, where **she took the Franciscan Tertiary** (Secular Franciscan) **habit**, wishing to devote the rest of her life to the poor and sick in obscurity. But she was called forth to act once more as peacemaker. In 1336, Affonso IV marched his troops against the King of Castile, who was married to her daughter Maria, and who had neglected and ill-treated her. In spite of age and weakness, the holy queen dowager insisted on hurrying to Estremoz, where the two king's armies were drawn up. She again stopped the fighting and caused terms of peace to be arranged. But the exertion brought on her final illness; and as soon as her mission was fulfilled, she died of a fever, full of heavenly joy, and exhorting her son to the love of holiness and peace. Elizabeth was buried at Coimbra, and miracles followed her death. She was canonized by Urban VIII in 1625.

Comment:

The work of promoting peace is anything but a calm and quiet endeavor. It takes a clear mind, a steady spirit and a brave soul to intervene between people whose emotions are so aroused that they are ready to destroy one another. This is even more true of a woman in the early 14th century. But Elizabeth had a deep and sincere love and sympathy for humankind, almost a total lack of concern for herself and an abiding confidence in God. These were the tools of her success.

