

**Homily during Mass at the opening of the Third OCDS CONGRESS 2002 delivered on November 8, 2002**  
**by Fr Dominic Borg, OCD.**

The last sentence of the Gospel told us that the Spirit will teach us all things, and he will bring to our remembrance everything that Jesus Christ has told us. For us, in our mentality, we are what we eat. For the Jewish people, we are what we remember. That is the reason why there is the commandment in the Bible repeated many times. "Remember, remember these words, engrave these words on the hearts of your people, on the hearts of your children." This is a word that as soon as we hear it, it is a word that will make us holy, it is a word that has the power to make us spotless. It is a word that has the power to make us holy, because as Jesus Christ said himself "I have given them your word Father, and they have received it. Sanctify them in truth, thy word is truth."

The word holy means separated. As soon as we listen to the Word of God, we find ourselves separated from the rest of the world in the way we think, in the way we respond, in the way we behave. Among these people who have accepted the Word we find Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity. She is one of those people, who, when she joined Carmel in 1901, was asked "What is your idea of holiness." She answered "For me, holiness is to live in love." That is what holiness is, to live in love.

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love." Jesus Christ said to us. The more we listen to the Word, which is a letter of love sent by the Father to his children who are in exile, the more we listen to this Word, the more we discover how much God loves us. God loved the world so much that He gave His Son. This gift was discovered by Elizabeth of the Trinity when she said that she had discovered heaven on earth, when she said that inside each one of us, there is living the King, and where there is the King, there is his kingdom, so inside each one of us there is the Kingdom of God. It is heaven on earth. She had learned the lesson that the Rabbi had not learned. When he died, the Rabbi went to heaven. He saw people there reading the Torah, studying the Torah. The Rabbi said to the angel who was giving him a tour, "Is this all that there is to heaven?" The angel replied, "You see Rabbi, once more you are wrong. You think that the saints are in heaven, whereas in reality, it is heaven that is in the saints."

It is heaven that is in you and in me when we listen to the Word of God. It is this Word that will quench our thirst. It is this Word that will cleanse our dirt. "You are clean because of the Words that I told you." It is this Word also that will quench our thirst. In what sense? The Psalmist says "As the gazelle runs for living water, so my soul thirsts for you O God. So my soul yearns for you." In what sense, brothers and sisters does the gazelle run for living water? The gazelle is an animal that can play with serpents. It has the courage to meddle with serpents, but quite often the serpent will bite the gazelle and inject poison in the gazelle. As soon as the gazelle feels the bite of the serpent, the gazelle runs for living water because a process of dehydration will start in the gazelle and if it does not find water to drink, it will die. You and I too brothers and sisters have been bitten by the serpent. The serpent, not only to Eve, said that what God told her is not true; the serpent tells the same thing to you and to me: "God does not love you." Look what kind of character you have. Look what kind of marriage you have. Look what kind of a job you have. Look at your head, it is deteriorating ... Is this God's love? And we too believe, deep down, that God doesn't love us. This poison that will kill us. But Jesus Christ, on the Cross took the effect of the bite of the serpent upon himself. That is why, when he was on the Cross, St. John tells us, he said "I thirst." He opened his side, and out of his side came blood and water, so that you and I can drink. It is that rock out of which the people of God, in the wilderness, drank. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians, "That rock, out of which the people of God drank in the wilderness, that rock is Jesus Christ." You and I receive this water, the water of the sacraments, the water of the Torah.

The Torah, in the Jewish mentality is compared to water. The way water travels from high places to low places, the same it is with the Word of God. It settles in the heart that is humble. The word humble, humility, comes from humus. Humus means earth, the dust, something very humble. Moses, who could hear God speaking to him very clearly - the Bible tells us about him that he was the most humble person on earth - not that he was a great leader - not that he was a miracle worker - no - the Bible praises him as being the most humble person on earth.

Not once or twice, brothers and sisters, God trains us in humility by sending pain, suffering and sorrow in our lives. If we were to read the life of Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, it doesn't take much to discover the suffering that this woman had to pass through, even though she died at the age of 26.

She still had to undergo a lot of suffering. She is one of the pioneers in the studies in the Bible at the turn of the Century. In 1900, the Bible was not studied as much as it is today, especially by lay people. Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity, was one of those few people who encouraged the reading of the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament. She was very much in love, she says, with Paul and John, with the Epistles, with the letters of Paul and with the Gospel of St. John. Mind you, now-a-days, we can find a slight mistake in what she says, but in her time, the letter to the Hebrews was considered to be written by Saint Paul. Now-a-days, the Church tells us no, it was not written by St. Paul. But, in her time, it was considered as written by St. Paul. She says, "as the apostles say that 'God is a consuming fire', and whoever is touched by this fire is transformed.". We all know that suffering and pain are sharpening tools in the hands of God. Suffering and pain are those tools that sometimes God uses in our lives to humble us ... to purify us. It's like that furnace that makes us clean.

In the Book of Sirach we read "My son, if you come forward to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for temptations, for as gold is tested in fire, so the acceptable person in the furnace of humiliation." St. Paul, writing to Timothy said "All those who desire to live a Godly life, are bound to suffer persecution." Persecution, in what sense? It is not necessarily physical persecution ... you can suffer psychological persecution, being at home, being at work, surrounded by people who don't understand anything about your faith, your beliefs. They have no idea about this God who is in love with them, and is constantly in search of them. Yes, God is a consuming fire. It reminds me about that woman who once heard a person who was preaching. This person was quoting the Old Testament where he said that "when the Messiah comes, he will sit like a refiner of silver". This woman could not understand ... in what sense is he going to sit like a refiner of silver? Because she could not understand that statement, she was very troubled inside of her. She was determined to find a silver refinery and go there to try to understand the meaning of this statement, and so she did. She found a silver refinery. She went in and she found this man sitting near the furnace. She said to him "Do you always sit here." "Yes lady, I sit over here." "Why do you have to sit here constantly?" "Because I have to watch the temperature of the furnace, if the heat is a little high, it will ruin the silver. A little less heat will ruin the silver. I have to keep watch so that the temperature remains constant." "I see, that is why then he shall sit as a refiner of silver." She said "God will not give us one degree of pain more than we can take. He does not give us one degree less of pain than we deserve or need. God gives us just the exact amount of suffering in our lives to purify us." This woman was so pleased that she had discovered the meaning of this statement, that full of joy she was going out. But the person who was sitting near the furnace knew more about silver than the woman knew. And so, he called her back and he said to her "And look here lady, I know when the silver is ready, because I can see my face reflected in it." When the face of God is reflected in our actions, when the face of God is reflected in our way, the way we react in front of suffering and pain ... in front of a history that we cannot understand, then we are ready to be true witnesses. We are ready to be instruments that are flexible in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ told us "The Holy Spirit is my witness, and you also are my witnesses". It is this Spirit that comes to you and to me, this Spirit that implants wisdom in us, the Spirit that gives us the courage to listen constantly to the Word of God, and close our ears to what the world around us is telling us.

This man went to the Rabbi and said to him, "I know that I am a fool Rabbi, can you tell me what I should do so that I will not remain a fool?" The Rabbi looked at him and told him "My son, the very fact that you know that you are a fool, makes you no fool." "But, Rabbi, people around me tell me that I am a fool." The Rabbi looked at him and told him "My son, if you listen to what people tell you, and if you make your self assessment on what people tell you, then you must be a fool indeed."

People around us tell us that we are miserable, they look at us seeing our suffering, the way the friends of Job told him that he must have a sin. I suppose people were looking at Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity in her suffering and in her illness as being struck by God, as being punished. Many times we open our ears to the world and close our ears to the Word of God. That is foolishness brothers and sisters. It is the Word of God that liberates us, that gives us this freedom. Have you ever noticed that the first statement in the Bible that God said to humanity is "You are free." As soon as he created Adam and Eve, this is the word that he gave them "You are free to eat from any tree except the tree in the middle." Once we listen to the Word of God, we

experience this freedom, this freedom that St. Paul told us in the first reading today from the letter to the Ephesians "We have been given this freedom that we have acquired through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." St. Paul tells us "Christ has set you free. Do not submit yourself to the yolk of slavery again." It is this Word that gives us freedom, because Jesus Christ told us in the gospel of St. John, He said to the disciples who believed in Him "If you continue in my words, you will be truly my disciples, you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

This truth is the seal of the Spirit about which we heard in the first reading today from the letter to the Ephesians. St. Paul said that God has made this seal of the Spirit upon us. The seal of the Spirit is the truth. The Hebrew word for truth is 'emet, and is made up of three consonants. The first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the middle letter of the Hebrew alphabet and the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Just by looking at that word, a Jewish person will say "We have our origin, our birth in God, we are sustained by God, and our destiny is to move towards God." Once we discover that, we discover that the Word of God enlightens us. "And God said: Let there be light." That Word of God shows us that God loves us "God loved the world so much that he gave his son." God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world. That is the purpose of the Word ... it is a life saver bothers and sisters. It is a life-saver in your life and in my life. This Word is life. "They kept your word", Jesus Christ said in his prayer, and that is why they have eternal life.

The last recognizable words which Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity said before she died were these words: "I am going to light, love and life." Those were the last recognizable words that she uttered: "I am going to light, to love and to life." You and I too, brothers and sisters, if we listen to the advice of Blessed Elizabeth, we continue to fall in love with the Word of God. It is a love relationship. It is not something that you can always understand. St. Thomas Aquinas has a very beautiful statement. He says "Where the mind stops, the heart sees beyond." The heart goes beyond. It is not a matter of understanding the Word of God, it is a matter of treasuring this Word in our heart, like Our Lady did. It is a matter of listening to the advice of Blessed Elizabeth. It is really a moment of irony, a moment of sarcasm ... you can call it whatever you want ... that when Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity was in full force, trying to convince the people to read the Bible more, Pierre Lagrange was in Jerusalem, coming from France, building the institute of Biblical Studies there. From atheistic France, comes this source of Wisdom. Is it irony? Is it sarcasm? I don't know. But it is a fact, brothers and sisters.

Blessed Elizabeth of the Trinity had 57 people with whom she corresponded on a regular basis. Out of these 57, 4 were priests, 13 were seminarians and 40 were lay people like you. 40 of her correspondents were lay people who she used to evangelize by writing letters. In her letters she made it a point to encourage them to read the Word of God. It is the Word that will purify us, this Word that is a consuming fire. Any person who touches that Word, or that Word touches him or her, that person will be transformed. That is what matters in the long-run, that we will be transformed in the same love that God installed in our hearts.