

The Elizabeth of the Trinity School of Prayer

Lord teach us to Pray Series

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Part 1

To conclude these **four conferences on prayer**, I propose that we review all that we have studied by using Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, canonized by Pope Francis, as an illustration.

Before we do, let's find out who this **young Carmelite** is, **daughter** and **granddaughter of an officer**.

The first seven years of the life of Elisabeth Cattez were characterized by great bursts of anger often impossible to control.

Her first confession, however, was a real conversion. From that moment on, she engaged in a struggle against her dominant defects: **anger and sensitivity**.

Her **spiritual combat** will continue until the age of 18. It was evident that with her temperament, Elisabeth would become either a saint or a demon. She became a saint!

A sudden and profound change took place within her one day after receiving communion. She had the impression that the word of **Carmel** was echoing in her soul. It was then, at 17 years old, that her spiritual adventure began. She tried to escape from this sad, seductive world but one does not enter into Carmel like that. Her mother was against it. She could do nothing else but wait for **God's chosen hour**.

So, she began to **socialize** going to parties and other gatherings of all kinds. She was happily mingling with the society in which she lived, but she always fled from sin. In Dijon where she lived, she devoted herself to parish life especially caring for children.

She really liked Francine's pies. Francine was the best pastry chef in Dijon. Elisabeth would laugh heartily talking about the heavy meals that would fill stomachs for three days straight! Remember, Dijon is in Burgundy is where good food and good wine is most appreciated.

But in the midst of these worldly festivities, Elisabeth's **heart** remained **nostalgic** for the Carmel. She liked being alone with Christ. The spiritual battle she led against her defects, the triumph over her nature, and simply because she had changed her focus, resulted in the first manifestation of God's **mystical graces** in her life which would gradually, overtime, transform her life. Then there was her **profession in Carmel** and finally the last six months of her life spent in the infirmary would allow her to make **giant strides**.

In January 1899, at the age of 19, Elisabeth lived her **first divine experiences** during a retreat. This is what she said:

The degree of prayer where God does everything and we do nothing, where He unites our soul so intimately to Himself that it is no longer we who live but God who lives in us.

I recognized moments of sublime ecstasy where the Master often raised me both during this retreat and afterwards. Not only ecstasies but sublime rapture during which the soul forgets everything seeing only its God.

She goes on to say: **Ordinary prayer now seems hard and painful. What an effort one has to put forth to gather together the powers. It seems so difficult.**

These few lines seem to **sum up our spiritual path**. Perhaps you have received the grace of ecstasy that Elisabeth speaks of? She told us that these moments are brief, fleeting while **ordinary prayer** consists mostly of **dryness**. This explains

why we have so much trouble persevering in prayer. If not raptures, maybe you experience union with God which is so important since we were created for it. Elisabeth followed Teresa of Avila's school of prayer and the way of perfection Teresa described. Let me invite you to slowly read Teresa's **Way of Perfection** to encourage the desire to be united with God to grow within you; to experience feeling inhabited by God.

Part 2

It was at the Carmelite monastery that Elisabeth met Father Vallée, a Dominican friar, who confirmed that her movements of **grace** were **gifts** from God.

From then on the **Holy Trinity** would be her **unique life** through all. She entered Carmel and the **watchword** of her **entire inner life** was **to bury myself in the depths of my soul to find God**. Here we find the Augustinian movement, **return to your heart**.

It took all the work of stripping away the world and the supreme grace that transformed her life and clarified its definitive vocation, Elisabeth will be a **Praise of glory to the Trinity**

For Elisabeth, as for all of us, entering into prayer is a **struggle**. Pope Francis said in his homily at the canonization of Elisabeth:

Prayer is a mystery --Crying out to God is not discouragement but if you get discouraged, ask for help to hold on. Prayer is not taking refuge in an ideal world or an escape into a false and selfish tranquility, on the contrary, to pray is to fight and to allow the Holy Spirit to pray in us.

The **first steps** of her **religious life** were full of grace and then God abandoned her to herself for a long year. She was left to her powerlessness, her lassitude, her hesitation about her vocation to Carmel. The facility in prayer disappeared. But, as

with each one of us, she went through a **period of purification and detachment**, the only way to be **freed**.

It is important not to seek consolation in prayer. It is a **quest of pure faith** that brings about a **real conversion**. It is only by relying on faith that we grow.

Confident in the discernment of her spiritual father, she remained in Carmel and she made her profession. At this point, the struggle seemed to lessen. She, of course still had times of turmoil, but gradually a peaceful rhythm was established. A simple life basically reduced to essential moments emphasized in the first three conferences: **be silent; believe in the love deep within our soul that saves us**. Listen to Saint Elisabeth:

I feel so much love in my soul. It is like an ocean in which I immerse myself, lose myself. It is my vision on earth while waiting for the face to face in the light. He is in me, I am in Him. I have only to love Him and allow myself be loved by Him always; through it all; awaken in love, live in love, go to sleep in love. My soul in His soul, my heart in His heart so that by His touch He purifies me to deliver me from my misery.

All these remarks that Elisabeth makes shows the **unification** of Elisabeth's whole being. But we too can experience the same communion with God even if we have not yet reached the **degree of mystical prayer** of the Saint. Let me encourage you to ask the Lord for such grace.