

An illustration of a woman in a white dress holding a child, with other people in a village setting. The scene is set in a village with red-roofed houses and a dirt path. A woman in a white dress and black headscarf is holding a child in a red and orange outfit. To her left, a woman in a white headscarf is touching the head of a child in a yellow outfit. To her right, an older woman in a white headscarf and white dress is walking. The background shows a red wall and a dirt path.

Elizabeth
a mother of great heart

SERIES LE STELLINE

Direct by LUIGI FERRARESSO

*Elizabeth Vendramini... a booklet that
can be read by children of class one and above,
or can be read aloud by adults for children
who cannot yet read*

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IN A SPRING OF SEVERAL YEARS AGO

When on the fields the daisies start to blossom and the swallows fly high in the blue skies, it is a sign that spring season is near.

And it is on a beautiful spring day that Elizabeth is born in Bassano del Grappa, Italy. It is on a Friday of the year 1790, 9th April.

The first cry of Elizabeth makes Louis, John and Regina rush to see their new born sister; their mother Antonia allows them to embrace her.

The following day her father Francis, together with the godparents, takes Elizabeth in the church and the priest, Fr. Remigio is happy to baptize her. Now Elizabeth is a child of God.



A VERY LIVELY AND A HAPPY BABY

Elizabeth lives in a very nice house, a few steps from the church of St. Francis where sometimes her mother takes her to say a prayer.

She is a happy baby, lively and intelligent.

She plays with her brothers and sisters “ring-a-ring of roses” hopscotch and skips with the rope.

One day, just because everybody likes her, a servant offers her coloured sugared almond. Elizabeth liked so much the sweets. But as that servant asks for a caress in exchange, she renounces the sweets: the value of a caress from Elizabeth is higher than a sugared almond.



AT THE SISTERS' SCHOOL

At six years Elizabeth goes to school. Her parents choose a very special school for her: the boarding school of the Augustinian sisters.

With her schoolmates she participates in the Italian language, mathematics, and drawing and catechesis lessons. She learns also how to furnish the house, good table manners and even how to walk or go down the stairs.

All her slim body must acquire the elegance of movements proper to a young woman of a noble and gentle heart.



A SMALL CHAPEL FOR THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Elizabeth likes to keep in order the small altar of Mary that she found at the sisters' school. So every day she changes the water in the flowers, lights the candles and puts them off after prayer: the chapel of Mary becomes a little home for her.

During the month of May, towards evening, she invites her friends around the altar and they all sing, pray and promise the holy Virgin Mary to keep their hearts simple and transparent.

At the age of eight years Elizabeth receives Jesus the first communion. A few weeks later she receives the sacrament of confirmation.



LIGHT-HEARTED LIFE WITH HER FRIENDS

Elizabeth is fifteen years old and returns to her family. She is now a young lady: she wears dresses and shoulder shawl, socks and shoes. She chooses with good taste hairdressing and lady's hat. In the feast's days, after the holy mass, she goes for a walk together with her friends along Bassano streets.

– Elizabeth, did you see how Tino looks at you? - Matilde asks smilingly.

– Not at all, he was looking at you! Besides, I am sorry for him because my heart is already engaged. I leave Tino for you; I have someone else in mind.

Many young men were after Elizabeth, but her heart is promised to a young man from far, from Ferrara, beyond river Po.



LIFE IN THE COUNTRY SIDE

The Vendramini family has a villa, in the country side, at San Giacomo di Romano d'Ezzelino

It is good for our children to go to the countryside for some months, because it is foreseen that there will be difficult times here in the city. Elizabeth, who is the eldest, will care for her sisters - says a thoughtful father Francesco, seeing that the city of Bassano was undergoing a very difficult period.

Here Elizabeth takes long strolls across the green fields and enjoys nature with her two sisters, Regina and Gaetana. When possible, she gathers together the children of the peasants and teaches them to pray, narrates the story of Jesus and some episodes from the Old Testament.



A VOICE NEVER HEARD BEFORE

Elizabeth is now twenty-seven years old and with her friends speaks about the last fashion, of coloured dresses that are worn by rich people in the great cities.

– I heard that the hat must have an ornament to the left.

– Yes and the hair must be left free.

– Let me try! The feast of my engagement is near ... - whispers Elizabeth.

While she is admiring herself on the mirror, she hears a voice from within:

“Don’t you see that these things are not important? Do you want to be truly happy? Go to the Capuchins!”

This voice changes her life.



AT THE “CAPUCHINS”: WITH ABANDONED GIRLS

Elizabeth, after having spoken with Fr. Antonio of San Bonaventura church, goes to the “Capuchins”; an orphanage that was welcoming abandoned girls. Fr Marco, the priest who was running the house, leads her to the playground where a group of girls were cheerfully running after each other...

– These girls have no families; I am like a father to all - says Fr. Marco.

– I want to stay here with you father, and to help you - with certainty says Elizabeth

– Dear young lady, it is not easy to live here: we are poor and you are young and rich- objects Fr. Marco.

Elizabeth insists and after a while goes to live at “Capuchins”



A NEW NAME

Elizabeth is so happy to stay in this place, that she commits herself in a special way by becoming a member of Franciscan Third Order. She is even given a new name: she will now be called sister Margaret.

Five, six years pass and Sister Margaret suggests a regulation to improve the living condition of the Institute. All agreed, apart from the superior who began to make her suffer.

– Go back home, Elizabeth, - the elder brother suggests. - The superior does not understand you and then the orphanage is so poor that it will be closed in few months. Come, mum is waiting for you!



FROM BASSANO TO PADUA

Elizabeth's mother Antonia receives her daughter with open hands:

- My daughter, welcome back!

- Mum, I have come back, but I will soon follow Luigi to Padua and I will be a teacher in the institute of the “Esposti”. Don't cry this is all I desire.

A few days later Elizabeth and her brother Luigi in a calash, a horse drawn carriage with low wheels and a folding top, head for Padua, where they are awaited by the director of the institute, Fr. Luigi Maran.

Elizabeth understands immediately that this priest, from now on, will be important for her own life and immediately confides in him:

- I want to be like a mother for all the children who have no family.



A GARRET FOR A HOUSE

Not far from the institute of the Esposti there is a road lived by poor people: is the “Street of the selvages”.

– I would like to help the children and the women of the street of the selvages - Elizabeth tells Clare and Felicita, two young women brought up at the Esposti.

– I want to help you! Exclaims Felicita.

– Also me I would like to give you a hand! - Adds Clare.

Fr. Luigi obtains for the three women a poor house. The garret, a poor room within the roof of the house, becomes the new home of Elizabeth, Clare and Felicita. To the three the garret resembles a royal palace and even though, due to an opening in the roof it is very cold, they enjoy seeing the stars.



ELISABETTA THE TEACHER

Elizabeth, happy because her dream is coming true, calls the sisters:

– Sister Clare, sister Felicita, sister Angela! Call the young girls you find on the street and we will teach them how to read and write, how to sew, how to remain tidy, how to cook and we shall pray together.

– Will they stay here throughout the day? - asks a worried sister Angela

– Yes, the providence will meet our needs. You will see that there will be enough bread for all.

– And at night? Will they pass the night here as in a boarding school? – Asks sister Clare.

– No, they will return to their families, because no one should miss a family. Even if it is poor.



ELISABETTA A "MOTHER"

Mother Elizabeth - so the sisters call her- is happy when she could stay close to the sick, to the poor and the people who were neglected, as a mother that cares for her children.

She suggests to her sisters:

– When you come across to a poor person, a sick person, one who has made a mistake, remember that he/she is a person and that Jesus died on the cross for him/her. Indeed every person is great, because he/she carries within the image of God!

The sisters listen willingly and learn how to stay close to the people.



POOR, BUT HAPPY

Meanwhile many young women join Elizabeth: they learn from her to be cheerful with the small children in the nursery schools; attentive to the sick in the hospitals and the old in the homes for the aged: they are as sisters to the poor in the streets.

One day the sisters were complaining to Elizabeth because they had broken shoes and they could not go out.

– Let us ask God for them! - she responds-. He is a good father and cannot let his children lack anything! -

So Elizabeth writes a short letter to Jesus and, as other times, places it under the tabernacle. The following day, a basket full of shoes arrives! Certainly they were not in fashion, but all the sisters found a correct size of a pair of shoes for their feet. And so they begin to dance happily.



A DIRECT FLIGHT TO PARADISE

As the years passed, Elizabeth's eyes got sick and could not see well. Now she is old and moves with difficulty, uses a walking stick and then the wheel chair. She cannot visit the poor and the sick, but she is serene because she knows that the sisters will do even her part.

One day during the spring season, 2 April 1860, while she is in bed suffering, surrounded by the sisters, has a vision and murmurs: "Jesus, Joseph and Mary!" These are her last words. Elizabeth gets asleep forever and her soul flies in paradise.

Pope John Paul II told all people that Elizabeth is blessed in heaven; she is near to Jesus and all the saints. For this reason, when we are in need we can request her to ask Jesus' help for us.

From the *writings* of Elizabeth

Elizabeth was reflecting so much and was entrusting to her Journal the thoughts that were arising into her heart. She was writing letters to her sisters to encourage them to love all the poor people they were coming across.

- *A father loves every one of his creatures, does good things for them and freely forgives because they are the work of his hands.*
- *How can we love God if we do not love with actions the person who bears his image?*
- *Love, Yes, love may possess me, throw me out like wind in the whole world*
- *Our family is in need of strong women who know how to be whole-heartedly for the brothers and sisters.*

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Isabel Vendramini

Elizabeth Vendramini (9 April 1790- 2 April 1860) lived in Bassano del Grappa and in Padua; she, guided and supported by Jesus' spirit, took to heart the suffering of many neglected people, educating and assisting them. She founded the Tertiary Franciscan Elizabethan sisters. These sisters, even today, in Italy, Argentina, Bethlehem, Ecuador, Egypt, Sudan and Kenya, dedicate themselves to any person who is suffering and lives in poverty: to anyone who needs education and a hand that indicates the way to the Father, with the courage and the love of those who trust in Jesus.

She was declared blessed on 4th November 1990.