

The Holy New Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna

by *Metropolitan Anastassy*

St. Elizabeth and St. Barbara



Not every generation is destined to meet along its path such a blessed gift from heaven as was the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna for her time, for she was a rare combination of exalted Christian spirit, moral nobility, enlightened mind, gentle heart, and refined taste. She possessed an extremely delicate and multifaceted spiritual composition and her outward appearance reflected the beauty and greatness of her spirit. Upon her brow lay the seal of an inborn, elevated dignity which set her apart from those around her. Under the cover of modesty, she

often strove, though in vain, to conceal herself from the gaze of others, but one could not mistake her for another. Wherever she appeared, one would always ask: "Who is she who looketh forth as the morning, clear as the sun" (Song of Solomon 6:10)? Wherever she would go she emanated the pure fragrance of the lily. Perhaps it was for this reason that she loved the color white—it was the reflection of her heart. All of her spiritual qualities were strictly balanced, one against another, never giving an impression of one-sidedness. Femininity was joined in her to a courageous character; her goodness never led to weakness and blind, unconditional trust of people. Even in her finest heartfelt inspirations she exhibited that gift of discernment which has always been so highly esteemed by Christian ascetics. These characteristics were perhaps in part due to her upbringing, which she received under the guidance of her maternal grandmother, Victoria, Queen of England and Empress of India. An unmistakable English stamp was placed on all her tastes and habits and English was closer to her than her native German.

The grand duchess herself acknowledged that a great influence on the formation of the inner, purely spiritual side of her character was the example of a paternal ancestor, Elizabeth Turlin of Hungary, who through her daughter Sophia was one of the founders of the House of Hesse. A contemporary of the Crusades, this remarkable woman reflected the spirit of her age. Deep piety was united in her together with self-sacrificing love for her neighbor, but her spouse considered her great beneficence squanderous and at times persecuted her for it. Her early widowhood compelled her to lead a life of wandering and need. Later she was again able to help the poor and suffering and completely dedicate herself to works of charity. The great reverence which this royal struggler enjoyed even during her lifetime moved the Roman Catholic Church in the thirteenth century to number her among its saints. The impressionable soul of the grand duchess was captivated in childhood by the happy memory of her honored ancestor and made a deep impression on her.

Her rich natural gifts were refined by an extensive and wide education which not only satisfied her mental and esthetic needs but also enriched her with knowledge of a purely practical nature, essential for every woman with household duties. "Together with Her Majesty (i.e., Empress Alexandra Feodorovna, her younger sister) we were instructed during our childhood in everything," she once said in answer to how she became acquainted with all the details of housekeeping.

Chosen as the future wife of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the grand duchess arrived in Russia during the period when the country, under the firm rule of Alexander III, attained the blossoming of its might in a purely national spirit. With her moral sensitivity and inborn love for knowledge, the young grand duchess began an intense study of the national characteristics of the Russian people and especially

of their faith which places a deep mark on both their national character and upon all of their culture. Soon Orthodoxy won her over by its beauty and inner richness which she often would contrast with the spiritual poverty of Protestantism. ("And they are so self-satisfied about everything!" she said about Protestants.)

Of her experiences in the Roman Catholic world, the grand duchess sometimes recalled a trip to Rome which she had taken together with the late grand duke soon after the jubilee of Pope Leo the XIII. The latter knew well the unshakable firmness of Sergei Alexandrovich's Orthodox convictions and regarded him highly, having first made his acquaintance when the grand duke, still a child, was visiting Rome. This long-standing acquaintance allowed them to converse informally. Between them there even arose an argument about how many popes were named Sergius. Neither of these exalted disputants wanted to give way to the other and the pope had to withdraw into his library to check. He returned a bit upset.

"Forgive me," said Leo XIII, smiling, "although they say the pope is infallible, this time he fell into error."

The grand duchess, of her own volition decided to unite herself to the Orthodox Church. When she made the announcement to her spouse, according to the account of one of the servants, tears involuntarily poured from his eyes. The Emperor Alexander III himself was deeply touched by her decision. Her husband blessed her after Holy Chrismation with a precious icon of the Savior, "Not Made by Hands" (a copy of the miraculous icon in the Chapel of the Savior), which she treasured greatly throughout the remaining course of her life. Having been joined to the Faith in this manner, and thereby to all that makes up the soul of a Russian, the grand duchess could now with every right say to her spouse in the words of the Moabite Ruth, "Your people have become my people, and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

The grand duke's extended tenure of office as Governor-General of Moscow, the true heart of Russia, where he and his wife were in living contact with the ancient, holy shrines and the immemorial Russian national way of life, must have bound the grand duchess even more to her new homeland.

Even during these years she dedicated much time to philanthropic activities, though this was considered one of the main obligations of her high position and therefore did not earn for her much public merit. As part of her social obligations the grand duchess was forced to participate in social life which was already beginning to oppress her because of its frivolity. The terrible death of the grand duke Sergei Alexandrovich, who was torn apart by a bomb in the holy Kremlin itself (near the Nicholas Palace where the grand duke had moved after he left his position as Governor-General), began a decisive moral change in the soul of his spouse which caused her to forsake her former life once and for all. The greatness of spirit with which she endured her trial evoked for her the deserved admiration of everyone. She even found in herself the moral strength to visit Kaliev, the murderer of her husband, in the hope of softening and healing his heart by meekness and complete forgiveness. These Christian feelings she also expressed, through the person of the slaughtered grand duke, by having the following touching words of the Gospel inscribed upon the memorial cross, erected according to the plans of Vasnetsov, at the site of his death, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do..."

However, not everyone was capable of understanding the change which had taken place in her. One had to live through such a staggering catastrophe as this, in order to be convinced of the frailty and illusory nature of wealth, glory and the things of this world, and about which for so many centuries we have been warned by the Gospel. For the society of that time, the decision of the grand duchess to dismiss her court in order to leave the world and dedicate herself to serving God and neighbor, seemed as scandal and madness. Despising both the tears of friends, gossip and mockings of the world, she courageously

set out on her new path. Having earlier chosen for herself the path of the perfect, i.e. the path of ascetic struggle, she began with wisely measured steps to ascend the ladder of Christian virtues.

The advice of wise instructors was not foreign to her, guiding those starting out on the path of Christian activity to learn from others the way of life so as "not to teach oneself, not to go without a guide along a path which one had never traveled and hence quickly lose one's way; not to travel more or less correctly, nor become exhausted from too swift a run or to fall asleep while resting" (Jerome, *A Letter to the Monk Rusticus*).

Therefore she strove to understand nothing without the direction of spiritually experienced elders, especially the elders of the Zosima Hermitage under whom she placed herself in total obedience. As her heavenly guides and protectors she chose St. Sergius and St. Alexis of Moscow. She was entrusted to their special protection by her late spouse whose remains she buried at the Chudov Monastery in a magnificent tomb, styled after those in the ancient Roman catacombs. The extended period of mourning for the grand duke, during which she retired into her interior world and was continually in church, was the first real break to separate her from what up until then had been her normal everyday life. The move from the palace to the building she acquired at Ordinka, where she allotted only two very modest rooms for herself, signaled a full break with the past and the beginning of a new period in her life.

From now on her main task became the building of a sisterhood in which inner service to God would be integrated with active service to one's neighbor in the name of Christ. This was a completely new form of organized charitable Church activity, and consequently drew general attention to itself. At its foundation was placed a deep and immutable idea: no one could give to another more than he himself already possessed. We all draw upon God and therefore only in Him can we love our neighbor. Natural love so-called or humanism quickly evaporates, replaced by coldness and disappointment, but one who lives in Christ can rise to the heights of complete self-denial and lay down his life for his friends. The grand duchess not only wanted to impart to charitable activities the spirit of the Gospel but to place them under the protection of the Church. Thus she hoped to attract gradually to the Church, those levels of Russian society, which up until that time had remained largely indifferent to the Faith. Highly significant was the very name the grand duchess bestowed upon the institution she established—the Martha and Mary Convent, which name contains within itself the mission, the life of its holy patrons.

The community was intended to be like the home of Lazarus which the Savior so often visited. The sisters of the convent were called to unite both the high lot of Mary, attending to the eternal word of life, and the service of Martha, to that degree in which they found Christ in the person of His less fortunate brethren. In justifying and explaining her thought, the ever-memorable foundress of the convent said that Christ the Savior could not judge Martha for showing Him hospitality, since the latter was sign of her love for Him. He only cautioned Martha, and in her all women in general, against that excessive fussing and triviality which draw them away from the higher needs of the spirit.

To be not of this world, and at the same time live and act in the world in order to transform it—this was the foundation upon which she desired to establish her convent.

Striving to be an obedient daughter of the Orthodox Church in all things the grand duchess did not desire to make use of the advantages of her position fearing lest even in the smallest way she take liberties and depart from obedience, from the rules or specific statutes established for everyone by the Church Authority. On the contrary, she fulfilled with complete readiness the slightest desire of the latter even if it did not coincide with her personal views. At one time, for example, she seriously thought about reviving the ancient institution of deaconess, in which she was zealously supported by Metropolitan

Vladimir of Moscow. Bishop Germogen (at this time of Saratov, later of Tobolsk where he was martyred), because of a misunderstanding, stood up against this idea, accusing the grand duchess without any foundation, of Protestant tendencies (of which he later repented), and counseled her to abandon her cherished dream. Having been misunderstood in the best of her strivings, the grand duchess did not stifle her spirit because of this trying disappointment, but rather put her whole heart into her beloved Martha and Mary Convent. It is not surprising that the convent quickly blossomed and attracted many sisters from the aristocracy as well as the common people. Nearly monastic order reigned within the inner life of the community and both within and without the convent her activities consisted in the care of those who visited the sick who were lodged in the convent, in the material and moral help given to the poor, and in the almshouse for those orphans and abandoned children found in every large city. The grand duchess paid special attention to the unfortunate children who bore within themselves the curse of their fathers' sins, the children born in the turbid slums of Moscow only to wither before they had a chance to blossom. Many of them were taken into the orphanage built for them where they were quickly revived spiritually and physically. For others, constant supervision at their place of residence was established. The spirit of initiative and moral sensitivity which accompanied the grand duchess in all her activities, inspired and impelled her to search out new paths and forms of philanthropic activity, which sometimes reflected the influence of her first, western homeland, and its advanced organizations for social improvement and mutual aid. And so she created a cooperative of messenger boys with a well built dormitory, and apartments for the girls who took part in this activity. Not all of these establishments were directly connected with the convent, but they were all like rays of light from the sun united in the person of their abbess, who embraced them with her care and protection. Having chosen as her mission not only to serve one's neighbor in general, but also the spiritual re-education of contemporary Russian society, the grand duchess wanted to speak to the latter in a closer, more understandable language about Church art and Orthodox liturgical beauty. All the churches founded by her, especially the main church of the convent, built in the Novgorod-Pskov style by the famous architect Shchusev and painted by Nesterov, were distinguished by their austere style and the artistic unity of the interior and exterior ornamentation. The crypt located under the arches of the convent church also evoked general admiration for its peaceful warmth. The church services in the convent were always outstandingly well performed, thanks to the exceptionally capable spiritual father chosen by the abbess. From time to time she attracted other fine pastoral strength from Moscow and all parts of Russia to serve and preach. Like bees gathering nectar from all flowers, according to the words of Gogol, for her, as a true Christian, there was no ultimate course of study and she remained a conscientious humble student all her life.

All the external decor of the Martha and Mary Convent as well the internal structure, and in general all the material creations of the grand duchess were stamped with elegance and culture. This was not because she conveyed to it some sort of self-satisfying significance, but because this was the spontaneous action of her creative spirit. Having concentrated her activity around the convent, the grand duchess did not sever her ties with those other social organizations and institutions of a charitable or spiritually enlightening nature with which she had been bound by close moral ties ever since her first years in Moscow. Among these, the Palestine Society occupied the first place, so close to her because it called to life the deep Russian Orthodox feeling of her spouse, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, for the Holy Land. Having inherited from him the chairmanship of this society, she imitated him in holy zeal for Sion and in tireless concern over Russian pilgrims heading for the Holy Land. Her cherished dream was to go with them, though she already had earlier visited the holy places together with the late grand duke. The unbroken chain of activity and responsibilities, becoming more complicated with every year, prevented her for a long time from leaving Russia for the Holy City. Alas! No one then foresaw that she would arrive in Jerusalem only after her repose, in order to find there a place for eternal rest.

Her mind was always in harmony with her heart, and in the Palestine work she exhibited not only love and zeal for the Holy Land but a great working knowledge, as if she directly controlled all the institutions of the Society. During the last years before the war she was occupied with plans for the construction of a metochion to St. Nicholas, in Bari, with a church worthy of the Russian name. The project and model of the building, executed by Shchusev in the ancient Russian style, was permanently exhibited in her reception room. Countless papers and callers, the examination of various types of petitions and entreaties which were presented to her from all parts of Russia, as well as other affairs, usually filled her whole day and frequently brought her to the point of total exhaustion. This did not hamper her from spending the night at the bedside of suffering patients or from attending services in the Kremlin and at the greatly loved churches and monasteries in all parts of Moscow. The spirit strengthened the weakened body (her only rest was pilgrimages to various parts of Russia for prayer. However, even here the people took away the possibility of her finding seclusion and quiet. Greatly honoring her royal birth and great piety, the people ecstatically met her everywhere. The trips of the grand duchess to various cities of Russia, against her will turned into triumphant marches).

Concealing her struggles, she always appeared before people with a bright, smiling face. Only when she was alone or with a few close people, her face and especially her eyes reflected hidden sorrow—the mark of a great soul languishing in this world. Having detached herself from almost all earthly things, she even more brightly radiated an inner light, especially by her love and tenderness. No one could do an act of kindness more delicately—to each according to his need or spiritual temperament. She was not only capable of weeping with the sorrowful but of rejoicing with those who rejoice, which is usually the more difficult. Though not a nun in the strict sense, better than any nun she observed the great law of St. Nilus of Sinai: "Blessed is the monk who honors every man as (a) god after God." Find the best in every man and, "Have mercy on the fallen," was the continual striving of her heart. A meek spirit did not prevent her from blazing with holy wrath before injustice. Even more strictly she judged herself if she made some mistake, however involuntarily. Allow me to present a fact which witnesses to this facet of her character, as well as how her sincerity won out against an inborn reserve and the demands of social etiquette. Once during the time I was vicar bishop of Moscow she offered me the chairmanship of a purely secular organization, not having any activities connected with the Church. I was involuntarily embarrassed, not knowing how to answer her. Understanding my position, she immediately said decisively, "Forgive me, I made a foolish suggestion," and thus led me out of a difficult situation.

The high position of the grand duchess along with her openness attracted many and various organizations and individual petitioners to her for her help, protection, or authoritative influence in the higher echelons of both local Moscovite and the central authority. She carefully replied to all petitions except for those which bore political overtones. The latter she decisively rejected, considering dealings with politics to be incompatible with her new calling.

She paid special attention to all institutions of Church, charitable or artistic and scientific character. She also zealously worked to preserve the more important daily customs and traditions which made life so rich in old, beloved Moscow. The anniversary holiday of 1912 gave her an unexpected chance to exhibit her zeal in this direction.

Here are the circumstances of this activity, hitherto known only to a few people, including even those who had direct connection with this work. During the elaboration of the program for the celebration of the hundredth anniversary of the War for the Homeland, there arose in the special committee organized in Moscow a heated debate over how to celebrate the Thirtieth of August, the final day of the anniversary festival in Moscow, where the emperor, according to ceremony was supposed to arrive from Borodino. The representative of the ministry of the court offered to place at the center of the festival day

a visit by the emperor to the Zemsky Kustarny Museum, which had absolutely nothing to do with the historical recollection of 1812.

Others supported my proposed offer that this memorial for Russia, St. Alexander Nevsky's Day, be noted with a festive service of thanksgiving on Red Square. The ceremonial officialdom refused to put aside its plan, protecting itself with the impenetrable iron plating of "imperial order," a being whose existence no one, of course, could verify. As for me, a representative of the clerical department, and those who were of like mind, all we could do was submit to the inescapable. At my meeting with the grand duchess I told her all about the conflict that had come to pass. Having heard out my tale in much distress she said, "I will try to write about it to the emperor. It's true," she added with a reserved smile, "for us women, all is permitted."

Within a week, she informed me that the emperor had changed the program according to our desires.

When the Thirtieth of August arrived it presented a magnificent picture of a genuinely national, Church and patriotic festivity which will never be forgotten by the participants. For this fete Moscow was indebted to the intercessions of the grand duchess who exhibited in the present circumstance not only her devotion to the Church but a deeply historical, purely Russian devotion.

At the beginning of the war she gave herself over with complete self-sacrifice to the service of the sick and wounded soldiers whom she visited not only in the hospitals and sanitoriums of Moscow but also at the front. Like the empress, she was not spared the slander which accused them of excessive sympathy for wounded Germans, and the grand duchess bore this unwarranted, bitter offense with her usual magnanimity.

When the revolutionary storm broke out she met it with amazing self-control and calm. It seemed that she stood on a high, unshakable cliff, and from there fearlessly looked out at the waves storming around her and raised her spiritual vision to eternity.

She did not harbor even a shadow of ill feelings against the madness of the agitated masses. "The people are children, innocent of what is transpiring," she remarked quietly. "They are led into deception by the enemies of Russia." Nor was she depressed by the great suffering and humiliation that befell the royal family who were so close to her: "This will serve for their moral purification and bring them nearer to God," she noted once with radiant gentleness. She suffered deeply for the royal family only when the thorns of grievous slander were woven around them especially during the war. In order not to give impetus to new evil gossip, the grand duchess tried to avoid conversations on the subject. If it so happened that because of idle people's tasteless curiosity the subject was broached in her presence, she immediately killed it by her expressive silence. Only once after returning from Tsarskoe Selo, she forgot herself and remarked, "That terrible man (i.e., Rasputin) wants to separate me from them but, thank God, he will not succeed."

The charm of her whole temperament was so great that it automatically attracted even the revolutionaries when they first arrived to examine the Martha and Mary Convent. One of them, apparently a student, even praised the life of the sisters, saying that no luxuries were noticeable, and that cleanliness and good order were the rule, which was in no way blameworthy. Seeing his sincerity, the grand duchess struck up a conversation with him about the outstanding qualities of socialist and Christian ideals. "Who knows," remarked her unknown conversationalist as if influenced by her arguments, "perhaps we are headed for the same goal, only by different paths," and with these words left the convent.

"Obviously we are still unworthy of a martyr's crown," the abbess replied to the sisters' congratulating her for such a successful end to the first encounter with the Bolsheviks. But that crown was not far from her. During the course of the last months of 1917 and the beginning of 1918, the Soviet power to everyone's amazement granted the Martha and Mary Convent and its abbess complete freedom to live as they wished and even supported them by supplying essentials. This made the blow even heavier and unexpected for them when on Pascha the grand duchess was suddenly arrested and transported to Ekaterinburg. His Holiness Patriarch Tikhon attempted with the help of Church organizations to take a part in her liberation, but was unsuccessful. Her exile was at first accompanied by some comforts. She was quartered in a convent where all the sisters were sincerely involved. A special comfort for her was that she was not hampered from attending services. Her position became more difficult after her transfer to Alapaevsk where she was imprisoned in one of the city schools together with her ever-faithful companion, Sister Barbara, and several grand dukes who shared her fate.

Nevertheless she did not lose her abiding firmness of spirit and occasionally would send words of encouragement and comfort to the sisters of her convent who were deeply grieving over her. And so it continued until the fateful night of 5/18 July. On this night together with the other royal captives striving with her and her valiant fellow-struggler Barbara in Alapaevsk, she was suddenly taken in an automobile outside the city and apparently buried alive with them in one of the local mine shafts. The results of later excavation there has shown that she strived until the last moment to serve the grand dukes who were severely injured by the fall. Some local peasants who carried out the sentence on these people whom they did not know, reported that for a long time there was heard a mysterious singing from below the earth.

This was the great-passion-bearer, singing funeral hymns to herself and the others until the silver chain was loosed and the golden bowl was broken (cf. Eccles. 12:6) and until the songs of heaven began to resound for her. Thus the longed-for martyr's crown was placed on her head and she was united to the hosts of those of whom John, the seer of mysteries, speaks: "after this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;...And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 14). Like a wondrous vision she passed over the earth, leaving behind radiant traces. Together with all the other sufferers for the Russian land, she appeared simultaneously as a redeemer for Russia and as a foundation for that Russia of the future which is being raised up on the bones of the new martyrs. Such images have a timeless significance; their memory is eternal on earth and in heaven. Not in vain did the voice of the people declare her a saint during her lifetime. (It is noteworthy that soon after the birth of the grand duchess, her mother, the Princess Alice, a woman with a great and meek spirit, wrote to Queen Victoria about the name given to her daughter. "We liked Elizabeth since St. Elizabeth is an ancestress of the Hessian, as well as of the Saxon House." The late grand duchess had kept this name after being united to the Orthodox Church and chose for her heavenly protectress, St. Elizabeth—5 September.)

As though in reward for her earthly struggles and special love for the Holy Land, her martyred remains, which according to eyewitnesses were found in the mine shaft completely untouched by corruption, were destined to rest at the same place where the Savior suffered and rose from the dead. Exhumed on the orders of Admiral Kolchak, together with the bodies of other members of the royal house killed at the same time (the Grand Duke Sergei Michailovich, the Princes John, Igor, and Konstantine Konstantinovich, and the son of the Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich, Prince Paley), their remains and the bodies of the grand duchess and Sister Barbara were taken first to Irkutsk and then to Peking where they remained for a long time in the cemetery church of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission. From there,

through the concern of her sister, Princess Victoria, the Marchioness of Milford-Haven, to whom she was closely bound during life, her coffin and Sister Barbara's were transferred from Shanghai and sent to Palestine.

On the 15th of January, 1920, the bodies of both sufferers were triumphantly met in Jerusalem by the English authorities, the Greek and Russian clergy, as well as crowds of the large Russian colony and local inhabitants. Their burial took place the next day and was served by the head of the Church of Jerusalem, the Blessed Patriarch Damianos, together with a host of clergy.

As if destined for the purpose, the crypt below the lower vault of the Russian church of St. Mary Magdalene was adapted as a sepulchre for the grand duchess. This church, built in memory of the Empress Maria Alexandrovna by her august children, was not strange to the deceased, for together with the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich she had been present at its consecration in 1888. Located on a picturesque slope of the Mount of Olives, it is the best-styled and most graceful of all the churches one finds in Palestine, attracting one's gaze even from a distance by its colorful and purely Russian lines. The martyr herself could not have chosen a better resting place even if, having foreseen that she would have to repose for a time outside her convent, she had earlier prepared a grave for herself.

Here, everything reflects her spirit: the golden domes of the church, sparkling in the sun amidst green olive trees and cypresses; the artistic interior furnishings, stamped with the inspiration of Vereshchagin, and the very character of the holy images, pierced through by the rays of Christ's Resurrection. Even closer and dearer to her heart is the fragrance of the holy places, which breathes upon her sepulchre from all sides. Below, beneath the tomb stretches out a unique view of the Holy City with the great cupola of the Life-Giving Tomb rising on high; at the foot of her tomb, the Garden of Gethsemane where in agony the Divine Sufferer prayed until drops of blood appeared. Further on, Gethsemane itself, the place of the Mother of God's burial and to the left one can discern half-concealed by the folds of mountains, Bethany, that true Convent of Martha and Mary, the sister of Lazarus, whom the Lord called forth from the grave; and above, the Church of St. Mary Magdalene joyously crowns Mt. Olivet, whence the risen Savior rose gloriously to heaven in order to crown from there all those who amid temptations remained faithful to Him until death (see Rev. 11:5, 21).

Jerusalem

5/18 July, 1925

Orthodox America

By Her Prayers...

Elisabeth Hawkins

I want to share how Grand Duchess Elizabeth has helped me in guiding me to Orthodoxy and strengthening my faith.

As a divorced single mother, I was living with my eight-year-old son Timothy near Albany, New York. My older brother had become a monk at Holy Trinity Monastery, in Jordanville, and came occasionally to visit us. He would talk to me about his Orthodox faith, and I would appear to listen, but I was not interested and therefore I did not really hear what he said. A turning point came in April 1989. Fr. Theophylact came to visit us one evening, and after he left I began wondering if there was some truth in what he was saying.

For many years I had been searching for a church where I felt I belonged. We had been raised Baptist and Lutheran, and I had been baptized at the age of nineteen in the Lutheran church. But I felt something was missing, and over the years I also attended Methodist, Dutch Reformed and Roman Catholic churches. I had recently become a member of a Presbyterian church, although there, too, I was not really satisfied, and I continued to pray that God would lead me to a church where I would not feel such emptiness.

It was soon after Fr Theophylact's April visit that I learned I had a growth on my thyroid. The doctors thought it was cancerous, and I was frightened. I had always been very athletic and in good physical shape, and suddenly I was faced with cancer. This no doubt intensified my desire to find the "right Church," and in July, I finally responded to Fr. Theophylact's invitation to visit the monastery, it made a great impression -- not only on me but also on Timothy. My brother gave us a tour, and we even attended a funeral. For the first time I really opened up to what he had to say and asked questions.

Early in August I drove again to the monastery and attended my first Divine Liturgy. It was a deeply moving experience. In spite of my worries about cancer, I felt very peaceful. Later that month, I was to have surgery to remove the growth on my thyroid. Fr. Theophylact requested one of the hieromonks to serve a moleben for me, which was done before the icon "Unexpected Joy," and the tumor turned out to be benign. I firmly believe this was a miracle.

After my surgery, Fr. Theophylact came and anointed me with oil from Saint Nectaros. He left and suddenly, inexplicably, I was overcome by a profound feeling of repentance. I wept and wept. Then I began reading a book that Fr. Theophylact had brought with him: Saint Elisabeth the New Martyr by Ludmila Koehler. I was never a reader, but this book captivated me. I felt a special closeness to the martyred Grand Duchess, and I was moved to tears by her life.

Shortly afterwards, on one of our trips to Jordanville, Timothy and I visited the nearby sisterhood, which is dedicated to Saint Elizabeth. There I experienced such peace and contentment. I scarcely noticed the two-hour drive home in the [x]uring rain.

That evening I framed the photo of Saint Elizabeth that one of the sisters had given me, and put it on my bedside table. I awoke that night to see light coming from the photo. The Grand Duchess had a white rope in her hand and held it out towards me. A feeling of peace enveloped me. After years of searching, I knew that I was on the right path.

In November of that year, Timothy and I became catechumens. Every weekend we drove to the monastery, to attend the Divine services. We were baptized on April 7, 1990, Lazarus Saturday, which coincided that year with the feast of the Annunciation. I took the name Elizabeth after the martyred Grand Duchess. Never had I experienced such inner joy and happiness. That night I awoke to see Saint Elizabeth, dressed in black monastic attire, kneeling at my bedside and praying.

Timothy and I continued our weekend trips to the monastery until, in July, we were able to move to Jordanville. By the prayers of Saint Elizabeth, we were permitted to stay at the sisterhood. This was a great blessing, because I soon became quite ill. After four days in the hospital and numerous tests, the doctors were still unsure as to what was causing me such pain. Only the following March did they finally determine that I had endometdosis. With my health problems compounded by financial insecurity, I am sure I would have become depressed had I not had the support of the sisters. We continued to live at the sisterhood until August, when we moved into our own apartment in Richfield Springs, only seven miles from the monastery.

I truly believe that it is through the prayers and intercession of Saint Elizabeth that God's great mercy was so generously manifest to us in the events of those two and a half years. My successful operation, my becoming acquainted with Holy Trinity Monastery and the Sisterhood of Saint Elizabeth, our being baptized into the true Church, my becoming Elizabeth and having Saint Elizabeth as my heavenly protectress, and living in the Sisterhood of Saint Elizabeth for a year during my illness, where I was able to gain a firm foundation in the Orthodox faith.

As if all this were not blessing enough, in September 1993, an older woman asked my godmother (one of the nuns from the Saint Elizabeth sisterhood) and me to accompany her to Russia -- and paid for our travel expenses. While in Moscow we stayed at the Martha-Mary Convent, founded by Saint Elizabeth, and were there for her name day, September 5/ 18. The convent buildings were in crying need of repair, but one could nevertheless strongly sense the Grand Duchess's presence. The white roses she planted were still flourishing, and I was privileged to play her piano.

I am so unworthy of all that has happened, and I give all honor and praise to God and thankfulness to Saint Elizabeth for her faithful intercession. I hope that those who read this and who are not yet well acquainted with Saint Elizabeth will want to read about her inspiring life. There are two biographies available in English: Ludmilo Koehler's book, which has already been mentioned, and Grand Duchess Elizabeth of Russia: New Martyr of the Communist Yoke by Lubov Millar. Her life was devoted to helping people, and she continues to help people even now, as I myself can testify.

Martyrdom Of Sister Barbara,

The New Martyr Of Russia

by

Father Demetrios Serfes

21 November, 1999



St. Barbara The New Martyr

***Dismissal Hymn (Tropar) Of The New Martyrs
Grand Duchess Elizabeth And Sister Barbara
Plagal of the First Tone***

Emulating the Lord's self-abasement on the earth, thou didst forsake royal mansions to serve the poor and disdained, overflowing with compassion for the suffering. And taking up a martyr's cross, thou in meekness didst perfect the Saviour's image within thee. Wherefore, with Barbara, entreat Him to save us all. O wise Elizabeth.

In describing the precious Christian devotion of Sister Barbara and her martyrdom, I am also presenting you brief accounts of the lives of the martyrs for their great Christian faith and duty, with her: HRH. Grand Duchess Elizabeth (Abbess of Ss. Martha and Mary Convent of Love and Mercy), Princes John, Igor, Constantine, Vladimir and Sergius, who were all martyred in Alapaevsk, Russia, on July 5/18, (*new calendar followed by old calendar, as in Russia they follow the old calendar in the Liturgical life of the Russian Orthodox Church*) the day after the holy martyrdom of the Holy Imperial Royal Martyrs Tsar Nicholas, Tsarina Alexandra, Grand Duchesses Olga, Tatiana, Marie, Anastasia, and the Grand Duke Tsarevich Alexis, along with their friends.

From the teachings of the Orthodox Christian faith we learn to lay down one's life for the promotion and aid of another is the pinnacle of what it means to follow Jesus Christ, to be a child of Light and lover of mankind. The Christian witness of laying down one's own life - martyrdom, for the Greek word "martyria" literally means "witness" - is what our Savior accomplished for the life of the world (St. John 6:51). Jesus Christ was no mere mortal, since His death on the Cross was greater than any other sacrificial death in the history of the world. Jesus was the God-Man, truly God in human form, and thus His sacrifice on the Cross exhibited and demonstrated the superabundant love of God Himself for His entire creation: "*For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*" (St. John 3:16). Accordingly, as every Orthodox Christian believes, it is the emulators of this sacrifice of Jesus - the glorious Martyrs - who have always been considered to be the Protectors of the Faith, as they have throughout the ages preserved our

Faith whole and pure from all defilement of the devil. Every local Orthodox Church which has in her history the record of martyrdom can rightfully be considered blessed by God and even justified in His eyes.

Concerning this test and witness, we have such a devoted God-loving handmaiden of our Lord Jesus Christ named Sister Barbara, a Russian Orthodox nun, who was the cell keeper of the Holy Royal Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth, who was the Abbess of Ss. Martha and Mary Convent of Love and Mercy in Moscow, Russia.

Two nuns from the convent, named Sister Barbara, and Sister Catherine, were with Grand Duchess while under arrest by the local Red Guards on Bright Tuesday of the Paschal season in April of 1918. Carried off into exile, no one knew where they were taken, although the Grand Duchess Elizabeth was under the impression that she was going towards Siberia to help with her nursing skills, and that both Sisters Barbara and Catherine were going to help with the same cause. Then again the thought was that it was their road to Golgotha!

By train on the way they stopped in Ykaterinburg, where the captives spent several days under strict surveillance, (the Royal Martyrs Tsar Nicholas II and his Royal Family members, and friends had not yet arrive in Ykaterinburg), and then from Ykaterinburg the three nuns were transported to Alapaevsk, where they imprisoned the the Grand Duchess Elizabeth with the nuns in a school building prepared for the purpose. There authorities had also imprisoned the others whom they had arrested: the Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich, Prince John Konstantinovich and his wife, Helena Petrovna, and their children, Vsevolod and Catherine, Prince Konstantine Konstantinovich, Prince Igor Konstantinovich, Count Vladimir Palovich Paley, and the steward of the estates of the Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich - Theodore Semyonovich Remez.

At first the captives were under the strict guard of the Red Army soldiers, but they were allowed to go to church on feasts days and to work in the school garden, which during the course of a month, they had cultivated in such a way that even their enemies were amazed.

At times they were able to take walks, under guard, and even to talk to outsiders, with whom they spoke only a little, simply answering questions with a noble reserve, behaving bravely and not showing the deep pain of their hearts.

They lived in a spirit of struggle and prayer. Mornings and evenings they prayed for a long time, and the Grand Duchess spent much of the night in prayer. At midnight she could always be found in prayer.

The Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich, the youngest son of the Grand Duke Michale Nikolaevich (the brother of the Tsar Liberator, Alexander Nikovaevich) was born on 25 September 1869.



Royal Martyr
Grand Duchess Elizabeth
(Last known photograph 1918)

He was named after St. Sergius of Radonezh, who cared and prayed for the Russian land.

From childhood the Grand Duke loved work and studies and while he was traveling through Russia with his father he became acquainted with the needs of the common people and came to love them with his whole soul. While serving in the post of General Inspector of the Artillery with the rank of Adjutant General, he always received those who came to him, doing everything possible for the petitioners. He was particularly distinguished among leaders by his simplicity and his sincere, affectionate manner. The Grand Duke was accessible to everyone, from the simplest peasant to the highest dignitary. He was faithful, sincere and devoted servant of the Emperor and his homeland to the end.

The three brothers, Princes John, Konstantine and Igor, were the sons of Grand Duke Konstantine Konstantinovich, who was the son of the Grand Duke Konstantine Nikolaevich (the ardent champion of the liberation of the peasants from serfdom), and his wife, the former Princess of Saxony-Alterburg, now the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavreikievna. These were the children of an august poet, renowned in the academic world, president of the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and general inspector of the military academies. These were the children of a great man of government, whose lofty and diverse gifts marked his activities, enabling him to serve in various aspects of governmental and social life. These were the brothers of an august, great, modern hero, who fell on the field of battle, a valiant young champion, Prince Oleg Konstantinovich, who was mourned by the army and all Russia.

The right believing Prince John Konstantinovich, who was born on June 23, 1886, and named after St. John the Baptist, who suffered for the truth of God and whose life ended in a dungeon and martyrdom. Prince John was married to Helen Petrovna, the daughter of the King of Serbia. They had two children: Vsevolod Ioannovich, born on January 1, 1914, and Catherine Koannovna, born on July 12, 1915. The Prince was distinguished by a rare inclination for spiritual and religious matters and by his compassion for the unfortunate. He was sensitive and unpretentious to soldiers and to those people who were victims of cruel fate. He remembered the testament of his father: "Do not betray your high calling and stay in your homeland." During the hours of his grievous exile, he comforted himself with the words of his poet father: "Blessed is he who smiles, who with a joyful countenance bears his cross without complaint..."

At all historical religious festivals, Prince John Konstantinovich served as the representative of His Majesty the Emperor. In the spirit of his religious life, he was close to the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna, with whom he many hours discussing moral and religious questions. Although he was a family man, he was nonetheless a great man of prayer, of love and of pure devotion; he lived not for the dark, fleeting moments of life, but rather for holy eternity, leaving his kin with a legacy of truth, good, love and humanity.

Prince Constantine Konstantinovich was born on December 20, 1890; his names day was the twenty-first of May. He was an extremely modest officer of the Guard of the Izmailovsky Regiment, much beloved by officers and soldiers alike; along with them he was a brave soldier who distinguished himself in the past war, he was often seen in the trenches among the soldiers, risking his life.

Prince Igor Konstantinovich was born on Mary 29, 1894; his names day was the fifth of June. This martyr of duty was a worthy son of his great father. In general, all three departed brothers in that they were faithful to their civil duty, were also faithful to their Christian duty.

Count Vladimir Pavlovich Paley was the son of the Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich from his second marriage to Countess Paley, though morganatic had been performed in accordance with the church's law of matrimony.

Barbara Yakovleva, the nun from the Martha and Mary Convent of Love and Mercy, had been one of the first inhabitants of the holy convent and had always been faithful to all the traditions of the convent. Although she had been the closest person to the Grand Duchess (Elizabeth), she never took pride in this and always behaved like an ordinary nun accessible, kind, and pleasant to everyone. Everyone thought kindly of her. She was faithful to her great Matushka to very end, and voluntarily went to her suffering and death, fulfilling the command of Christ: *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (St. John 15:13).

The noble Theodore Semenovich Remez, the steward of the Grand Duke Sergei Michailovich's estate, remained faithful to his master up to their martyrdom. By his example, he showed how one must serve and be faithful to one's benefactors to the grave. It is not in vain that people say you find out who your friends are in times of sorrow.

There you have a short biography of the departed ones.

The imperial prisoners spent the month of May tolerably well, although they were often subjected to insults and humiliations by their treacherous persecutors. In June, the regime became stricter. Apart from being deprived of complete freedom, all money, gold and silver in their possession, in general, everything of quality was taken away from them, and they were left with their poorest clothes and a change of linen. They were given the poorest food in limited quantities. God alone knows what the poor suffering ones bore, endured, and thought during these fatal days in bloodstained Alapaevsk.

During the last days of June (Old Style), sisters Barbara and Catherine were taken away from the Grand Duchess Elizabeth the Abbess, and sent to Ykaterinburg. Their parting with her was moving; all three cried like small children. They begged to be allowed to remain with the Grand Duchess to the end, but neither tears nor entreaties had any effect on the cruel hearts of their captors. The Grand Duchess was left alone, without her devoted cell attendants. However much she strove to be strong, there were times when she could not restrain her tears, and wept like a little child before the icon of the Mother of God. She clearly saw what this was all leading up to. Though she was strong in spirit, she was also human; though she had a cheerful spirit, her flesh was weak. Only divine grace supported her invisibly and strengthened her in the difficult moments of suffering, both of body and soul.

When sisters Barbara and Catherine arrived in Ykaterinburg, they were hauled before the regional soviet, where they tearfully entreated the temporal authorities to return them to the Grand Duchess, assuring them that they did not want to be set free, leaving their spiritual mother alone in her difficult imprisonment.

Their request was cruelly refused. The nuns, kneeling, begged to honor their request. At last, wanting to shock them by their cruel answer and to cool their ardent desire, the authorities replied: the elder of the two could return to Alapaevsk on the condition that she attest in writing that she would be willing to be tortured and die with the abbess; they predicted that the suffering and torture would be unprecedented in cruelty. Barbara, as the elder and closest cell attendant to the Grand Duchess, did not hesitate to answer bravely: *"I agree to give you the requested*

signature, not only in ink, but, if necessary, in my own blood." Such an answer threw the vile people into confusion, but their pride forced them to live up to what they had said. They had never imagined that this delicate girl would voluntarily exchange freedom for suffering and death.

This heroine of spirit, Sister Barbara, was ordered to return to Alapaevsk to be imprisoned. Sister Catherine was released despite her tearful pleading to exchange her freedom for imprisonment together with Barbara, (no one really knows what happened to Sister Catherine, but perhaps martyred).

How great was the joy of the Grand Duchess when she saw her faithful spiritual daughter returned to her in Alapaevsk. The captives hardly had time to rejoice when a new blow of inexorable fate struck. On the first of July, the wife of Prince John Konstantinovich, Princess Helena Petrovna, and the children, were taken away.

Neither the tears of the mother nor the tears of the children could move the heartless captors to halt the separation of a husband from his wife, of a father from his children. They were taken to Perm where they spent some time in prison; then they were sent to Moscow, and then on to Serbia because of the demands of foreign governments.

After this heavy blow of fate, the august prisoners immediately understood what awaited them in the very near future. They consciously prepared for death, prayed fervently and asked God to strengthen them in their sufferings. Now they thought of nothing earthly except their families, reflecting upon death, the spiritual preparations of the dread Judgment, eternal torment and eternal joy in the mansions of heaven. They repeatedly expressed the wish that God might preserve their sinful bones from being desecrated, for the sake of the joy and comfort of their kin and the people dear to their hearts, who would commemorate them. They asked one another to pray to God concerning this, because they felt that they would be treated cruelly and that there would be an attempt to hide the traces of this crime.

They wrote letters and notes containing their last testaments, put them in pouches or lockets and hung them around their necks with their crosses, in the hope that their relatives would find out their last behest's in this manner.

With tears streaming from his eyes Prince John Konstantinovich wrote a letter to his beloved wife and his little children.

They mourned for Russia, torn apart by turmoil, civil strife, by traitors and by foreigners, perishing without a sovereign and without a government which believed in principles centuries old and was devoted to the Holy Faith of their ancestors. They felt only the eye from the throne on high could see through the covert behavior of a two-faced judge, over the arbitrariness of a ruler, over the depravity of a prodigal, over the cruelty of brutish people. Their souls felt and perceived the signs of the last times, everything on earth was impoverished, oath breaking was accepted, and the living proclamation of heaven was not recognized.

For a further account of these suffering ones and their holy martyrdom please visit [Murder of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth](#)

The mysteries of God's judgment are hidden from us, but the temporary sojourn of the Imperial

Martyrs will doubtless in itself have blessed traces, on which flowers of Christ's love and mercy will blossom towards a poor people who lovingly gave them refuge.

I would like to humbly thank John Wilson Smith for his kind assistance with this web site, and for the thoughtful help of my internet assistant Raymon David. Thank you kindly and God Bless you both!

*Holy St. Barbara,
New Martyrs of Russia,
Pray Unto God For Us!
Glory Be To God For All Things*





Orthodox America

A Sacrificing Love - New Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth

One of the brightest stars in the celestial array of Russia's New Martyrs is holy Grand Duchess Elizabeth. A convert to Orthodoxy, she outshone many of those who's faith she had so ardently embraced. She was like a sun whose penetrating rays warm hearts grown cold and renew the lost faith of a fallen and despairing humanity, as if to say that not all have succumbed to an egotistical self love, that there are still those servants of Love, whose example points the way to the true path, tom happiness both on this earth and for all eternity. She placed a law in her heart: that the strong bear the frailties of the weak. Love was the cornerstone of her life and all her activities. This love made easy for her what was difficult, it made serving her fellowman a plea sure, and through it the forgiveness of enemies was made possible. For the sake of this Love she sacrificed herself for others, thereby fulfilling that greatest of commandments according to the Apostle of love, that "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John3:16).

There exists perhaps no more eloquent tribute to the holy Grand Duchess than the spiritual portrait so finely drawn by the late Metropolitan Anastassy:

“She was a rare combination of exalted Christian spirit, moral nobility, enlightened mind, gentle heart, and refined taste. She possessed an extremely delicate and multifaceted spiritual composition and her outward appearance reflected the beauty and greatness of her spirit. Upon her brow lay the seal of an inborn, elevated dignity which set her apart from those around her. Under the cover of modesty, she often strove - though in vain, to conceal herself from the gaze of others, but one could not mistake her for another. Wherever she appeared, one would always ask: "*Who is she who looketh forth as the morning, clear as the sun*" (Song of Solomon 6:10)? Wherever she would go she emanated the pure fragrance of the lily. Perhaps it was for this reason that she loved the color white--it was the reflection of her heart. All of her spiritual qualities were strictly balanced, one against another, never giving an impression of one-sidedness. Femininity was joined in her to a courageous character; her goodness never led to weakness and blind, unconditional trust of people. Even in her finest heartfelt inspirations she exhibited that gift of discernment which has always been so highly esteemed by Christian ascetics..."

The Grand Duchess was born on October 20, 1861, the daughter of Princess Alice of Hesse and the granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England, under whose strict tutelage she received both an extensive and a practical education. Her mother died when she was still young, the first tragedy in a life marked by inner suffering. But through, greatness of spirit, her sorrow at the absence of maternal love was later transformed into a tender and solicitous compassion for others who lacked this love.

Chosen as the future wife of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, the Grand Duchess arrived in Moscow and set about learning all she could about her newly adopted homeland, its people and its culture. Her heart was soon captured by the beauty and spiritual depth of Orthodoxy which she discovered so tightly interwoven into the rich fabric of the Russian soul. It was not mere formality that prompted her decision to become Orthodox, but a strong inner conviction. In Orthodoxy she found full



The Convent today: main church

expression for the natural spiritual cast of her character. Social obligations at the palace, however, prevented this disposition from blossoming, although in keeping with her new position she was able to dedicate much time to philanthropic activities. It was only with the tragic assassination of her husband in 1905 that Providence granted her the opportunity to withdraw from the tumult of a world which her soul found so wearisome. But through her patient endurance she had already achieved a measure of Christian perfection. This was manifest in her ready forgiveness of her husband's murderer whom she even went to visit in hopes of softening his heart. On the memorial cross erected upon the site of her husband's death, she had inscribed the Gospel words, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do..." She had already begun the ascent up the ladder of Christian virtue.

Ignoring the scandal caused by such a move, the Grand Duchess left the royal apartments and settled in a building which she had acquired at Ordinka. Here, with the counsel of the eiders of the Zosima Hermitage under whom she had placed herself in total obedience, she laid the foundation for a sisterhood which combined in itself the ascetic labors of the monastic life and works of charity. This quiet haven in the midst of a bustling city was named in honor of Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus, whose two natures of service and prayer were so beautifully intertwined in the mission of the new community. "To be not of this world and at the same time to live and act in the world in order to transform it--this was the foundation upon which she desired to establish her convent."

The Grand Duchess was personally involved in all the plans for the buildings of the community, and they reflected her refined aesthetic sensibilities. The main church was built in the traditional Novgorod-Pskov style and painted by the well-known Russian artist Nesterov. The austere white walls were balanced with exquisite sculptured ornamentation. The architectural harmony of the buildings, the peaceful atmosphere, the beauty of the church services--all combined to lift the tired soul from its earthly cares and give it a glimpse of paradise. Even members of the unchurchly contemporary Russian society, whose spiritual re-education was of such concern to the Grand Duchess, were drawn to this unique community.

"It is not surprising that the convent quickly blossomed and attracted many sisters from the aristocracy as well as the common people. Nearly monastic order reigned within the inner life of the community and both within and without the convent the activities of the Grand Duchess consisted in the care of those who visited the sick who were lodged in the convent, in the material and moral help given to the poor, and in the almshouse for those orphans and abandoned children found in every large city. The Grand Duchess paid special attention to the unfortunate children who bore within themselves the curse of their fathers' sins, the children born in the turbid slums of Moscow only to wither before they had a chance to blossom. Many of them were taken into the orphanage built for them where they were quickly revived spiritually and physically. For others, constant supervision at their place of residence was established. The spirit of initiative and moral sensitivity which accompanied the Grand Duchess in all her activities, inspired and impelled her to search out new paths and forms of philanthropic activity, which sometimes reflected the influence of her first, western homeland, and its advanced organizations for social improvement and mutual aid..."

Wherever there was a need the Grand Duchess would try to answer it, and only her strong spirit was able to keep her from being entirely overcome physically by all that she in her willingness was ready to undertake. All her activities, however, did not cause her to wander from the "one thing needful," and while serving the least of Christ's brethren, she was ever at Christ's feet, listening to His words.

The sorrowful tribulations which visited Russia as the Revolution spread its shadow over the land only caused her virtues of love and self-sacrifice to shine more brightly. Together with her younger sister, Tsaritsa Alexandra, she was slandered on account of her German blood. But she harbored neither bitterness nor hatred towards her enemies, and even the revolutionaries recognized her greatness of spirit and spared her and her community for a time,

Finally, however, the martyr's crown was brought within her reach. On Pascha, 1918, the Grand Duchess was suddenly arrested and taken first to Ekaterinburg and then to Alopevsk where, with her ever-faithful companion Sister Barbara, she was imprisoned in one of the city schools. On the fateful night of July 5/18, together with other royal captives, she was taken in an automobile outside the city and buried alive in a mine shaft. Even here, in the bowels of the earth, she did not cease to manifest her sacrificing love. Excavations have shown that until the last moment she strove to serve the grand dukes who were severely injured by the fall.

At last her precious remains – which, according to eye-witnesses were found in the mine shaft completely untouched by corruption – were received with triumph in Jerusalem and laid to rest in a sepulchre of the church of St. Mary Magdalen, just over the hill from Bethany where the sisters, Sts. Martha and Mary, served and glorified the Lord.

(Quotations from “The Holy New Martyr, Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna,” by Metropolitan Anastassy, in *Orthodox Life*, Sept.-Oct., 1981)

Holy New Martyr St. Elizabeth!
Pray unto God for us sinners!

The night after the murder of The Emperor Nicholas and his family, Abess Elizabeth Feodorovna was summarily and for no reason executed along with several other Romanovs.

Elizabeth Feodorovna was the older sister of Tsaritsa Aleksandra. She had married Grand Duke Sergei Aleksandrovich, a younger brother of Emperor Aleksander III. in 1884.

She was always a very devoted Orthodox Christian and after her husband's murder in 1905, she founded a Convent in Moscow, known as The Convent of SS Martha and Mary.

One of Moscow's best hospitals were under this Convent, and during world war I some of it's Sisters went to serve at field hospitals. The Convent had 97 Sisters by 1914.

In 1918 she along with other Romanovs was imprisoned under appalling conditions in Alapayevsk - not far from Ekaterinburg, where her sister The Tsaritsa Aleksandra was a prisoner.

On the night between 17th and 18th of July 1918, The Holy Martyress Elizabeth and the other prisoners were led to a mineshaft, thrown in, and bombarded to death with hand grenades!

Peasants from the neighbourhood swore that they heard the singing of Psalms after the mineshaft had been closed! So the Martyress Elizabeth Feodorovna died a horrible death in the mineshaft in Alapayevsk!

When white Russian investigators opened the mineshaft in 1919, they found that some of the murdered Romanovs in the shaft had been bandaged by this unselfish and pious loving soul after the shaft had been closed, and the God-less murderers had thought everybody dead!

Holy New Martyr Elizabeth!
Pray unto God for us sinners!