

April 2

Blessed Elisabeth Vendramini (19th century)

Good day, good people! May the Lord give you peace!

A remarkable woman comes into our company today. She keenly understood the inseparable relationship between loving God and loving neighbor, particularly the poor. Faith does not turn our sight away from the concerns of our world. Instead, an alive faith joins our ears to God's to "hear the cry of the poor."

Some wish to deflect their Christian responsibility to help the indigent and are quick to quote Jesus, "the poor will always be with you." Sharply this cuts off any more conversation on how we can respond to suffering before us. Was Jesus freeing us from social action on behalf of the poor? Was he saying poverty "is what it is," accept it and move on? Hardly. Some say he was employing irony, maybe even sarcasm to express God's displeasure with humanity's unwillingness to solve this global concern that has dogged us throughout our history.

Elisabeth Vendramini was not deaf nor blind to the harsh realities of the poor. This profound awareness led her to make dramatic choices. On the night before her wedding day, she abruptly called off her engagement. The call of God became so overwhelming that she dedicated the rest of her life to serving the needs of the poor. Typical of many who have an intense experience of God, she started simply and took care of the suffering in her hometown. Other women, attracted by her example, came together and began a religious community of Franciscan sisters. While joining a religious community may not be the first impulse to serving others, Elisabeth's story reminds us that our relationship with Christ often intensifies our charitable outreach.

The recent US Census Bureau report of 2020 says that there are 37.5 million living in poverty. One in eight Americans is poor. One child in six is poor. Guilt, anger, blame or even fault-finding will not sustain us in efforts to rectify these numbers. Any of these motivations often leads to burnout and a cycle of despair. Love for God through love of neighbor keeps us from becoming strident and forceful. "Getting your spirituality and worship right is key to sustaining one's service to God and the poor."

Perhaps this can be a time to widen your impact on serving the needs of others by uniting your efforts with one of the "faith groups" such as Bread for the World or Food for the Poor? United efforts of many lead to enormous results. A study from the University of Michigan's National Poverty Center estimates that local churches in the United States spent \$12.6 billion on social services in 2004.

Let us pray.

Lord, remind us that these are not merely statistics. Instill in us again that each person is created in your image and is deserving of worth and dignity. Give us deep empathy, more clarity, and persistent courage. Help us to stay present, be prayerful and compelled to action – to be active participants in your kingdom here on this earth. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

–Bread for the World.

Blessed Elisabeth Vendramini is a friend of God and the company we keep today.

