

Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity and Her Sister Guite:
 “Make my soul your heaven.”
 by Fr. Donald Kinney, OCD

Let’s pray the “Glory Be...” three times. I will tell you why.

I’m delighted to begin my conference with wonderful news: On June 20 Pope Francis met with a consistory of cardinals and approved the canonization of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity! And the date for the canonization was announced: Sunday, October 16, World Mission Sunday.

This is the miracle for her canonization: Marie-Paul Stevens, a Secular Order Carmelite from Belgium and former president of the OCDS Provincial Council there, had been diagnosed with Sjogren’s Syndrome, an auto-immune disease which had left her an invalid. She could no longer eat solid food or walk without help. She was greatly devoted to Bl. Elizabeth, so in 2002, when she was 30, she asked two of her friends to drive her on a pilgrimage to the Flavignerot-Dijon Carmel so that she could ask for the grace of a happy death. In the chapel there she prayed with all her might. Then she came out and was in the parking lot with her friends. All of a sudden she felt a dramatic change. She was cured! Back at home her doctors were confounded. Since then, she went back to the Carmel in thanksgiving: This time she *walked* the 210 miles!

Some of you may not be acquainted with “soon-to-be *Saint*” Elizabeth of the Trinity. Perhaps that’s the fault of the reading list in our Province’s *Formation Guidelines*. Why, none of her writings are even listed on it! We have to rectify that! For her influence on theologians, contemplatives and ordinary Christians throughout the world is remarkable.

The Institute of Carmelite Studies has published two volumes of Elizabeth’s writings, and a third volume containing her *Diary*, her *Intimate Notes*, and her 123 poems is in progress. I recommend to you another book from ICS Publications, their photo album on Bl. Elizabeth: *Light, Love, Life*.

After the writings of Bl. Elizabeth herself, my talk is built on three books: First, the world authority on Bl. Elizabeth is the Belgian Carmelite Fr. Conrad De Meester. He has written the definitive biography, *Biographie*. It is over 700 pages and is now being translated by ICS Publications.

But we don’t have to wait to read a magnificent book about Elizabeth which is a treasure in itself: the 2012 two-volume *Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Unfolding of Her Message* by Joanne Mosley, a Secular Order Carmelite in Ireland.

Most of the information I’ll be giving you on Guite comes from Fr. Jean Rémy’s book, which is only in French.

I'm very grateful to the Prioress of the Carmelite nuns in Flavignerot-Dijon, Sister Marie-Michelle, who has given me new information on Bl. Elizabeth. She has assured me several times that the nuns are praying for our Congress!

Do you know the prayer written by Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity, "O my God, Trinity whom I adore,...make my soul Your heaven, Your beloved dwelling and Your resting place." The subtitle of my conference, "Make my soul your Heaven" is taken from these lines.

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, section 260, there is a long quotation from part of this prayer. Bl. Elizabeth is the only twentieth-century female mystic quoted in the *Catechism*.

That same section says: "Even now we are called to be a dwelling place for the Most Holy Trinity." It refers to the Gospel of John 14:21-23: "If anyone loves me," says the Lord, "he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him".

This is what God did for Bl. Elizabeth and for her sister Guite, as we shall see.

In the 1960's rumors began circulating again in Dijon about the possibility of a beatification of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity. Her family and friends thought, "Yes, of course. But her sister Marguerite even more!" There is no cause for the beatification of Guite, but both were saintly women. They had different personalities, and they lived out their faith in different ways. Elizabeth's faith was a passionate, spousal love. Guite's faith was more tender, discreet, even hidden, but just as profound. Guite was a true contemplative in prayer and in service to her family and others.

The parents of Elizabeth and Guite were Joseph and Mary: Joseph Catez and Marie Roland. He was a captain in the army. They married late. He was forty-seven, and she was thirty-three. Each had experienced a traumatic personal loss. Joseph's father had died suddenly of a heart attack at age forty-six when Joseph was eight years old. (Remember that.) Marie had been engaged once before, but her fiancé was killed in 1870 in the Franco-Prussian War. It took her years to recover. She became deeply religious and even considered a religious vocation. She would be very possessive of her daughters. She tended to worry and control.

Elizabeth, nicknamed "Sabeth", was born on July 18, 1880 on an army base at Avor. Two and a half years later, Marguerite, nicknamed "Guite", was born on February 20, 1883 in Dijon, where Joseph had been transferred. Even as a little girl, Elizabeth had a strong character, was hypersensitive and easily upset. Sometimes she would fly into a rage, which everyone around her dreaded. Her mother spoke of "her furious eyes". On the other hand, Guite was by nature "sweetness itself", very shy and quiet, thank goodness. But the two girls always got along and were close.

In 1887, when Elizabeth was six-and-a-half and Guite was four, their father died suddenly of a heart attack at fifty-five. He died at home in the arms of his family. (Remember that.)

Their father's death profoundly affected his family. They became so close that they called themselves "the trio". From then on, Mme. Catez and her daughters had to live very modestly.

Elizabeth made her first Confession when she was seven. With it, she made real progress in overcoming her bad moods. That same year, she began taking piano lessons. The next year she enrolled to study piano at the Conservatory of Dijon. Guite followed two years later. Their mother wanted them to become piano teachers. From then on, music was first place in their studies, and the girls practiced for hours every day. Other subjects came second. So as an adult Elizabeth would write the most sublime thoughts, but she would misspell some simple words.

Also when Elizabeth was eight, they moved to an apartment on the second floor in Dijon, a move Elizabeth would always thank God for, but which her mother would always regret. For from the balcony outside her bedroom Elizabeth could see a large, austere building in a garden just 150 yards away. It was the Carmelite Monastery.

When Elizabeth was 10, she made her First Holy Communion. She was carefully prepared by her mother and in classes by the parish priest. This day would change her life. People said that tears flowed down her face during the Mass. When they were leaving church, one of her little girl friends invited her to her house for a reception. Elizabeth said, "I'm not hungry. Jesus has fed me."

That evening it was the custom that the little girls in the neighborhood who had made their First Communion would go to the Carmelite Monastery for a visit with Reverend Mother Prioress. She would visit with the little girls still in their white dresses and with their mothers.

During that visit Mother Marie of Jesus told Elizabeth the meaning of her name "Elizabeth": "house of God". She told her, "You are the happy little house of the good God, and your name means that!" Elizabeth was deeply impressed! Why, that is what she had *felt* that morning: that God was dwelling in her! This would be the central focus of the rest of her life. Elizabeth's life was short and to-the-point. And this is the point: "God in me, me in God, oh, that's my life!", as she would say later. In French it rhymes: "Dieu en moi, moi en Lui, oh, c'est ma vie!" She writes in her Prayer to the Trinity, "Make my soul your Heaven... May each minute carry me further into the depths of Your Mystery." Elizabeth experienced—and is excited to tell us—that we too can experience the reality of the Trinity right here and now.

From the day of her First Communion, Elizabeth felt won over by Jesus. She began to like to spend time with Him in prayer. For Jesus, she put all her energy into overcoming her outbursts and conquering her sensitivity. From that day on, people said, Elizabeth was transformed!

In a normal family life, the two girls spent their childhood practicing the piano, preparing for competitions and performances. When she was thirteen she won her first piano competition, and there was an article about her in the newspaper.

A deeper, hidden life was taking place in Elizabeth's soul. When she was fourteen, one day after Holy Communion Elizabeth felt drawn to make a private vow of chastity. That year, she heard the word "Carmel" deep in her soul.

That same year she won the "Prize of Excellence" at the Conservatory. Two years later Guite won the same prize.

There is a comparison we can make between learning to play the piano and learning to pray. See what you think of this. I played the clarinet when I was in school, but you could apply this to something you do very well (like sports or cooking), something that has become part of who you are:

Think about learning to play the piano...and also learning to pray.

For one and the other, at first you might not enjoy it. You go through stages of boredom, impatience, even wanting to get up and walk away. But you stay with it. You set a regular time to practice. You practice every day, whether you feel like it or not. You have to change your priorities and give up other things. But if you put your whole self into it, something wonderful happens, too deep to understand: After a while, every now and then, when you least expect it, why, even sometimes when you wake up in the middle of the night, just *a little phrase* comes to you to lift you up and bring you the greatest joy. This is what happened for Elizabeth as she learned to play. This is what happened for Elizabeth as she learned to pray.

By the time she was fifteen and sixteen, no one suspected what was going on within her soul. In competitions, she would forget her audience and play for Jesus. More and more she longed for Jesus, for Carmel, for Heaven. After her first prize, she should have gone to Paris to study at the Conservatory there, but she did not want to put her vocation in danger. She studied English, which she called "the language of birds". She took sewing lessons. She and Guite made and wore beautiful clothes. They were always elegant.

Everyone who knew her used the word "recollected" to describe her, but she was simple and happy, outgoing, and fun, never distant or turned in on herself. Fr. Conrad summarizes, Elizabeth prayed in the street and at parties, during social gatherings and at dances (She loved to dance, and she was good at it!)

Later in her teens, in her parish she volunteered playing the organ, and she taught catechism classes to poor children. A considerable part of her writings date from this period before she entered Carmel.

God gave this inadequately educated young woman a special gift for understanding the hidden meaning of Scripture, especially in St. Paul and St. John. She got to the heart of Scripture texts by patiently reading, praying, thinking about them, and taking them into the way she lived. This is what gives her writings such clarity, simplicity, and depth. Often when we read her writings, we sit up and think, “Why, this is the real thing!” And we are “carried further into the depths of His Mystery.”

This is a grace God wants to give you and me in *our* Carmelite vocation: in our Liturgy of the Hours, in our reading of Scripture, in our private prayer time, all throughout the day.

Elizabeth was also very influenced by the works of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross. In 1898 the Carmelite nuns gave her a copy of the first edition of *Story of a Soul* written by a certain Sr. Thérèse of the Child Jesus up in Lisieux, Normandy, who was seven years older. It is fascinating to see the influence of the “small town girl” Thérèse on the “city girl” Elizabeth. The year of Elizabeth’s death, she read the writings of the marvelous fourteenth-century Rhineland mystic Bl. Jan Ruysbroeck, whom I recommend to you. Elizabeth’s writings are often filled with quotations from these authors. Just like many of us, she enthusiastically wanted to share what she was reading with others.

It is true that often Elizabeth’s style is very solemn and intense. But everyone who knew her said that she was always simple and affectionate.

You will be surprised to know that Fr. Conrad De Meester and Joanne Mosley write that if Elizabeth had died before she entered the monastery, she would already have been canonizable. As far as we can tell, there were no extraordinary mystical experiences in her life until she was dying in the infirmary. It is important to know that she became holy through the same opportunities you and I have: in the Eucharist, in Confession, in prayer, and in service.

It’s time I say that we shouldn’t think we can just stroll into the Trinity! The way to the Trinity is the way of the Cross.

Bl. Elizabeth’s friend St. John of the Cross, *Living Flame of Love*, (Book 4, 14) writes: “God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance, for otherwise they would not last. Yet there is a difference, a great difference, in his dwelling in them. In some souls he dwells alone, and in others he does not dwell alone.”

In *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, II, 5 (170) St. John writes, [“Many spiritual person] are of the opinion that any kind of withdrawal from the world, or reformation of life, suffices. Some are content with a certain degree of virtue, perseverance in prayer, and mortification, but never achieve the nakedness, poverty, selflessness, or spiritual purity which the Lord

counsels us.” We will see how Elizabeth and Guite went through this hard purification in their lives.

What was the great trial of Elizabeth’s life before she entered the monastery? Believe it or not, it was living with a mother who was so adamantly opposed to her vocation! Are you surprised? For many of us, is not our greatest trial getting along with our family? Elizabeth’s vocation was a terrible crisis for her mother. Mme. Catez was terrified of losing her daughter. She wanted both her daughters to get married and have children. Elizabeth loved her mother and sister very deeply, but she loved God much more. For several years Elizabeth was even forbidden to have any contact with the nuns. In this great trial, Elizabeth’s health began to waver, but her faith became deep and strong. Unlike her mother in this conflict, *she* preserved her peace. She came to accept the will of God for her, whatever it might be, even if it meant giving up her vocation. Finally when Elizabeth was nineteen, her mother gave her permission to enter Carmel when she was twenty-one. But then there were periods when her mother would change her mind from one day to the next. As for Mme. Catez, in the last months before Elizabeth entered the monastery, she went through times of despair, but she did not try to hold her daughter back.

Mme. Catez would not have been so grieved by Elizabeth’s vocation if she had wanted to enter an order that was not so strictly enclosed. In Elizabeth’s day, in Carmel cloister and separation from the world was severe. Only one parlor visit or one letter a month to family was allowed. All letters—going out and coming in—were read first by the prioress. In the parlor, the sisters were separated from others by a forbidding, hard-to-see-through double grille. Only immediate family members could visit the Sister with the curtain pulled back on her side so they could actually see her. Visits were half an hour. It was the custom then that there would always be another nun sitting in the back of the parlor with her grate veil down over her face to monitor the conversation. No wonder a young woman and her family would think long and hard before making such a sacrifice.

Mme. Catez also revolted that Elizabeth would be throwing away her exceptional musical gifts. In Carmel then, out of poverty, the nuns were not allowed to play musical instruments. Once Elizabeth entered, she who had spent hours a day playing the piano, never touched the piano keys again.

But there is another reason why Mme. Catez and Guite were fearful for Elizabeth’s vocation. This brings me to tell you about the political situation in France during these years. These years were a time of great anxiety for the Church in France. People remembered the French Revolution when the Church was suppressed and thousands of innocent Catholics were sent to the guillotine, among them the sixteen Carmelite nuns in Compiègne in 1794. Since then there had been periods of calm, but then periods of persecution.

Beginning in 1901, the year Elizabeth entered Carmel, the government stepped up pressure on the Church and its influence on society. In 1901, the year she entered Carmel, the government outlawed Catholic education. Thousands of schools across the country were closed. Religious congregations whose ministry was teaching or preaching had to leave the country. Then the government began confiscating Church buildings and property, sometimes with outbreaks of violence and hysteria.

Thirty-eight Carmelite nuns' monasteries in France also had to leave the country. In case the Dijon nuns had to flee, the prioress and another nun traveled incognito to Belgium, where they found an old farmhouse and sent on some furniture. All the nuns had street clothes ready in case they had to leave the monastery at a moment's notice.

During these years, strangely, the very Bishop of Dijon, Albert Le Nordez, began to side with the government in its persecution of the Church. He had presided at Sister Elizabeth's Clothing ceremony in 1901, but Catholics became so suspicious of him that in 1903 for the public ceremony for her to receive the black veil, the nuns chose a date when they knew he would be out of town.

That same year during Easter Week, the nuns were celebrating the Golden Jubilee of their sweet elderly Sr. Marie of the Incarnation, who had had a stroke five years before and was confined to the infirmary. Sister Marie was brought down from the infirmary for the Mass, and the chapel was filled with family and friends. But just after the Mass began, the Vicar General of the Diocese ran in and stopped the Mass. The Diocese had just been told that the nuns' chapel was immediately closed to the public. There would be no public Mass until the summer of 1906, three months before Elizabeth died.

The leader of the protest movement against the Bishop was the Prioress' own brother. The nuns were in great fear when the Bishop himself started dropping in to the Carmel to visit, hinting that he himself might take over as their personal chaplain!

Eventually, Pope Pius X called Bishop Le Nordez to Rome where he was dismissed. This was one of the reasons the French Republic broke off diplomatic relations with the Holy See in 1904.

What was Sr. Elizabeth's attitude during this crisis? She was not apathetic or impassive, as you and I can be today. The Sisters in her community said that she was "conspicuously calm", an example of peace and encouragement to them all. She did not give in to her fears. She was grounded in faith. She kept turning to God in prayer all the more.

It is a great irony that during these years when the French government was intent on stamping out the Church, when it had exiled its teachers and preachers, this young woman, first in the world and then in the cloister, was leading others to God and building up the Church in a magnificent way.

The French Catholic historian Daniel-Rops writes that during these hard years in France, “There was an immense current of fervor and mysticism circulating underground, which would surface in due time in hundreds of springs” to water the parched land. The life and message of Bl. Elizabeth of the Trinity is one of the purest of these springs. Like St. Bernadette’s spring in Lourdes where the water at first only trickled out drop by drop, as the years have passed the spring that is Elizabeth’s life has surged forth to “give God”, as she often wrote, to “give God” to people all over the world. Now with her canonization, we look forward to this spring gushing forth all the more powerfully.

During Elizabeth’s lifetime this spring was hidden away. Yet in darkness and in light, she kept offering herself for the Church. She would say on her deathbed, “O God, consume my substance for your glory. Let it distill drop by drop for your Church.”

My brothers and sisters, this is what we ask God to do with *our* lives too. In these troubled times, we want *our* lives to be “consumed drop by drop for God’s glory”. This is how we can help bring God back into our world. This is how we can help strengthen the Church in our families, in our country and throughout the world.

Elizabeth *did* enter Carmel on August 2, 1901, just two weeks after her twenty-first birthday.

Listen to the letter which Guite wrote to her tutor just three days after Elizabeth entered:

“My very dear Mademoiselle, if you knew how unhappy I am! Sabeth entered Carmel on Friday morning: The day we’ve awaited for a long time came, and we made our sacrifice. It was a real agony. As for our last days together, they were awful, the last meal, the last evening... Finally on Saturday at the eight o’clock Mass at the Carmel, we all received Holy Communion. Afterwards... we went to the enclosure door. She kissed us one last time and the door closed behind her! I thought I would die. I felt something was breaking within me. Well, God held us up, for I was really afraid Mama couldn’t stand that awful moment of separation. Now the two of us are really alone. When we see her empty place at the table, it’s all over! And it’s that word ‘forever’ that is the worst. Pray hard for us, dear Mademoiselle... I’ve often revolted against this and cursed all convents. I’m no longer myself, and I don’t know if I’ll ever be again. We are in a very bad state, and all this has really killed us... Well, our consolation is to see her happy... You can see her through the grille, but it’s just not the same... I assure you that she also suffered in leaving us. She was wasting away from it, and it was better to get it over with... Mlle Forey,...I really wish I were in your place, believe me. Your Guite who is no longer as she was...”

Two months later Mother Germaine of Jesus was elected the new Prioress. She also kept the office of Novice Mistress. Elizabeth was the only postulant and the only novice in the community during her five years in Carmel. The two would always be very close.

On Trinity Sunday, May 22, of this year, Pope Francis said: “The Trinity is a family of three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit which is not closed in on itself, but is open. It embraces us all and encourages us to live in love and fraternal sharing.”

This is what the love of the Trinity does in us: The more we are open to God, the less we are closed in on ourselves. The more we are open to God, the more we are open to embrace others and encourage them in love.

What has impressed me as I have read Elizabeth’s letters is how close she is to others, despite the strict separation. Again and again she writes, “In God, I feel quite close to you.” She speaks of “union”, “communion” not just God, but also with those she loves. She wrote to her mother, “Oh, don’t you feel my prayer that is constantly rising up to Him and descending to you?”—like the rays of our Congress logo. In her last letter to her sister, she wrote, “Oh, Guite, as I write you this evening my soul is overflowing... I wish I could make my soul pass into yours so you could believe in [God’s] love for you always, even in your saddest times.” And we shall see what “saddest times” Guite would go through!

Sister Elizabeth was also an excellent teacher. To illustrate this, here are some short quotations from her letters to different people which Fr. Conrad has put together:

“During the day sometimes think of Him who lives in you and who so thirsts to be loved” (L93). “You must build a little cell in your soul as I do. Remember that God is there and enter it from time to time; when you feel nervous or unhappy, quickly seek refuge there and tell the Master all about it” (L123). “Live with Him wherever you are, whatever you’re doing” (L291). We must never act purely by nature. We must become aware that God dwells within us and do everything with Him. Then we are never commonplace, even when doing the most ordinary tasks, for we do not live in these things, we go beyond them (GV 8). “Then outside activities, [and] noises within will never be an obstacle; He will deliver you. Look at Him. Love Him” (L 281).

Now are you understanding who Bl. Elizabeth is? You can see why people kept her letters and read them over and over. She “gave them God!” As Pope Francis said, the more we are open to God, the more we are open to embrace others and encourage them.

Elizabeth was such an exemplary postulant that she received the habit just four months after she entered, on December 8, 1901.

Her novitiate year was very dark and painful. Her prayer became difficult, she went through terrible scruples, and her health wavered. Still she was offering everything for her family, her community, her country, the Church.

The next year, 1902, the trio's prayers were answered: Guite fell in love! She met Georges Chevignard. She was nineteen, and he was thirty. He and his brother ran the family bank. Georges played the cello. He had always said he would have to find a wife who could accompany him on the piano. A mutual friend thought of Guite! This time Mme. Catez was in her glory as a matchmaker! She arranged for Guite with herself, naturally, as chaperone, to take a train trip to the Province of Lorraine. They had rented seats in the same compartment as Georges and one of his friends. On their return, they organized a "musical soirée", where George and Guite "made beautiful musique together"!

They were married a few months later in the parish church on October 15, 1902, a date they chose with Elizabeth in mind. Elizabeth was ecstatic. Everyone who knew Georges said he was a wonderful man. Although he was hardly practicing his faith when they married, under his wife's influence he changed so remarkably that at the end of his life he became a Third Order Franciscan and was going to daily Mass. He was an authoritarian, while Guite was always quiet and sweet. Their great pastime was music. Every evening they played together. People said it was extraordinary. George played the cello very well. Guite was a virtuoso at the piano. One of their daughters said, "Mama played as if she were stringing pearls."

Sister Elizabeth made her Profession on January 11, 1903. Very quickly after pronouncing her vows, her peace returned and never left her again.

The next two years were a time of great happiness for Elizabeth in her prime, even though her community was just as difficult and challenging as St. Thérèse's community in Lisieux. Read about her community in Joanne Mosley's book, and you will be amazed.

God was rewarding these sacrifices: In March of 1903 another prayer was answered: Guite and George had a little baby girl, whom they named—can you guess?—Elizabeth, nicknamed "Sabeth".

On November 21, 1904, Bl. Elizabeth composed her famous prayer "O my God, Trinity whom I adore...", which was found in her papers after her death.

During Lent of 1905, Elizabeth began to experience extreme weakness. Because of her great courage in not letting her suffering show, for months most of the Sisters did not even notice.

In April 1905 a second little girl, Odette, was born to Guite and Georges.

At this same time Elizabeth had to be moved to the infirmary, and she stayed here until she died eight and a half months later.

She was suffering from Addison's Disease, practically unknown in France at the time. Sixty years after her death, doctors studied her medical documents and were able to diagnose the nature of her illness, probably caused by tuberculosis.

Addison's Disease is a chronic disease of the adrenal glands: characterized by increasing weakness, nausea, the inability to eat, emaciation, severe headaches, insomnia, internal ulcerations "like beasts devouring me inside", she said. The closer she got to death, the more violently these symptoms manifested themselves. She could only eat minuscule portions. It was a real torture for her to drink. The last eight days, she ate and drank absolutely nothing. One day she told the Prioress: "Mother, I believe the first thing I'll do when I get to Heaven is to take a drink." Yet she never complained. She showed affection and gratitude to everyone.

During her last visit with her mother and sister in the infirmary parlor, she asked them to pray three "Glory bes" every day in thanksgiving for all that God had done for her. Guite said later, "She didn't say anything about prayers for the repose of her soul. She told me that when she would be in Heaven, she would do much more for me than she had done on earth because she would see what I needed and would inspire me what to do."

Elizabeth died on November 9, 1906. She was only 26 years old and had lived in Carmel just five years.

In her casket laid out in the parlor, she looked like a skeleton. One of her friends said, "She was frightening. You had the sense of a creature who had been ravaged, consumed."

After Elizabeth died, the prioress gave Guite the text of a long retreat, called "Heaven in Faith", which Elizabeth had written in the infirmary as a last gift for her.

Mme. Catez died nine years later in 1914, surrounded by Guite and her grandchildren, still missing her elder daughter but now in awe that Elizabeth was becoming known and loved throughout the world. Her biography and writings were being printed and sold out in one edition and one translation after another.

Guite and George were very happy together as their family grew. They had nine children! Everything changed dramatically on November 18, 1925 when George died suddenly of a heart attack. He was 53, and she was 42. (Remember that Elizabeth and Guite's father had died of heart attack at 55, and their paternal grandfather had died of a heart attack at 46.)

George had been out to a business meeting and had come home at 11:00. He went to bed. About 11:30 Guite heard the death rattle. Guite woke up her children right away.

Their oldest daughter Elizabeth said: "I thought he had just lost consciousness, and I wanted to call the doctor. Mama realized what had happened and said, 'First the priest.' She looked at her missal and started the prayers for the dying. Then she said, 'I can't see clearly any more. You continue,' so I finished the prayers. We took the baby's crib into the bedroom next door, and we left Papa with the priest and the doctor. We stayed all night with Mama. She took out her Rosary: the one her Sister Elizabeth had used every day. What silence! Not a word of complaint! But how many times did I see her crying,

yet she never complained. She was putting into practice the advice of her blessed sister, who must have helped her so much in this sad trial.”

[14 on] At 42, Guite was left alone with nine children: the oldest was 21 and the youngest was just 8 months.

When Guite’s husband died, the family’s financial situation changed completely from one day to the next. At that time there was no life insurance, no pension. The family was ruined.

Her daughter Chantal: “Until Papa’s death, we had a very easy life at home. Everything changed when he died. We had a very sad childhood. Three years later, we were still in mourning. But Mama reorganized her life and raised us perfectly. She forgot herself for us and found her strength in prayer. She had many friends who helped her very much, including some old friends of Elizabeth.

Her son Jacques: “In 1952-53, I was working and was better off financially. Knowing how modestly my mother was living, each month I sent her the little sum of fifty francs (about \$10). After she died in 1954, we found an envelope in her belongings. All the money I had given her was inside. She had willingly accepted it, but she preferred to live without it in poverty. She herself ate little and heated the house even less.

In 1932, Guite’s oldest child, Elizabeth, entered the Carmel of Dijon. She took the name “Elizabeth of Jesus”, the name her aunt had first wanted before she entered. She died in 1991 at the age of 87.

In 1933, Guite’s son Xavier died of spinal meningitis. He was 10. He was a very fervent little boy and had already entered the minor seminary. When Guite found out the diagnosis, it was terribly hard. There was no hope for a cure. Her second daughter Odette kept a diary of his last words while he was dying. One day he said, “In five days Aunt Elizabeth will come for me at 5 o’clock in the morning.” He died five days later at five o’clock in the morning, just as he had said.

As the years passed, four daughters entered the convent, three others married, one son, Pierre, became a priest. He was eventually named chancellor of the Diocese of Dijon and became famous for his kind welcome to each visitor at the Bishop’s residence. When he died in 1983, more than 100 priests concelebrated at his funeral.

In 1939 when war broke out with the Nazis, Jacques was drafted, then taken prisoner and deported to Germany. The family went for months without news of him. He was eventually freed in 1945 at the end of the war.

Jacques married an American young woman, Eleanor Hatch, who had been one of the students Guite had taken into her home for extra money, just like I lived with a French family in Paris in my twenties. Eleanor waited for Jacques all the seven years he was a

prisoner of war in Germany. After the war she came back from the States to marry him. The whole family admired her faithfulness.

The prioress of the Carmel of Flavignerot-Dijon put me in touch with the youngest of Jacques and Eleanor's six children, that is, one of Guite's granddaughters, who now lives in the United States.

Her daughter Chantal: "What was first of all striking about Mama was her extraordinary faith, which let her see God's love in all the events of her life—joyful or sad.... She got up early every morning and, in her bathrobe, made her meditation."

A friend: "I lived in the same parish as Mme. Chevignard. When I would see her in church, in deep meditation, I was drawn to the Lord. Her prayer was communicative."

Sabeth said: "Mama *lived* with her sister. She took all her advice. When you think how angry she was when Sr. Elizabeth entered Carmel, how angry she was against 'all convents' and what she became! She kept all of Elizabeth's letters, read them, and re-read them... She *lived* on her sister, on everything she had told her, on all the councils she had received from her."

Although she would have blushed at the idea, Elizabeth was an unofficial spiritual director for her sister, her mother, and other people she wrote to.

So many of us can't find a spiritual director and feel we are deprived. We forget what a tremendous grace we have in our Carmelite vocation. Why, God has given us one spiritual director after another: We have three Doctors of the Church and a constellation of bright stars! Guite is an example for us. We should let our Saints teach us as she did with her sister's letters. In your formation classes, read and re-read our Saints' writings... Be like Guite, "She *lived* on her sister, on everything she had told her, on all the councils she had received from her."

I also want to apply this to your OCDS community meetings. Your meetings are not primarily prayer meetings. First and foremost, your meetings are meant to give you practical help and mutual support in living a life of prayer. Instead of reading slavishly through a book from cover to cover, each month your formators should present a few passages which help you learn to listen to God speaking to you in the Scriptures; to learn how to *pray*, not just *say*, the Liturgy of the Hours; to help you know how to deal with distractions and dryness—and, every once in a while, to know how to deal with wonderful consolations.

Because when you are doing your very best to give yourself to God in your vocation, every now and then, when you least expect it, there will be a passage you read, perhaps just a little phrase, which will lift you up and "carry you further into the depths of His Mystery."

This will surprise you: All who knew Guite agree: She hardly ever spoke of her sister, even to her children. Her son François: “Mama never made any allusion to her sister in front of me, never. With our nightly Rosary we said a prayer for Elizabeth’s beatification, and we all had a holy card of her in our missal... That was all.”

Her daughter Marie: “Mama never spoke of her sister except when someone would ask about her. Yet we knew we had an aunt who was a saint and everybody would remind us of it. Mama lived a great deal with her sister, they were very close, but she never spoke of her!”

We can understand this if we think of Our Lady. Like Mary, Guite “kept all these things in her heart.”

Guite died on May 7, 1954. She was seventy-one. Her daughter Chantal describes it:

“I arrived with my sister Geneviève about three days before she died... We began to talk about death with great simplicity. I asked her, ‘Are you afraid?’ She answered with a little smile, which meant, ‘Why should I be afraid?’ Then looking at the photos of her sister, her husband, and her little son Xavier she said with a big smile, ‘*They* are waiting for me.’ That night we told her we were going to pray together. She said, ‘You do it for me. I don’t have the strength. People who say they will convert at the last minute are very wrong. That’s no longer the time...’ We prayed [the Rosary], and at the end Mama said a ‘Glory be’ in a way that made us think, ‘She’s saying it with Aunt Elizabeth.’ Then we all stayed with her through the night, except François, who was out of town. Mama kept looking for him. She wanted us all to be with her: ‘He isn’t there!’ ‘He hasn’t come?’ He arrived about 11:00 p.m. When she caught sight of him, her face lit up. She opened her arms to him and said, ‘Now there’s nothing else to wait for.’ A little after that she slipped into a coma. The next morning, we were all around her bed. All of a sudden, she opened her eyes very sweetly, though she could hardly see. Her gaze went around the circle to all her children, and she looked at us. A few minutes later, she died.”

There was a sizable crowd at her funeral, very recollected. It was a spontaneous tribute of many people and an instinctive homage to Elizabeth of the Trinity and her sister Guite.

Here is part of the homily at Guite’s funeral: “Having accomplished her task, Mme. Chevignard, surrounded by her dear children, discreetly left us to go to God, her hands full of good works. Our families here below will come together on high. With Christ and the Virgin Mary, whom she loved so much, welcoming Mme. Chevignard are her dear husband whom she missed so much, her little Xavier, Sr. Elizabeth of the Trinity, and all those who were waiting for her in the place where there is no more mourning or tears. The life of a Christian has just ended. She has reached the summit of her efforts. Death is not a fall into the abyss. It is an ascent, an assumption. Our Lady of the Assumption, keep our hearts in confidence and hope...”

This image of Guite on her deathbed surrounded by *all but one* of her children is very powerful: She kept looking for him. “Where is he? He hasn’t come?” This is how you and I long for all our children to be with us: those we have given birth to, our *spiritual* children, our friends, and, yes, our enemies, our politicians. We want them all to be with us in Heaven, “that we may be one”, “that we may be one in our home in Heaven.”

In whatever vocation God has given us, whether we write beautiful works or nothing at all, our most noble task is to let Him bring us and those we love “further and further into the depths of His Mystery.” Then one fine day when this little life is over, we’ll exclaim: “O Trinity whom I adore, you’ve made my soul your Heaven. You’ve made your Heaven our home.”

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.” (3 times)