

**St. Elizabeth of Hungary**

**November 17**

II Jn 4-9  
Lk 17:26-27

*Waiting for the Son of Man to be Revealed*

Alvin D. Paligutan, O.S.A.

Every Friday morning since last month, I have been doing ministry with a group of volunteers at Gift of Peace, a home for men and women with mental and physical disabilities and HIV/AIDS, run by the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa's sisters. At the Gift of Peace, less than two miles from our back gate here on Otis St. NE, we help to serve breakfast and lunch to the residents; wash dishes and clean the dining room; change their beds and clean their rooms; clean the common areas, hallways and bathrooms, and so on. One morning, the sisters asked me to drive two men to the shops on Rhode Is. Ave. One man was in a wheelchair (he doesn't have left leg) and the other has a mental disability. We stopped by a liquor store for them to buy their cigarettes. The brother with a mental disability asked me, "Brother Alvin, can I get you something to drink?" I told him politely, "No thanks, Peter; I'm fine." But he insisted, "Come on, Br. Alvin, just grab something from the icebox; it's on me." I got a bottle of orange juice and so did he.

I was very grateful to Peter, who has lived at the Gift of Peace for almost 20 years, who probably does not have many family and friends to visit him, who is much poorer than I am in many ways – this man was ministering to me by offering me a drink. I was humbled by his kindness and encouraged by his care and generosity.

Jesus says in Luke's Gospel this morning, "*Whoever seeks to preserve his life will*

*lose it, but whoever loses it will save it.*” Our ministries and service to other people are some of the ways in which we keep vigil and patiently wait for the day that the Son of Man – Jesus Christ - will be revealed. Our caring for others and reaching out to them are our ways of loving one another and walking according to God’s commandments, as we have just heard in the second letter of John, the first reading.

The saint we celebrate today, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, waited for the Son of Man and kept vigil for him precisely by losing her life, loving her neighbors and practicing that preferential option for the poor. Elizabeth, who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, had such a great love for the poor and suffering that she became the patroness of Catholic charities and the Secular Franciscan Order. The daughter of the King of Hungary, she chose a life of penance and asceticism when a life of leisure and luxury could easily have been hers. At the age of 14, she was married to Ludwig of Thuringia (Germany), whom she deeply loved and bore three children. Under the spiritual direction of a Franciscan friar, she led a life of prayer, sacrifice and service to the poor and the sick. Seeking to become one with the poor, she wore simple clothing. And instead of lording it over her subjects, she distributed bread daily to hundreds of the poorest in the land who came to her gates. Her husband Ludwig the king supported her service to the poor. But her in-laws mistreated her, looked down upon her for wasting royal funds to help the poor and eventually threw her out of the palace.

When her husband died fighting with the Crusades, after 6 years of marriage, she joined the Third Order Franciscans and spent the rest of her life caring for the sick, the poor and the lepers in a hospital which she founded in honor of St. Francis. In 1231, she died at the young age of 24 and her service to the poor and the suffering won her a

special place in the hearts of many common people throughout Europe. Her great popularity resulted in her canonization four years later.

Elizabeth understood well the lesson Jesus taught – of losing one’s life to save it. The Christian must be one who serves the humblest needs of others, even if one serves from a position of power. Today, there is an inescapable duty to make ourselves the neighbor of every individual, without exception, and to take positive steps to help a neighbor, whom we encounter, whether that neighbor be an orphan, an elderly person, someone in prison, the homeless, a patient in the hospital, or a brother here in our community. We call to mind the words of Jesus Christ in Mt. 25:40 – *“As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it for me.”*