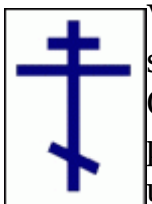




## St. Nicholas II, Tsar & New-Martyr of Russia, & the Royal Family martyred



Very soon after Russia accepted the seed of the Gospel (in the year 988) her soil was sanctified by the blood of the martyrs. The pure young sons of Grand Duke Vladimir, Boris and Gleb, accepted death at the hands of a political assassin in order to save their people from civil war and terrible upheaval. They became sufferers for righteousness (I Peter 3:14); being conformed to the innocent suffering of Christ, they became true *Passion-bearers*.

As in the beginning of Holy Russia, so at the end: it pleased God to reveal Himself to the Russian people through the innocent suffering of Boris and Gleb; now, in these latter times, He has again unveiled Himself through the purifying suffering of a Tsar,

the Anointed of God and supreme Protector of Christ's Church in Russia, Nicholas II.

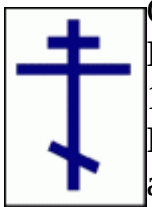
In 1917, Metropolitan Macarius of Moscow saw in a vision the Saviour speaking to Tsar Nicholas: *You see, said the Lord, two cups in my hands: one is bitter for your people, and the other is sweet for you.* In the vision the Tsar begged for the bitter cup. The Saviour then took a large glowing coal from the cup and put it in the Tsar's hands. The Tsar's whole body then began to grow light, until he was shining like a radiant spirit. Then the vision changed to a field of flowers, in the middle of which Nicholas was distributing manna to a multitude of people. A voice spoke: *The Tsar has taken the guilt of the Russian people upon himself and the Russian people is forgiven.*

Nicholas himself once said: *Perhaps an expiatory sacrifice is needed for Russia's salvation. I will be that sacrifice. May God's will be done!* He had a very strong sense of his destiny as an Orthodox ruler. Although he had an opportunity to flee the country with his family and seek refuge outside Russia, he and his Empress deliberately chose to stay and accept whatever awaited them.

Source: <http://www.orthodoxaustin.org/martyrs.html?pid=2>



## St. Elizabeth, the Grand-duchess and New-Martyr of Russia



Grand Duchess Elizabeth was born Her Grand Ducal Highness Princess Elisabeth Alexandra Louise Alice of Hesse and by Rhine on November 1, 1864, the second child of Grand Duke Ludwig IV and his wife, born Princess Alice of Great Britain, a daughter of Queen Victoria. Elizabeth had a happy childhood which was marred by the sudden death of both her sister May and her mother from diphtheria. This early sorrow affected her family deeply, and forced the young woman into becoming a second mother to her remaining siblings.

Exceptionally beautiful, Elizabeth was courted by many important members of European Royalty, but Elizabeth chose the handsome and aloof Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovitch, brother of Emperor Alexander III. Although Queen Victoria was opposed to the match, Elizabeth won her family over. The young Grand Duchess was adored by the Imperial family and the Russian court for her beauty, kindness, and her

ready adoption of Russian language, customs, and her ardent conversion to Orthodoxy. Her marriage to Grand Duke Serge puzzled the court, but the love between the two was real and highly intellectual—they ardently debated matters of faith and religion, and Serge admired his wife as a paragon of virtue. Childless, the couple adopted the children of the disgraced and morganatically married Grand Duke Paul, and Elizabeth looked upon Grand Duchess Marie and Grand Duke Dimitri as her own children.

Elizabeth and Serge moved to Moscow in 1894, when Serge was made Governor General of Moscow. Though Elizabeth had loved life in Saint Petersburg, it was not until her move to Moscow that began to see and understand what she was able to do for the less fortunate. She became very conscious of her role in helping the impoverished of Moscow, and sponsored benefits and charities in Moscow to help the poor and unfortunate.

While Muscovites praised her efforts, and admired her sterling character, they were less kind to her husband. Responsible for pogroms against the Jews, and a tightening of police control, Grand Duke Serge was more than unpopular, and in 1905, while driving through the Kremlin, an anarchist threw a bomb beneath his carriage, which exploded, tearing him to pieces, and killing him instantly.

Devastated by the assassination, Grand Duchess Elizabeth went to see the murderer in his cell, and forgave him for the murder. It was from this moment that Elizabeth began her path towards her sacred purpose.

Elizabeth remained in mourning, and in 1909, she took the veil and founded the Convent of Martha and Mary in Moscow. Elizabeth sold or gave away all her jewelry and possessions, and assembled the funds to build the convent. Modeled on German convents, where the sisters were actively involved outside the walls with the poor, ministering to their needs, the Convent of Martha and Mary originally ran afoul of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy, but with the assistance of her nephew and brother-in-law Tsar Nicholas II, Elizabeth was able to create a new and modern convent which held cloistered and uncloistered sisters who moved among the poor, and provided them with school for children, advanced medical care, and modern comforts and aid. The convent grew, and even during her lifetime, the Grand Duchess was called a saint by the poor of the capital. The convent, based on old Novgorod models, was an architectural jewel, which owed much to the art nouveau and to the Russian arts and crafts movements of Abramtsevo and Talashkino, featuring works of art by Vasnetsov, Konnenkov, and Sorin.

The convent grew and prospered until the Revolution. Though the Grand Duchess avoided arrest and imprisonment for some time due to her popularity within the capital, by 1918, her presence was finally no longer tolerated by the Revolutionary government, and she was arrested. They then exiled her first to Perm, then to Yekaterinburg, where she spent a few days and was joined by others: the Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich Romanov; Princes Ioann Konstantinovich, Konstantin Konstantinovich, Igor Konstantinovich and Vladimir Pavlovich Paley; Grand Duke Sergei's secretary, Feodor Remez; and Varvara Yakovleva, a sister from the Grand

Duchess's convent. They were all taken to Alapaevsk on May 20, 1918, where they were housed in the Napolnaya School on the outskirts of the town.

At noon on July 17, Cheka Officer Petr Startsev and a few Bolshevik workers came to the school. They took from the prisoners whatever money they had left and announced that they would be transferred that night to the Upper Siniachikhensky factory compound. The Red Army guards were told to leave and Cheka men replaced them. That night the prisoners were woken and driven in carts on a road leading to the village of Siniachikha. Some 18 kilometres from Alapaevsk there was an abandoned iron mine with a pit, twenty metres deep. Here they halted. The Cheka beat all the prisoners before throwing their victims into this pit, Elizabeth being the first. Hand grenades were then hurled down the shaft, but only one victim, Feodor Remez, died as a result of the grenades.

According to the personal account of Ryabov, one of the assassins, Elizabeth and the others survived the fall into the mine, prompting Ryabov to toss in a grenade after them. Following the explosion, he claimed to hear Elizabeth and the others singing hymns from the bottom of the shaft. Ryabov threw down a second grenade, but the singing continued. Finally a large quantity of brushwood was shoved into the opening and set alight, upon which Ryabov posted a guard over the site and departed.

Early on July 18, 1918, the head of the Alapaevsk Cheka, Abramov, and the head of the Yekaterinburg Regional Soviet, Beloborodov, who had been involved in the murders of the Imperial Family, exchanged a number of telegrams in a pre-arranged plan saying that the school had been attacked by an "unidentified gang". A short time later, Alapaevsk fell to the White Army.

On October 8, 1918, the Whites discovered the remains of Elizabeth and her companions, still within the shaft where they had been murdered. Elizabeth had died of wounds sustained in her fall into the mine, but had still found strength to bandage the head of the dying Prince Ioann. Her remains were removed and ultimately taken to Jerusalem, where they lie today in the Church of Mary Magdalene.

In 1918, the convent was disbanded, and the sisters dispersed.

Elizabeth was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia in 1981, and by the Patriarchal Russian Orthodox Church in 1992 as the New-Martyr Elizabeth. Her principal shrines are the Marfo-Mariinsky Convent, and the St. Mary Magdalene Convent on the Mount of Olives, which she and her husband helped build, and where her relics (along with the Nun Barbara) are enshrined. The convent was returned to the church and reopened in 1992 and the cathedral church in 2006, continuing St. Elizabeth's work.

Source: <http://www.orthodoxaustin.org/martyrs.html?pid=1>

# St. Elizabeth the New Martyr: from Palace to Mine Shaft

by Lily Emilia Clerkx

Elizabeth Feodorovna was born in 1864, a German Hessian princess. Her maternal grandmother was Queen Victoria. At age 20, Elizabeth married Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, brother of Czar Alexander III. She at once began to study the Russian language in order to become familiar with the culture and religion of her adopted homeland. She and her husband lived on a country estate in Ilinskoe, near Moscow, and there attended church regularly. It was here that young Elizabeth, shocked by the poverty of the peasants, first began her response to the poor. Aware that many children died soon after birth, Elizabeth convinced her husband to bring a midwife to serve the district.

In 1891 Elizabeth announced her decision to become Orthodox, assuring her Lutheran father that she had not been pressured by her husband, but was taking this step of her own free will. Her decision was not a response to the “outer charms” of the Church, she assured her brother, but rather was due to “pure conviction — feeling [Orthodox Christianity] to be the highest religion.”

Czar Alexander III appointed her husband governor of Moscow, after which the couple moved to the city. Elizabeth now had many social obligations — attending balls and concerts, receiving guests — but also visiting hospitals, old age homes, orphanages and prisons. Each day she was confronted by the enormous contrast between the luxury of court life and the terrible poverty in which large sections of the population lived. Putting her large income to good use, she did all that was in her power to alleviate the suffering of the poor.

In 1894 Nicholas, heir to the throne, became engaged to Elizabeth’s younger sister, Alice. Elizabeth rejoiced at her coming to Russia and did all she could to help her sister prepare for her role as empress. Unfortunately this could not be done gradually. The same year Czar Alexander III died suddenly. The following day Princess Alice was received into the Orthodox Church and was given the name of Alexandra Feodorovna. Her marriage to Nicolas took place a week later.

At the end of the 19th century, many changes were taking place as a consequence of industrialization, the rapid growth of an impoverished urban working class, and the growing influence of Western ideas. Many lived in expectation of social reform when the new czar was crowned. Nicholas, however, though a gentle and compassionate man, held fast to his belief in absolute monarchy.

In rapid succession four daughters were born to the imperial couple, and finally, in 1904, a son, a successor to the throne. Unfortunately it was soon apparent that he suffered from hemophilia.



During the war with Japan in 1904, Elizabeth organized relief for soldiers. Taking possession of halls in the Kremlin Palace, she set up workshops where thousands of women worked at sewing machines and packing tables, gathering clothes, food, medicines, gifts, icons and prayer books to be sent the front.

War enthusiasm quickly turned to war bitterness as reverse followed reverse in the contest with Japan. As casualty lists arrived from the front, social tensions rose sharply. There was increasing poverty and hunger, as well as renewed activity to promote social reform. Protests, strikes and terrorist actions were met with increased police and military repression. There were also plots to murder members of the royal family.

On February 4, 1905, with a climate of revolution gripping the city, Grand Duke Sergei was assassinated when a bomb was hurled into his carriage. Elizabeth hastened to the place of the tragedy and knelt by the mutilated body of her husband and embraced it. On the day of the funeral, she arranged that free meals be served to the poor of Moscow. Three days later, Elizabeth secretly visited the imprisoned murderer of her husband. She offered forgiveness on her husband's behalf, begging him to repent of his sin and to seek a pardon. The man, however, regarded his act as a virtuous deed. Elizabeth left a Bible and an icon in his cell. Czar Nicholas rejected her plea for mercy. Eventually the man was hanged. Elizabeth had a large crucifix erected over the place of her husband's death, with the text, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Affliction brought about a profound change in Elizabeth's soul. She withdrew from social life, renounced luxury, and no longer ate meat. Her bedroom in the Nicholas Palace was done over in such austerity that it resembled a nun's cell. She opened a hospital in Ilinskoe where she herself served men who had been injured in the war, then opened another small hospital in Moscow.

Two-thirds of her jewelry she gave away; the rest was used to buy a property with five buildings at Ordynka on the far side of the Moscow River where she resolved to found a religious community for women who would serve the poor.

She dedicated the community to Saints Martha and Mary in the hope that the sisters would "combine the lofty destiny of Mary — given to hear words of eternal life — with Martha's service to Our Lord through the least of His brethren." The community's rule drew inspiration from the words of the Savior: "I was hungry and you fed me . . . sick and you cared for me."

Elizabeth moved into a few simply furnished rooms. For several years she was busy furnishing the buildings so they could function as a church, hospital, polyclinic, a home for the nuns, school, orphanage, library, and priest's residence. From the beginning, she made herself available to every person in need.

She hoped her work might help revive the ancient institution of deaconess: women ordained to carry on merciful service. Since her vision of religious life differed from what was then customary in Russia, which placed its stress on monastic withdrawal from the world, at first she did not receive the approval of the church authorities; one

bishop accused her of Protestant tendencies. Finally Czar Nicholas II signaled his support with an imperial decree. The Church Synod gave its endorsement of the community's typicon. (The Czar's sympathy had not been easily obtained. From letters Elizabeth wrote to her brother-in-law, it is clear he found her vocational decision hard to accept. As she wrote to him: "Forgive me living differently than you would have wished, forgive that I cannot often come to see you [in St. Petersburg] because of my duties here. Forgive ... and pray for me and my work.")

On February 10, 1909, Elizabeth took off her widow's habit and put on the robes of the Sisters of Love and Mercy. At the same time she was officially appointed Abbess of the community — only six women at the time. On the occasion she said, "I am leaving the brilliant world where I occupied a high position, and now, together with all of you [my sisters], I am about to ascend into a much greater world, the world of the poor and afflicted."

Gradually more sisters joined the community. Their spiritual father was the greatly revered priest, Father Mitrofan Serebrenski, who moved with his wife into the priest's house.

The daily schedule resembled that of a monastery: Liturgy, vespers and matins were celebrated daily, and on Saturday, the vigil. An akathist was prayed four times a week. The nuns' tasks were to nurse the sick, visit the poor, and care for children. They also were given an education. While organizing the work, receiving guests, and writing many letters, each day Mother Elizabeth helped attend to the sick, sometimes staying at a bedside until dawn. She lived in strict accordance with the rule and was obedient to her spiritual father. Her life was a sober one and she prayed a great deal, with the Jesus Prayer at its core. Though her life was ascetic, she took pains to reassure relatives that she was in no way harming herself. "Some kindhearted busybodies are afraid I will end by breaking down my health, don't eat enough, don't sleep enough .... That is not true. I sleep eight hours, I eat with pleasure, I feel physically marvelous, well and strong."

Since the turbulent years following the uprising of 1905, Russia's circumstances had gradually become calmer. The Czar's power was curtailed with the establishment of a State Duma. A number of civil rights were recognized. After 1910 the economy began to recover. Production increased, foreign companies invested in Russia, farming land was reclaimed in Siberia. Such stars of the Russia opera, theater, and ballet as Chaliapin, Pavlova and Diaghilev were acclaimed at home and abroad.

The Convent of Martha and Mary also flourished. The best medical specialists of Moscow worked at the free hospital. There was an orphanage and a soup kitchen. Mother Elizabeth herself went into the poorest neighborhoods, offering care and education in the convent to abandoned children who had been living on the street. Though the economy was improving, poverty was greater than ever. Every year in Moscow, thousands of babies were abandoned.

News of the outbreak of the First World War caused her to weep; she saw in it the destruction of Russia. When the casualties began to arrive, Mother Elizabeth and her growing community devoted themselves to the care of the wounded. Russian troops



suffered staggering losses.

Mother Elizabeth kept in contact with the imperial family by mail. Her relationship with her sister, however, was strained by the Rasputin affair. The Czarina felt personally responsible for her son's incurable hemophilia, an illness that mothers transmit to their male children. In desperation she consulted not only doctors but charlatans. The last was Rasputin, a peasant whom many regarded as a holy man. He alone seemed able to stop the hemorrhages of the Czarevitch. The Czarina saw him as God's answer to her prayers. In time, through the Czarina's influence, Rasputin became influential in state affairs.

In this matter Elizabeth again showed great spiritual insight. In vain she implored her sister to free herself of Rasputin, but talks with her sister only resulted in a cooling of their relationship, for the empress credited Rasputin with her son's survival; she saw Rasputin as a "maligned saint." Mother Elizabeth's efforts to speak on this matter with the Czar also failed; he was about to leave for the front and had no time. In these events, Mother Elizabeth foresaw the end of the imperial rule. That same year Rasputin was murdered by members of the nobility, who blamed Russia's defeats on the front on Rasputin's influence in St. Petersburg. The situation in Russia was chaotic. There were millions of dead to lament; the economy was in tatters; there was a shortage of food everywhere. Rebellion, strikes, terrorist actions and repression increased.

During the February revolution of 1917, the convent was stormed by an angry mob convinced Mother Elizabeth was a German spy. In response, Father Mitrofan with Elizabeth and her nuns held a moleben in the church. At last the crowd left the convent. Mother Elizabeth was unharmed but her peril was obvious. Several times diplomats offered her a chance to escape, but she refused, determined to share the fate of Russia.

In March 1917, Czar Nicholas abdicated, and shortly thereafter, the family was interned in the Summer Palace. When Mother Elizabeth heard that they were arrested, she said, "This will serve for their moral purification and will bring them closer to God."

For a few months after the Bolsheviks seized power in October, the Martha and Mary Convent was spared and was even provided with food and medicines, but the sisters no longer went outside. The daily schedule was not changed, although the prayers were longer. During the Liturgy the church was crowded.

Each day saw radical changes. Factories and private property were expropriated. In February the "new" (secular) calendar was introduced. In March the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty was signed. For the first time since the rule of Peter the Great, Moscow became the capital. Red flags were raised over cathedrals. The Czar, his wife and children, a doctor and three servants were deported to Ekaterinburg where they were closely guarded and roughly treated. Resignedly, Nicholas and his family accepted all humiliations.

In April 1918 Mother Elizabeth was arrested. Attempts by Patriarch Tikhon to obtain

her release failed. She was taken away with Sister Barbara, who chose to share her abbess's fate. On the way to prison, she was able to smuggle a letter to the community: "The Lord has found that it is time for us to bear His cross," she said. "Let us try to be worthy of it. . . .Blessed be the name of the Lord for evermore." She spent the last months of her life in prison in Alapayevsk, not far from Ekaterinburg. Other members of the Czar's family and of the imperial household were imprisoned with her.

On July 18, 1918, the day after the Czar and his family were murdered, Mother Elizabeth and the other prisoners with her were thrown alive into an old mine shaft. When the executioners hurled her into the 60-meter pit, they heard her say, "Lord, forgive them, they know not what they do." Because of ledges and projecting logs, not all died in the fall. A peasant who witnessed what happened said he could hear voices in the shaft singing the Cherubic Hymn from the Holy Liturgy. The executioners threw in one hand grenade, then another.

The following year priests were able to recover the bodies of Elizabeth and Barbara. Two years later, after long wanderings, the coffins were brought to the Russian convent at Gethsemani just outside Jerusalem. In 1991 the martyrs, Grand Duchess Elizabeth and Nun Barbara, were canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church. The feast day of Elizabeth is 5/18 July.

The convent survived for another seven years although the Communist authorities prohibited the community continuing its charitable work. The hospital became a state-run institution. Father Mitrofan and his wife were arrested in 1926 and died in the Gulag.

After the collapse of Communism, many brotherhoods and sisterhoods based on the example of the community of Martha and Mary, were established which are now devoting themselves to health care, relief of the poor and education.

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If we look deep into the life of every human, we discover that it is full of miracles. You will say, "Of terror and death, as well." Yes, that also. But we do not clearly see why the blood of these victims must flow. There, in the heavens, they understand everything and, no doubt, have found calm and the Truer Homeland — a heavenly Homeland.

We on this earth must look to that Heavenly Homeland with understanding and say with resignation, "Thy will be done." Completely destroyed now is the "Great Russia without fear or reproach," but "Holy Russia," the Orthodox Church, the Church against which "the gates of hell shall not prevail," exists and exists as never before; and those who believe, who have no doubts, have an "inner sun" that illuminates the darkness of the thundering storm,"

– from a letter of St. Elizabeth to her brother-in-law, the former Czar, when he was living under house arrest in April 1918

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Sources: <http://www.orthodoxaustin.org/martyrs.html?pid=1>

<http://www.incommunion.org/2007/06/19/st-elizabeth/>