

St. Elizabeth, Grand Duchess of Russia and New Martyr

(†1918)

Commemoration Days: February 7, July 18

Part I

The life of St. Elizabeth, Grand Duchess of Russia, *embodies* Christ's commandment, "love thy neighbour," in the most perfect and pure way.

Elizabeth, the second of seven children, was born in 1864 to Louis IV, Grand-Duke of Hessen-Darmstadt, and Princess Alice of the United Kingdom, daughter of Queen Victoria.

When Elizabeth was fourteen, an *outbreak* of diphtheria killed her mother and youngest sister. The orphaned girl was raised by her grandmother, Queen Victoria, and spent many years in

England. Called Ella by her family, she grew into a beautiful young princess – highly intelligent, *lively*, *compassionate*, and very *pious*. Having declined several *suitors*, in 1884 she married the son of Emperor Alexander II of Russia, Grand Duke Serge.

The Grand Duchess quickly adjusted to her new home and learned to speak *fluent* Russian with only a slight accent. In the beginning of her married life, Elizabeth continued to attend Protestant services but felt a great attraction to the faith of her husband. After much *contemplation* and study, she converted to the Orthodox faith, despite the disapproval of her English and German relatives. Only Queen Victoria supported her granddaughter's decision.

Both Elizabeth and her husband were involved in *charity* work. Serge helped the Russian Orthodox Mission in Palestine, building schools and orphanages for Arab Christians. When he was appointed the Governor of Moscow, Elizabeth, as the first lady, worked to improve the living conditions of the poor and hungry. The couple, unable to have children of their own, adopted Serge's niece and nephew.

In February of 1905 Elizabeth's life changed forever. Her husband was killed by a bomb in a political *assassination*. Close to the place of the explosion, Elizabeth saw the body and, kneeling on the snow, helped gather Serge's remains. Deeply shocked and *affected* by the tragedy, she spent days in *ceaseless* prayer and later visited her husband's murderer in prison, begging him to *repent*, saying she had forgiven him. Elizabeth asked for mercy for



the assassin from the government. She had her husband's gravestone inscribed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Vocabulary

| | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| embody | [ɪm' bɑ: .di] | воплощать |
| outbreak | [' aut breɪk] | вспышка (заболевания) |
| lively | [' laɪv li] | живой, весёлый |
| compassionate | [kəm' pæ fə nət] | сострадательный |
| pious | [' paɪ əs] | набожный, благочестивый |
| suitor | [' sju: tər] | претендент на руку |
| fluent | [fluent] | беглый, чистый (о владении языком) |
| contemplation | [,kɑ:n tʃəm' pleɪ fən] | размышление, серьёзное рассмотрение |
| charity | [' tʃe rə ti] | благотворительность |
| assassination | [ə ,sæs ə' nei fən] | убийство |
| affected | [ə' fek təd] | быть до глубины души поражённым |
| ceaseless | [' si: s ləs] | непрестанный |
| repent | [ri ' pent] | покаяться |

Part II

Elizabeth *withdrew* from her former social life completely. She sold all her jewelry and expensive clothes and moved out of the palace. On a large piece of land she had *purchased*, the Duchess founded the Convent of Saints Martha and Mary. The nuns established a rent-free *hostel* for female workers and students, free hospital, clinic, school for nurses, library, and soup kitchen. Elizabeth took care of *abandoned* children and brought food to poor families, often visiting the most dangerous parts of Moscow. By 1910, the Convent became home to 45 nuns, and Elizabeth was chosen to be the *abbess*. During the First World War, the sisters helped wounded soldiers in hospitals. Elizabeth was respected and loved throughout Russia.

When the Revolution of 1917 came, the nuns stopped neither their worship nor their service. For Elizabeth, as a member of the royal family, it was very unsafe to stay in Russia. Her brother-in-law, Tsar Nicholas II, abdicated the throne and, together with his family, was placed under house arrest. The Grand Duchess had a chance to *escape* but *turned down* all offers, saying that she would never abandon her sisters in Christ. On Pascha 1918, Red Army soldiers broke into the Convent. Elizabeth and her close companion, Sister Barbara, who refused to leave the Abbess, were arrested and taken first to Yekaterinburg and then to the town of Alapayevsk nearby. Together with five members of the imperial family and their secretary, the Grand Duchess and Sister Barbara stayed in a school house on the edge of town.

On the night of July 5, the prisoners, beaten and *blindfolded*, were taken to a place in the woods and *executed*. The first to die was Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich, grandson of Nicholas I: he was shot when he tried to *fight back*. The others were pushed into a mine shaft, with grenades tossed in after them. The martyrs didn't die immediately, but lived for several hours more. Local villagers who came to the shaft after the murderers had left heard the singing of Christian hymns coming deep from underground.

When the White Army liberated Alapayevsk, the soldiers recovered the bodies. They discovered that Elizabeth, before she died, tried to *dress the wounds* of Grand Duke John. On her chest she held the icon of Christ given to her by her husband on the day of her baptism.

Long before her death, the Grand Duchess had expressed a wish to be buried in Palestine. With great effort, Victoria, Elizabeth's older sister, transported the body of the *martyred* Abbess to the Middle East. In 1921 members of the Russian, Greek and Arab clergy received the *relics* and placed them in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. To this day, the relics are kept there, and Christians from all over the world come to *venerate* them.

Vocabulary

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| withdraw (withdrew-withdrawn) | [wɪð'drɑ: wɪð'dru: wɪð'drɑ:n] | уйти от, оставить |
| purchase | ['pə: tʃəs] | купить, приобрести |
| hostel | ['hɑ: stəl] | общежитие |
| abandon | [ə'bændən] | покинуть, бросить |
| abbess | ['æb es] | настоятельница |
| escape | [ɪ'skeɪp] | бежать |
| turn down | [tə:n daʊn] | отклонить |
| blindfolded | ['blaɪnd faʊldɪd] | с завязанными глазами |
| execute | ['ek sə kju:t] | убить, казнить |
| fight back | [faɪt bæk] | сопротивляться |
| dress the wounds | [dres ðə wʊndz] | перевязать раны |
| martyred | ['mɑ:r tɛd] | замученный |
| relics | ['reɪɪks] | святые мощи |
| venerate | ['ve nə reɪt] | читать, почитать |