



The Mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity deepens Virtue of Simplicity in the Vincentian Spirituality

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Abstract:

Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity (1880-1906) exemplifies the integration of mysticism and simplicity within Vincentian spirituality. Born in France, she showed early signs of a deep spiritual inclination, eventually joining the Carmelite convent. Elizabeth's spirituality, centered on the Holy Trinity, emphasizes an inward unity and simplicity that leads to a profound contemplative life. She viewed simplicity as essential for entering into a mystical union with God. Her writings, filled with warmth and insight, continue to inspire Christians to live out their faith with genuine simplicity and deep contemplation. Elizabeth's life and teachings highlight the importance of simplicity not only as a lifestyle but as a pathway to divine intimacy and spiritual growth.

Sainte Elisabeth de la Trinité (1880-1906) illustre l'intégration de la mystique et de la simplicité dans la spiritualité vincentienne. Née en France, elle a montré très tôt des signes d'une profonde inclination spirituelle, rejoignant finalement le couvent des Carmélites. La spiritualité d'Elizabeth, centrée sur la Sainte Trinité, met l'accent sur l'unité et la simplicité intérieures qui conduisent à une vie contemplative profonde. Elle considérait la simplicité comme essentielle pour entrer dans une union mystique avec Dieu. Ses écrits, pleins de chaleur et de perspicacité, continuent d'inspirer les chrétiens à vivre leur foi avec une simplicité authentique et une contemplation profonde. La vie et les enseignements d'Elizabeth soulignent l'importance de la simplicité, non seulement comme style de vie, mais aussi comme chemin vers l'intimité divine et la croissance spirituelle.

Santa Isabel de la Trinidad (1880-1906) ejemplifica la integración de misticismo y sencillez en la espiritualidad vicenciana. Nacida en Francia, dio tempranas muestras de una profunda inclinación espiritual, ingresando finalmente en el convento de las Carmelitas. La espiritualidad de Isabel, centrada en la Santísima Trinidad, hace hincapié en la unidad interior y la sencillez, que conducen a una profunda vida contemplativa. Para ella, la sencillez es esencial para entrar en una unión mística con Dios. Sus escritos, llenos de calidez y perspicacia, siguen inspirando a los cristianos a vivir su fe con auténtica sencillez y profunda contemplación. La vida y las enseñanzas de Isabel ponen de relieve la importancia de la sencillez no sólo como estilo de vida, sino como camino hacia la intimidad divina y el crecimiento espiritual.

Keywords: Myticism, Vincentian Spirituality, Simplicity, Saint Elizabeth of Trinity.

In the seventeenth century, Saint Vincent de Paul published the *Common Rules*,¹ in which he urged the members of Congregation of the Mission to have the simplicity of

¹ Saint Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) is the Founder of the Congregation of the Mission and the Company of the Daughters of Charity. The *Common Rule* is his only official published writing.



a dove, stating: “Each of us, then should take care to behave always in this spirit of simplicity, remembering that God likes to deal with the simple and that God conceals the secrets of heaven from the wise and prudent of this world and reveals them to the simple ones.”² However, simplicity is not just a kind of simple lifestyle, but according to Dietrich von Hildebrand, true simplicity is something deeper as he wrote: “The Gospel intends us to attain true simplicity: the simplicity in the sense of an inward unity.”³ In the twentieth century, Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity frequently mentioned simplicity as an attitude of contemplation in her writings. To Saint Elizabeth, simplicity leads the soul to enter the mystical union with the Trinity. This paper introduces the life and mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity and the virtue of simplicity in Vincentian spirituality. Then, it studies simplicity in the mysticism of Saint Elizabeth and draws some lessons for the Christians today. Hopefully, this research helps the readers to grasp how the mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity deepens the virtue of simplicity in Vincentian spirituality.

I. The Life and Mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity

1. *The Life of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity*

Elizabeth Catez, the first of two daughters of Captain Joseph Catez and his wife Marie, was born on Sunday morning, July 18, 1880, at the military camp of Avor, France. Elizabeth was baptized on July 22, the Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene. She grew up as a beautiful and lively child with a passionate and choleric temperament; as her governess said, “She had an iron will.”⁴

After several heart attacks, Captain Joseph Catez died when his children were young. Elizabeth’s mother was concerned about her children's education, so she enrolled her eight-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, in the Conservatory of Dijon. Talented in music, at the age of thirteen years, Elizabeth won the first prize for piano in the concerts of the Conservatory organized in town. A report in the local press described her as a distinguished pianist with an excellent touch, beautiful tone, and a musical feeling.⁵

Besides music, Elizabeth was enthusiastic about the beauty of nature, the mountains, and the sea. She was keen on seeing her friends, playing tennis and croquet. She was too attractive for one to forget her.⁶ At the same time, she had an intense devotion to Jesus and a remarkable religious sensibility. She was very fond of prayer and loved God so much that, even before her First Holy Communion, she thought of loving God regularly. From then on, she was determined to worship God alone and live only for God.⁷

² Saint Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules*, II, 4 in Congregation of the Mission, *Constitutions and Rules* (Philadelphia: De Paul University, 1989), 3.

³ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ: On the Christian Attitude* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2001), Kindle location 1132. Kindle.

⁴ Anne Hunt, “Apostle of the Indwelling Trinity: Elizabeth of the Trinity OCD,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 73 (2008), 61. Dwyer mentions more Elizabeth’s “choleric temperament” in Claire Dwyer, *This Present Paradise: A Spiritual Journey with St. Elizabeth of the Trinity* (New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2022), Kindle location 265. Kindle.

⁵ Conrad De Meester, “Biographical Sketch,” in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings, trans. Elethia Kane (Washington, DC: ISC, 1984), Kindle location 320, Kindle.

⁶ Meester, “Biographical Sketch,” Kindle location 337.

⁷ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Reminiscences of Sister Elizabeth of the Trinity, Servant of God, Discalced Carmelite of Dijon*, trans. A Benedictine of Stanbrook Abbey (Westminster, MD: Newman, 1952), 11.

With a solid religious tendency, Elizabeth was aware of the presence of God in her life at the age of fifteen and sixteen. And at seventeen, she knew how to accept her concrete situation and all that caused suffering to her young heart, already animated by a very contemplative desire for oblation.⁸ In 1899, at nineteen, Elizabeth was touched by *The Story of a Soul* by Therese of Lisieux. She even had a mystical experience of divine love before entering Carmel. She gave God the title which would remain very dear to her: The God “Who is All Love.”⁹

Elizabeth, at the age of fifteen, expressed her desire to enter the Carmel to her mother, who at first disapproved. However, during a popular mission in the parish, preached by the Redemptorists during Lent 1899, her mother experienced a kind of conversion and consented to Elizabeth’s entry to Carmel.¹⁰ Two years later, Elizabeth entered the Carmelite convent at Dijon on August 2, 1901, made her profession on January 11, 1903, and received the black veil on January 21.

Elizabeth lived only five years in the Carmelite monastery before succumbing to the then-incurable Addison's disease. By October 1906, Elizabeth’s situation was acute. Her stomach was not able to receive food or even drink.¹¹ She died in November 1906. Pope John Paul II beatified Elizabeth on November 24, 1984, and Pope Francis canonized her on October 16, 2016. Her feast day in the Catholic Calendar is November 8.

Her major spiritual writings were written in the last months before her death, including *Heaven in Faith*, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, *Last Retreat*, and *Let Yourself Be Loved*.¹² She also wrote more than three hundred letters filled with warmth, tenderness, spontaneity, and simplicity, those revealed her spiritual journey and insight.¹³

2. *The Mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity*

Elizabeth reached remarkable heights in the spiritual life and was soon acclaimed as one of the twentieth century's greatest mystics.¹⁴ She built her spirituality on the objective foundation of Scripture, “Be holy for I am holy” (1Pet 1:16) and “Let us make man in Our image and likeness” (Gn 1:26).¹⁵ She rooted her contemplative life in Baptism, in which the baptized have been united to Jesus Christ: “We are no longer guests or strangers but belong to the city of saints and the House of God. Trinity is our dwelling, our home, the Father’s house we should never leave.”¹⁶

According to Elizabeth, the union with God is the union of love that is her vocation.¹⁷ She wrote, “The more intense this love is, the more deeply the soul enters God and the more it is centered in God.”¹⁸ So, she said about her way of life, “I do everything

⁸ Meester, “Biographical Sketch,” Kindle location 329-332.

⁹ Meester, “Biographical Sketch,” Kindle location 369.

¹⁰ Hunt, 62.

¹¹ Hunt, 64.

¹² Four major spiritual writings of Elizabeth were published in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings, trans. Elethia Kane (Washington, DC: ISC, 1984).

¹³ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works* Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2014); Hunt, 64.

¹⁴ Hunt, 60.

¹⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 22, Kindle location 3333.

¹⁶ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 2 Kindle location 1912.

¹⁷ Dwyer, Kindle location 162.

¹⁸ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 6, Kindle location 1941.

with love, I suffer everything with love. Love fills it so completely, absorbs it, and protects it. My occupation is loving.”¹⁹ Elizabeth reminded her Prioress to be loved more than these.²⁰

Elizabeth contributed to the spirituality of the laity. She lived as a young layperson longer than as a Carmelite.²¹ Elizabeth is a model of holiness for lay people, living out her vocation in the world as she did for several years and making her life, with all its engagements and activities, a continual act of love and conformity to God’s will.²² Many of her writings were destined for lay people, such as her sister, a young mother with two children, married to a banker. Among her fifty-nine correspondents were six priests or seminarians and thirteen religious.²³

About the spirituality of Elizabeth, according to Anders Arborelius, the Holy Trinity is the atmosphere, the spiritual climate wherein Elizabeth of the Trinity lived. Her entire spiritual life and doctrine had their foundation in the Holy Trinity.²⁴ Before entering the Carmel, she wrote: “I so love the Trinity; it is an abyss in which I lose myself.”²⁵ In her Trinitarian approach, Elizabeth always remained Christocentric. Since childhood, she had been deeply touched by the total gift of self that Jesus manifested on the Cross and in the Eucharist. Her transformation in God emerged through conformity to the Crucified and Risen One.²⁶

There was a personal charism of sound interiority and attention to God in her spirituality.²⁷ Elizabeth presented a prophetic aspect through the gentleness and flexibility with which she lived, especially during her sickness. There is nothing harsh, complicated, or irritating about her. In her silence, there was a freedom that she had already acquired as a young layperson.²⁸ Especially in her writings, she poured out her soul with delightful simplicity, freshness, and serenity.²⁹ Mother Germaine, the Prioress of Elizabeth, wrote in *Souvenirs*, “It is true that Elizabeth possessed the simplicity of a child.”³⁰

II. Simplicity in Vincentian Spirituality

¹⁹ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 16, Kindle location 2021.

²⁰ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Let Yourself Be Loved*, 2, Kindle location 4126.

²¹ Conrad De Meester, “General Introduction,” in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings, trans. Elethia Kane (Washington, DC: ISC, 1984), Kindle location 425, Kindle.

²² Hunt, 62.

²³ Meester, “Introduction of Heaven in Faith,” in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings, trans. Elethia Kane (Washington, DC: ISC, 1984), Kindle location 1766, Kindle; Meester, “General Introduction,” Kindle location 523.

²⁴ Anders Arborelius, “The Church: The Mystery of Communion and Friendship According to Elizabeth of the Trinity.” *Teresianum* 36 (1985), 6.

²⁵ Arborelius, 7.

²⁶ Meester, “General Introduction,” Kindle location 492.

²⁷ Meester, “General Introduction,” Kindle location 444.

²⁸ Meester, “General Introduction,” Kindle location 455.

²⁹ Conrad De Meester, “The Contribution of the 'Souvenirs,'" in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works*, vol. 1: General Introduction, Major Spiritual Writings, trans. Elethia Kane (Washington, DC: ISC, 1984), Kindle location 734, Kindle.

³⁰ Mother Germaine, *Soeur Elizabeth de la Trinité. Souvenirs*, 256, quoted in Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Complete Works* vol. 1, Kindle location 784.

1. *Simplicity and the Five Virtues*

In 1658, Saint Vincent wrote about simplicity in the *Common Rules*, “Chapter II: Gospel Teaching,” which instructs the member of the Congregation to follow Jesus Christ always. According to Vincent, the Gospel teachings calls for submission to the will of God that brings triumph and liberation to human beings.³¹ Among many Gospel teachings, the saint selected the principal virtues more suitable for the members of the Congregation of the Mission. They are simplicity, humility, gentleness, mortification, and zeal.³²

Saint Vincent strongly believed that Jesus Christ practiced the five virtues perfectly and encouraged his confreres to follow and conform themselves entirely to the Lord by practicing those virtues. So he urged the Congregation to pay special attention to developing and living the five virtues. And he wished that those virtues might be the faculties of soul of the whole Congregation and inspire all activities in the Congregation.³³

The *Constitutions* of the Congregation of the Mission reminds all Vincentian members to practice the five virtues in living community life as a sign of the newness of evangelical life.³⁴ The five virtues do not constitute the entire Vincentian spirituality, but they bring out the profile of the Vincentian missionaries.³⁵

2. *Simplicity in Vincentian Spirituality*

Among the five virtues, simplicity is the first and most important to Saint Vincent. He said in a conference, “God has given me such a high esteem of simplicity that I call it my Gospel.”³⁶ In many letters and conferences, Saint Vincent declared that being genuine is uppermost among his values and that he has spent a lifetime pursuing this trait of simplicity. He said in another conference, “Simplicity is the virtue I love the most and to which, I think, I pay the most attention in my actions.”³⁷

Vincent understood simplicity as personal transparency, aligning outside appearances with inner attitudes and dispositions. All the acts of this virtue consist in saying things without duplicity or subtlety, in being straightforward, without prevarication or evasion. Concretely, simplicity means giving a clear opinion about something in the way we see them without needless reservations. It also means doing things without double-dealing or manipulation, our attention being focused solely on God. Moreover, simplicity means truth-telling and truth-witnessing.³⁸

More importantly, according to Saint Vincent, simplicity directs the soul to God’s love alone. He said:

³¹ Saint Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules* II, 1; Saint Vincent de Paul, *Correspondance, Entretiens, Documents*, vol.12, ed. Pierre Coste (Paris: Lecoffre/Gabalda, 1924), 302. Future references to this work will be inserted into the text using the initials (SV) followed by the volume number, then the page number, for example, SV XII, 302.

³² Saint Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules* II, 14.

³³ Saint Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules* II, 14; SV XII, 299, 302 in Jean Pierre Renouard, “Saint Vincent de Paul and the Five Fundamental Virtues.” *Vincentiana* 49 (July-December 2005), 306.

³⁴ Congregation of the Mission, *Constitutions*, 24.

³⁵ Renouard, 298.

³⁶ SV IX, 606.

³⁷ SV I, 284.

³⁸ Saint Vincent de Paul, *Common Rules*, II,14; Thomas McKenna, “Vincentian Simplicity: A Core Leadership Trait” in *Vincentian Heritage Journal* Vol 26 (2005) Iss. 1, 70.

Simplicity consists of doing everything for God's love and having no other end in all one's actions but his glory[...]. Simplicity, therefore, is to do everything for the love of God; one encounters no fabrication. It is a very pure act and a very simple being. Consequently, it is necessary to banish all confusion to have only God in view.³⁹

Saint Vincent saw simplicity as the trait of Jesus Christ, "Simplicity is in the makeup of Jesus Christ, demonstrated even unto his death."⁴⁰ Moreover, God only communicates his wisdom and graces to simple souls (cf. Mt 10:16). Therefore, simplicity is fundamental to the members of the Congregation of the Mission so that they must have this virtue, for all their lives are dedicated to acts of charity, towards God or the neighbor.⁴¹

Thus, Saint Vincent said, "How necessary it is to guard against appearing cunning, clever, sly, and ever saying an ambiguous word! Ah, far be that from any missionary!"⁴² He repeated in another conference, "Away with the Mission, farewell to its spirit if it has not that of simplicity."⁴³

III. Simplicity in the Mysticism of Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity

1. *Simplicity and Contemplation*

Elizabeth understood simplicity as a simple eye or a single eye which allows the light of God to enlighten us.⁴⁴ She also understood that the single eye is the simplicity of intention that gathers into unity all the scattered forces of the soul and unites the spirit itself to God. With the light of simplicity, the soul gazes steadfastly at its Master. In other words, in contemplation, God the Trinity is the sole object of the soul that needs a single eye to concentrate on God. Then, penetrating and permeating itself and all creatures, the simple soul finds and contemplates God in soul's abyss.⁴⁵

Saint Elizabeth contemplated God in the simplicity of the One "Who I Am" (cf. Ex 3: 14). She wrote in the *Last Retreat*, "The glorified have this repose of the abyss because they contemplate God in the simplicity of his essence."⁴⁶ And in response, the Lord brings the soul into this spacious place, the simplicity of the Lord, which is nothing more than the Lord alone; there, everything is pure and holy.⁴⁷ To her Prioress, Elizabeth wrote, "You are called to render homage to the simplicity of the Divine Being and to magnify the power of His love."⁴⁸

With the simplicity of the single eye, the soul occupies the knowledge from above that surpasses all other knowledge: the knowledge of the love of Christ Jesus (cf. Ep 3:19). And through Jesus Christ, the complete and perfect God's Revelation, humans have access to the Father (cf. Ep 2:18).⁴⁹ According to Elizabeth, the knowledge of God is the excellent knowledge that all other things are the loss. She was convincing, "The love of

³⁹ SV XII, 302.

⁴⁰ SV IV, 486.

⁴¹ SV XII, 302; Thomas, 70.

⁴² SV XII, 302.

⁴³ SV XII, 303.

⁴⁴ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 3, Kindle location 3101.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 21, Kindle location 2094.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 7, Kindle location 3156.

⁴⁷ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 16, Kindle location 3272.

⁴⁸ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Let Yourself Be Loved*, 6, Kindle location 4205.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, Kindle location 3447.

God, I have forfeited everything.”⁵⁰ Or in other words, she wrote, “Those who love will understand.”⁵¹

So, in the *Last Retreat*, Elizabeth reflected on the word of Jesus about Mary, “*unum necessarium*” (cf. Lk 10:42). Elizabeth realized that Mary had listened to what Jesus had told her (cf. Lk 10:39). In that conversation, Mary Magdalene knew nothing (*nescivi*) but Jesus. Elizabeth concluded, “It is the same for the soul that has entered into the fortress of holy recollection, the eye of its soul, opened in the light of faith, discovers its God present, living within it; in turn, it remains so present to Him, in beautiful simplicity.”⁵²

Elizabeth recognized the beautiful inner unity she wanted to live in, the life of the blessed, simple beings and spirits. For her, the soul simplified and unified becomes the throne of the Unchanging One since unity is the throne of the Trinity.⁵³ She wrote, “How its life is simplified, how it resembles the life of the blessed, how it is freed from self, and all things. Everything for it is reduced to unity, to that ‘one thing necessary.’” (cf. Lk 10:42)⁵⁴ Thus, the repose in God is the simplest, most natural movement of the grace-filled creature. Contemplation, the soul turns in simplicity to the one who one loves.⁵⁵

According to Elizabeth, the soul that, by the depth of its interior gaze, contemplates its God through everything in that simplicity which sets it apart from all else is a radiant soul.⁵⁶ In other words, through simplicity, humans contemplate and enter the union with God:

Simplicity will transport us into the depths where God dwells and give us the repose of the abyss. The inheritance that eternity has prepared for us will be given to us by simplicity. All the life of the spirits, all their virtue, consists of – with the divine likeness – in simplicity, and their final rest is spent on the heights in simplicity also. The simple soul, rising under its interior gaze, enters itself and contemplates in its own abyss the sanctuary where the touch of the Holy Trinity touches it.⁵⁷

In contemplation in simplicity, the soul becomes a reflector of all that God is. Elizabeth compared the soul in contemplation like a bottomless abyss:

It is like a bottomless abyss into which God can flow and expand; it is also like a crystal through which God can radiate and contemplate all God’s perfections and God’s own splendor. A soul which thus permits the divine Being to satisfy in itself God’s need to communicate all that God is and all that God has is, in reality, the praise of the glory of all God’s gifts.⁵⁸

2. *Simplicity, Detachment, and Union*

The soul must be purified and detached from earthly attachments to enter the union with God. Elizabeth wrote to Marguerite (Guite), her sibling, “Let us empty

⁵⁰ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, Kindle location 3512.

⁵¹ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, Kindle location 2054.

⁵² Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 4, Kindle location 3120.

⁵³ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 5, Kindle location 3136.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Greatness of Vocation*, 8, Kindle location 2743.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Letter 301*, quoted in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Two Sisters in the Spirit: Thérèse of Lisieux & Elizabeth of the Trinity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 426.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat* 17, Kindle location 3285.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 21, Kindle location 2094.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 43, Kindle location 2361.

ourselves; detach ourselves from everything. Let God be the Only One, God alone.”⁵⁹ To live in the union with God, according to Elizabeth, the soul must be stripped and withdrawn from all things that is not God.⁶⁰ Silence of all the power of the soul means focusing on God alone. The saint explained, “It means to see nothing, to hear nothing, to take pleasure in nothing, and to stop at nothing that may distract the heart or retard the soul on its way to God.”⁶¹ She wrote, “Strip off the old human in whom you lived your former life to live a new life in holiness and justice according to God's image and likeness.”⁶²

According to the Gospel teaching, it is the requirement to follow Jesus as his disciple that the soul has to be stripped off, to die to self, and to lose sight of self as Jesus declared: “If anyone wants to follow me, let him take up his cross and deny himself (cf. Mt 16:24).”⁶³ She repeated the words of Saint Paul, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3: 3). Hence, the soul must be separated, stripped, and withdrawn from all things so that the soul seeks God alone.⁶⁴

Elizabeth understood that the property of love is never to seek self, and to keep back nothing, but to give everything to the one it loves.⁶⁵ Thus, to attain God's love, the soul must first be “entirely surrendered, it must be calmly lost in God's will, so that its faculties move only in God's love and for the sake of this love.”⁶⁶ Hence, simplicity is the abyss of the soul's nothingness, in which the soul encounters the abyss of God's mercy in which it finds the strength to die to its self and lose all vestige of self; the soul will be changed into love.⁶⁷ With the soul's nothingness, the soul is in the union with God when God embraces its void.⁶⁸

Moreover, Elizabeth saw everything in the light of God. To the saint, everything is a sacrament reflecting God's creative and generative power. The Trinity is the source of everything; the mutual love relationship between the three divine Persons is reproduced in innumerable ways in all creation. To Elizabeth, everything is seen as an emanation of this love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁹

Saint Elizabeth summarized the relationship between simplicity and contemplation as following:

The Praise of Glory gazes on God in simplicity, giving thanks in all things, allowing everything to increase her love and ‘rooting her more deeply in love... like an echo of the eternal *Sanctus*.’ Every activity, every moment of daily life, then becomes an act of love for God, and everything is received as an act of love from God. ‘Each incident, each event, each suffering, as well as each joy, is a sacrament which gives God to [the soul].’⁷⁰

⁵⁹ Philipon, 38.

⁶⁰ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 7, Kindle location 1949.

⁶¹ Philipon, 39.

⁶² Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 3, Kindle location 2692.

⁶³ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 24, Kindle location 3362.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 11, Kindle location 1978.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 10, Kindle location 1971.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, Kindle location 2029.

⁶⁷ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 4, Kindle location 1910.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 5 Kindle location 2710.

⁶⁹ Arborelius, 7.

⁷⁰ Julie Enzler, Elizabeth of the Trinity Can Show You How to Live Life “As In Heaven,” *National Catholic Register*, <https://www.ncregister.com/blog/elizabeth-of-the-trinity-can-show-you-how-to-live-life-as-in-heaven>

IV. Some Lessons for the Christians Today

1. *Simplicity Is Necessary for the Mission of the Church and the Foundation for Other Virtues*

According to Saint Vincent de Paul, simplicity is a crucial virtue for missionaries because it is only possible to be effective as an apostle with simplicity. In reality, if people see that our words do not correspond to what we do or what is inside us, they will not hear our preaching or accept our ministries. Therefore, our words and deeds should come from inner conviction, not masked self-interest.⁷¹ Thus, as laborers in God's vineyard, we need to nourish the transparency and simplicity that can bring credibility and attract people to listen to and accept the Good News.

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The message of Christianity is simple, pure, transparent and luminous when it proceeds unsullied from God and announces itself integrally to the world. It then becomes intelligible to the pure eyes of faith, unproblematic and free of agonizing brooding (cf. 1Jn 1: 3-7)".⁷² Similarly, Saint Elizabeth reminds us to have simplicity to recognize and embrace the message of God. Saint Vincent, too, states the missionaries should be simple in proclaiming the message of the Gospel.

Simplicity and humility are inherently interrelated. Living in simplicity, we should be aware of the presence of God. In the light of God's presence, we should know who we are and who God is. With that knowledge, then, we would live in humility. In other words, with simplicity and humility, we would recognize all we are and have are God's gifts. Humility is nothing else than walking in the truth of simplicity.⁷³

Saint Vincent and Saint Elizabeth invite us to build our spiritual life on the foundation of the virtue of simplicity that leads us to other virtues and to the intimacy with God. Saint Elizabeth said, "It is simplicity which gives God honor and praise. It is simplicity which presents and offers virtues to Him."⁷⁴ She continued, "All the life of the spirits, all their virtue, consists in simplicity, and their final rest is spent on the heights in simplicity also."⁷⁵

2. *Simplicity Leads Us to Contemplation in Our Daily Activities*

Contemplation is the vocation of all the baptized. Union with God is the calling of every human being.⁷⁶ The *Constitutions* of the Congregation of the Mission instructs the Vincentian missionaries that they should connect prayer with their apostolates so that they may become contemplative in action.⁷⁷ To live in contemplation, Saint Elizabeth suggested that we should remain in the presence of God through everything, in charity, that is, in God, and that contact with the Divine Being will make us holy and immaculate in God's eye.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Thomas, 71.

⁷² Balthasar, 410.

⁷³ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 4, Kindle location 2711.

⁷⁴ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 21. Kindle location 2094.

⁷⁵ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 21, Kindle location 2095.

⁷⁶ Jenifer Moorcroft, *He Is My Heaven: The Life of Elizabeth of the Trinity* (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2015), Kindle location 91. Kindle.

⁷⁷ Congregation of the Mission, *Constitutions*, 42.

⁷⁸ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, Kindle location 3142.

Through simplicity, Elizabeth saw God at work at every moment when she wrote, “All events of our lives lead us to the heaven in our souls.”⁷⁹ Thus, when we know that God dwells within us and do everything in God’s presence, we are never shallow but respectful and attentive, even when performing the most ordinary tasks, we go beyond them. To Saint Elizabeth, a contemplative soul never deals with secondary causes but with God alone.⁸⁰ This insight is similar to the idea of Saint Teresa of Calcutta, “Do ordinary things with extraordinary love.”⁸¹

We can live in contemplation not only in the church or chapel but in daily activities such as while working in the kitchen, office, classroom, market, or factory. In everything, we have only one subject, the Holy Trinity, to focus on. Elizabeth writes, “You find God in the laundry room as well as in prayer. God is simple everywhere. You live God, you breath God.”⁸² So, a soul that lives by faith in God's presence with this "single eye" that Christ speaks of in the Gospel is the purity of intentions that seeks only God.

Simplicity helps us to keep our strength for the Lord, that is, to keep our whole being in unity by interior silence, to collect all our power, to occupy them in the one work of love, to have the single eye which allows the light of God to enlighten us.⁸³ We need to see our nothingness, our weakness, and that we can progress through perseverance. We need to know the multitude of our shortcomings and our defects. We appear in our poverty in front of God and others so that God will be our richness and everything (cf. 2 Cr 8:9).⁸⁴

Conclusion

Karl Rahner talked about the future Christian who will be either a mystic or one who has experienced something; if not, they will cease to be anything.⁸⁵ Rahner’s word reminds us of the importance of mystical experience in Christian life. Saint Vincent, as a Mystic of Charity, discovered the virtue of simplicity as his gospel and the key to his activities. Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity, who received with gratitude the grace of God in the simplicity of a child, helps us to understand more deeply simplicity in the relationship with contemplation and other virtues.⁸⁶ At the same time, Saint Elizabeth of the Trinity invites us to create silence so that we may not live on the margin of the essential but live in the union with God.⁸⁷ Today, through her writings, Saint Elizabeth is still fulfilling her mission that she wished before her death, that is, “to draw people and help them to go out of themselves to adhere to God by wholly simple and loving movements.”⁸⁸

⁷⁹ Shirley Darcus Sullivan, *Transformed by Love: The Soul’s Journey to God in Teresa of Avila, Mother Aloysius of the Blessed Sacrament, Elizabeth of the Trinity* (New York: New City Press, 2002) 95-96.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *The Greatness of Our Vocation*, 8, Kindle location 2739.

⁸¹ John Burger, “Do Ordinary Things with Extraordinary Love,” National Catholic Register, August 26, 2010, accessed July 3, 2023, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/do-ordinary-things-with-extraordinary-love>

⁸² Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Letter 89*, quoted from Balthasar, 425.

⁸³ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Last Retreat*, 3, Kindle location 3090.

⁸⁴ Elizabeth of the Trinity, *Heaven in Faith*, 12, Kindle location 1985.

⁸⁵ Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigation 7* (1971), 15, quoted from Robert Maloney, “Saint Vincent as a Mystic of Charity,” *Vincentiana* 61, no. 1 (2017), 113.

⁸⁶ Meester, “Foreword,” Kindle location 155.

⁸⁷ Meester, “Foreword,” Kindle Location 160.

⁸⁸ Meester, “General Introduction,” Kindle location 547; Moorcroft, Kindle location 80. Kindle.

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