

# THE LIFE OF THE YOUNG ELIZABETH EPPINGER



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**The Life  
of the Young Elizabeth  
Eppinger**

<< Spoken by Her at the Request of Her Confessor  
and Written by Him >>

1849

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The Year of Beatification of Mother Alphonse Marie

## **Foreword**

God asked Moses, *“Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy’”* (Lv. 19:2). St. Peter, Apostle, repeating these words asks us to follow the example given us by Jesus Christ, *“but, as He who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in every aspect of your conduct, for it is written, ‘Be holy because I am holy’”* (1 Pt. 1:15-16).

In the year of the Beatification of Elizabeth Eppinger, Mother Alphonse Marie, let us consider the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI about “Holiness”. “What does it mean to be holy? Who is called to be holy? We are often led to think that holiness is a goal reserved for a few elect people.” The Pope continues, “holiness has its deepest root in the grace of baptism, in being grafted on to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, by which His Spirit is communicated to us, His very life as the Risen One. God has poured out His love in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (General audience, April 13, 2011).

Pastoral recommendation of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, brings us to Christ, who is the precious source of our life-giving energy for this millennium and the beacon which illuminates our path of life in the tangle of the various challenges and situations of our life.

How do we become holy? Pope Benedict XVI says, “the first and most necessary act is charity, by which we love God above all things and our neighbor through love of Him. But if charity, like a good seed, is to grow and bear fruit in the soul, each of the faithful must willingly hear the word of God and carry out His will with deeds, with the help of His grace. One must frequently receive the sacraments, mainly the Eucharist, and take part in the holy liturgy; he must constantly apply himself to prayer, self-denial, active brotherly service, and exercise all the virtues. This is because love, as the bond of perfection and fullness of the law governs, gives

meaning to, and perfects all the means of sanctification” (General audience, April 13, 2011).

This little book should contribute to widen your knowledge in what way the young Elizabeth Eppinger understood sanctity, what kind of means she used to become holy, and help you to enkindle your desire for holiness. Since the age of seven, holiness was the most important in her life. In her Autobiography she says: *“I want to become a saint. How can I do it? I do not know what to do to become a saint. I do not want to receive what my parents give me (namely, little presents) I would rather become a saint.”* Her great desire for holiness made her use all means offered by Church, which are mentioned above.

Very early, Elizabeth understood that prayer could draw her closer to God. Therefore, she prayed and constantly turned as a child to God as her Father and the Blessed Mother as her Mother. As much as she was attracted to prayer so much she also liked to listen to talks and readings about God and God’s Mother. Experiencing still greater joy in hearing from God and from the Mother of God, she often asked her parents or relatives, *“to talk as long as they could about them”* (Autobiography). Listening to the Life of Saints deepened her desire for holiness. She was deeply touched, especially, by talking of Jesus’ Passion thinking why Jesus suffered so terribly. Her pious and wise mother explained to her that sins are the cause of it, and also what sin is. Since then, Elizabeth did not only avoid sin but everything that could lead to sin because she did not want to offend her beloved God. She started each day with prayer, *“O my Jesus, preserve me today from every sin.”* When she failed, she humbled herself and confessed her sins asking God and others for forgiveness. Hoping in God’s mercy, she even prayed for others to avoid sins, as the Apostle James asks us, *“Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another”* (James 5:16).

Thus, Elizabeth’s pure soul could receive a long awaited Jesus in the Eucharist. She understood that the Eucharist is the source of grace. In the suffering of Christ, she found the meaning of the Eucharist

which became the source of her life. Her desire to receive Jesus in the Eucharist was so great that she asked their parish priest to receive the Eucharist often because in that time was not customary to receive Eucharist more often than every 14 days. Her request was granted because she was looking only for God's will. *"In everything I did, I wanted to be pleased by God."*

Elizabeth completely devoted herself to the suffering of Christ and His presence in the Eucharist. She prayed, meditated on the sufferings of Jesus, and adored Jesus in the Eucharist which led her to serve actively to Christ in His brothers and sisters. From the love of God, she practiced self-denial and all the virtues. *"I practiced especially interior prayer, in which I asked God to let me progress in virtue."*

God perfected His loved one by suffering and prepared her for great work, to found a new congregation. She left her followers heritage: *"Those souls who desire perfection and sanctity should do the will of God in all things, and submit themselves to it without reserve."* God finds His pleasing in the humble and faithful souls.

According to the example of our Foundress, during the 169 years since the Congregation was founded, the followers of Mother Alphonse Marie seek for holiness in everyday life. They confirm and express their identity by celebrating the Eucharist, living spirituality, spreading charism, and performing apostolate. All whom they meet in the streets, in schools, hospitals, or homes lead to deeper relationship with God, who is the source of holiness.

Let us ask Mother Alphonse Marie, Elizabeth Eppinger for the intercession. In your trials, remember her words: *"Do not think that the saints always and immediately received the graces for which they prayed. Often, God tried them with apparent refusal through long years of petitioning. Yet they persevered in their prayers."*

*Translator*

# Introduction to Autobiography

*Sister Denise Herissard*

In the letter dated February 2, 1849, Father Reichard from Niederbronn, Elizabeth's confessor, wrote to Bishop Raess of Strasburg: *"I am sending you the beginning of the report about the life of our sick."* It is a report from Elizabeth's life with the title: *"The Life of Young Elizabeth Eppinger, at the Command of Her Confessor said by her and wrote by him."* This document appeared at the "Diocese Acts" when the process of beatification was opened, titled as an Autobiography.

The original document is a small brochure (7"x9.5") with approximately 70 hand-written pages, on which, for the most part, is recognized handwriting of Father Reichard. The document is written in short numbered sections following the Life of Elizabeth. The first part describes her childhood until her First Holy Communion. The second part spans from her First Holy Communion until her first sickness. The third part, the shortest one, covers the time period from her first sickness until her age of twenty. This short document is written in German, the language Elizabeth spoke, but she never learned to write.

## **What Is Meant by this Message to Elizabeth?**

Elizabeth was 35 years old when Father Reichard asked her, on the Bishop's advice, to dictate her Biography. She was already bedridden for three years. Her life, as a simple woman from the village, was disturbed.

In faith, she tried to accept from God what occurred in her everyday life and because of her obedience, she accepted the request and shared her memories.

As it is in every “Biography” which goes back into the past, Elizabeth talks about what influenced her deeply and what was essential for her – her way with God in different stages. She speaks her way, in pictures, which remained in her memory and Father Reichard tried to respect. He wrote to Bishop Raess: “When writing, I try as much as possible, to keep the same words and expression that she uses as well as her simplicity of thoughts.”

### **What Is Expressed in this Report? How do We Accept it?**

In this report, written using the pronoun “I”, we meet the child, adolescent, and young woman in her daily life, in family life, life habits in the village, mentality, and all that contributed to the upbringing of Elizabeth.

Changing of language expressions may have distorted the original meaning; therefore, the original German language, used at her time and in her area, was kept. This also applied to translations to preserve the value of the original document as much as possible.

Below, we will meet the personality of Elizabeth Eppinger through her endeavors, reactions, and her difficulties. We will also learn something about her relationship with God. We will see that it is a simple life of a child and a young girl. Elizabeth teaches us that something great can arise from a very trivial reality: accept God’s work in us as we are and how we live. This means to be attentive and be led by great desire and respond to it.

# **AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

## **I. FROM AGE THREE TO THE FIRST HOLY COMMUNION**

1. Soon after I started to talk, it was a great joy to say the first words of the angel greeting “Ave Maria” or Hail Mary” and remember them. Sometimes, I left children at play, and I went to the place where my parents usually let me kneel during morning and evening prayer. I knelt there and many times I repeated “Ave Marie” – “Hail Mary”. Even during the meal, I constantly repeated the same words until my parents had to tell me to be quiet. They told me that it is a prayer to the Blessed Mother so I cannot say it this way. After this warning, I loved this prayer even more. I said to my mother: “If it is a prayer to the Blessed Mother, teach me about it.” My mother said: “My child, when you pray, raise your eyes toward the heaven because Mary, our dear Mother, is in heaven. You must pray to her: ‘Mary, my dear Mother, teach me to pray well so I will be good and pious.’” This teaching, I listened to with great joy, immediately remembered, and often repeated.

2. A short time after, I played with other children at the front of our house. Suddenly, I left them and went to our living room. No one was home. I threw myself on my knees and without leaning against something, I wanted to pray freely. I was very weak, therefore I fell forward to the floor many times. I had to lean against a chair. I raised my eyes toward the heaven and with raised little hands I prayed: “Ave Maria – Hail Mary”. Now, dear Mother of God, I would like to pray, but I do not know how to pray. Dear Mother of God, you have to teach me. You know, my mother told me that you would teach me how to pray.” For a certain time, I pleaded to the Blessed Mother in this childlike manner. Suddenly, I started to pray “Our Father” and I said the whole prayer; then I prayed “Hail Mary” also saying



the whole prayer. Previously, I was not able to say these two prayers without the help of my mother. I was so happy that I could say these prayers by myself. In the evening, when my mother came home, I ran toward her with joy saying that I know how to pray the “Our Father” and “Hail Mary” without any help. Immediately, I told her both prayers. My mother was very surprised about this and in amazement, she folded her hands. Then, she took me and kissed me. She made this remarkable thing known to the rest of the house.

3. Thereafter, I also easily learned the whole prayers: “I Believe in God” and “The Angelus” which is prayed three times a day in remembrance of the Incarnation. At this time, I was about four years old, and I felt great joy from prayer and at the same time resistance to play. I was very attracted to prayer and often I was saying the prayers without understanding or knowing why I prayed them. When I heard my parents or relatives talk about God or God’s Mother, I listened to them with great joy asking them to continue to talk as long as they could.

4. My parents had the laudable tradition to pray the rosary and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin every evening. During working days, we prayed only the litany and five “Our Fathers” and “Hail Marys”. I learned the words “Holy Mary, pray for us” with it, which I often repeated during the day for myself. I often changed the words, saying: “Holy Mary, pray for me, a poor child.” I experienced still greater joy in hearing from God and from the dear Mother of God; therefore, from now, I often asked my father to take me on his lap, so I could lean against his chest, to talk about God and the Mother of God.

5. It happened that the neighbor came to my father and talked with him. He spoke about Jesus’ Passion, how cruelly the Jews treated our Savior in the crucifixion. I listened attentively and began to cry.

My father, who noticed it, asked me why I was crying. I could not answer him because of my crying.

Soon afterwards, the neighbor came again and while we ate dinner, he spoke again about Christ's suffering. Sitting at the table, I immediately put aside everything and turned to the cross hanging on the wall above the table. I started to cry again. When the neighbor saw it, he said to my father: "Look! There is something exceptional about this child. The last time, I spoke about Christ's suffering, she cried and now she cries again. There is something special about this child."

6. Even in this tender age, after urgent petitions, my parents took me to church. There, I looked especially at the devout people and their devotion uplifted me. Now and then I cast timid glances on the altar to see what was happening and what could inspire such people with such devotion. Then I prayed to God: "God, grant me the grace to be as devout as these people so I learn to pray devoutly as they do."

7. At the age of five, I loved to work. At that time, I wanted to help my mother with her work so I followed her with this intention. But my mother sent me away. Once I left her, I went to a corner of the room, and threw myself on my knees imagining Jesus' suffering. I wondered how the rough nails had to be to make such terrible wounds. This thought touched me so deeply that I loudly cried. A thought came to me: "Why did this happen? Why was it permitted to happen?"

That day, my mother took me to the field. On the way we came to the cross. I considered again the same matter and I asked my mother: "Why did they crucify our Savior?" My mother answered: "This, my child, was done for our sins." I often remembered that answer afterwards.

Then I asked her, what is a sin? She answered: "One committing a sin and insulting the good God, if one does not pray with folded

hands, if one looks around while praying, if one disobeys, if one quarrels with other children.” I immediately added: But if that is a sin, I will not do it any more; I do not want to insult God. From then on, when my mother constantly sent me away and I did not want to obey her at once, she reminded me of my promise, and this was always touching for me and brought me to obedience.

8. From that time onward, the desire to know what to avoid so not to offend the beloved God, and what I should do to love Him, increased daily in me. At every occasion, I enjoyed going where I could hear something about God. I often asked my mother why not much is said about Him.

When I played with other children and they wanted to do something which I thought was sinful, I refused it immediately, saying: “You cannot do this, it is a sin by which you insult the beloved God.” I also liked to talk to my fellow girls, with whom I played, about the suffering of Christ as best I could.

9. When I was about six years old, I felt a strong desire to get to know God. If I was alone or with others, I always occupied myself with the thought if only I knew God well. What shall I do to get to know God? I wished to be someone who spoke only of God and the dear Mother of God. I was often with my father's sister (Barbara Eppinger). When she took a book to read on Sundays, I asked her to read it aloud so I could listen to it.

10. At this age, the tempers were also stirring me. The stubbornness and vehemence of the mind seized me, when I did not receive what I wanted, but only for the moment. I immediately returned to myself. I thought that was not right. I cried because of my fault. I said to myself: “What will I become if I behave like this? I cannot disobey my parents.”

11. The love for loneliness had already powerfully touched my heart. I often went to places where people would not look for me. I sat down there, raised my eyes to the Heaven, raised my folded hands, and prayed: “O dear Jesus, give me the grace to be a pious and well-pleased child. I want to belong to You completely.” I repeated this prayer. From this time on, I did not enjoy playing anymore, I found nothing but boredom in it.

12. I had several little siblings that my parents asked me to watch over. Because I loved solitude, I did not like to be with my siblings. That happened because I was tempted to disobey my parents and leave my siblings. Yet, immediately I was seized with fear that I might insult God through my disobedience and I overcame temptation. If it happened that I failed to obey, I began to tremble with fear; immediately I punished myself, often worse than my parents would punished me. I asked also the dear Mother of God to intercede for me with God so my sins may be forgiven. This I was taught by my parents.

13. The Life of Saints that I heard being read aloud made a deep impression on me. I also wanted to become holy. If I had been guilty of disobeying my parents – my disobedience was that sometimes I was stubborn and did not want to pray at the time my parents wanted me to, but for at another time. Well, when I accused myself of such disobedience, I was trembling – as I have already said – from fear that I have offended God and I could not become holy.

I was sad. Sometimes I went to a lonely place in the barn or in the shed (where my room is now). I knelt down, lifted my hands toward the heaven and sighing I prayed: “Jesus, I want to become a saint. I would give up anything if I could become a saint. Surely, my Jesus, You will help me to become a saint. You won’t let me commit a grave sin.” I had such a fear of sin that I took a great disgust against those who swore or otherwise committed sins.

14. At the age of seven, the desire to know God better, to love Him more, and to be more pleasing to Him, increased noticeably in me.

At this time, the desire was so violent that it caused me inner suffering. Therefore, I became introspective and was occupied for hours with the thought of how to behave in order to be more pleasing to God. Because of this, I often left the children I played with and went aside, raised my eyes to the heaven, and contemplated for a time about the joys we obtain in heaven. As I contemplated, I sighed and said, "O dear Jesus, am I also going to heaven?" At this time I was overcome with the fear that I could not go to heaven.

15. Once my parents took me to the field. While they worked, I walked a short distance away from them, sat down, and looked up the sky. Here again, without understanding, I felt the urge for holiness. I said: "I want to become a saint. How can I do it? I do not know what to do to become a saint." At these words, I began to cry, folded my hands, raised them to heaven, and said: "I do not want to receive what my parents give me (namely, little presents) I would rather become a saint."

16. Another time, my father took me to the field. On the way I asked him: "Who are the priests?" My father answered me: "The priests are the servants of God who preached the Gospel." I asked him: "How should we treat them?" "Because they are the servants of God and teach us," said father, "we have to show them great respect." I thought of father's answer, as well as any teaching I received from my parents. From this time on, I had a great respect for the priests. When I saw a priest it seemed to me that I saw God Himself, I stopped, looked after him for a long time, and thought to myself: "If only I could speak to a priest, he would certainly speak to me about God."

17. Because, as I already said, the desire to know and love God increased daily in me, I also tried to practice and deepen in prayer.

For this exercise, there was no better place than an open field, so I gladly went out with my parents. There, I could go aside from my parents and stay alone unnoticed. I could think about the heaven, and the flowers in the field which both awakened me to the love of God. Once, on such an occasion, I promised God a little mortification in the meal, saying: “My Jesus, if You grant me the grace to know You better, I won’t eat this out of love for You.”

18. At this time, I began to pray with outstretched arms, but always with eyes directed to the sky, as my mother taught me in the beginning. I was a bit shy so I tried to hide this way of prayer from my parents.

19. Once again I was in the field with my parents. I sat down close to my father while he was working and as I contemplated the firmament, I asked him to tell me something about God and Heaven. My father told me about the joys of heaven, but also about the punishments of hell. After becoming a little bit annoying to my father, he told me to go away. I obeyed and went to a lonely place. I sat down, looking up at the sky, thinking about the joys of the heavens, but not much about the punishments of hell. Then I prayed: “My dear Jesus, if I only would think of You all day long! When I grow up, surely You will make me think of You always and won’t permit me let offend You and become wicked as these.” Here I remembered people who cursed or talked badly of others.

20. I was already eight years old. My desire to know God, to love Him, and to do what pleases Him, has increased in me with every passing year, and was so fierce at this time that it happened to me, as follows: Once, while kneeling and saying the prayer my father taught, I was overcome with a fear, thinking: “My God, will I love You all my life and always do what pleases You?” Full of fear that I won’t be able to do it, I put my head down on a chair and cried.

21. Earlier, but especially at this age, I felt every time after my prayers a joy and an inner consolation, which made me obedient and nimble to do the work that I was able to do as a child. I did not understand yet the sweet bliss that I felt constantly in myself. In this feeling of bliss, I kept saying: “My Jesus! Jesus, my love! Jesus, my joy!”

22. Now came the time to attend school. We did not have any School Sisters at this time. I was happy to go to school because I expected to hear much from God and get to know Him better. Alone on my first visit to school, to my greatest regret, the opposite was true. The teacher made me sit down with children who spoke foul words. I had to listen to it. My resistance was so great, and my heart was so anguished that I cried. The teacher asked me why I was crying; I did not dare to tell him. Then my joy for the school was turned into dislike for it. I just went because I had to go. However, I obeyed my parents, to whom I did not say anything about what was happening, because I did not want to repeat the speeches that I had to hear and hated so much. On several occasions the night before school I could not sleep, because I thought about going to school the next day; and in the morning after I was dressed, I sat down beside the bed and sighed: “Oh, dear God, I would rather not eat anything all day long, if only I could not go to school.” Afterwards, I knelt down and prayed to my Guardian Angel as I was taught by my parents, that he may protect me in this day so that I do not insult God and obey my parents. Then I raised my hands toward the heaven, saying: “My dear Jesus, if I should die. After all, I cannot become a saint as I demand it. As I grow up, I may offend You.” This request was aroused in me by the memory of a child who died a short time ago, whom I saw dead, and by the memory of what had happened at school. I rose from prayer, went alone to a place and cried before I went to school. This inner suffering for attending school lasted as long as I had to be with these children at school. I did not reveal my

suffering to anyone. When school was over, I separated myself from these children who brought contempt with them.

23. As a child, I already hid my inner suffering and complained only to God. He released me from the suffering caused by the school, after about half a year. The teacher took me away from these bad children and put me in a bench near his seat. From there, I could better hear the lessons taught by the teacher, which pleased me. But I did not listen to any instruction with greater desire, and could understand nothing better than the suffering of Christ or the dear Mother of God. Now my joy for school returned and I went to school with content. I was about nine years old then.

24. Whenever our priest came to school, and entered the room, I fixed my eyes reverently on him. I trembled before him from great respect because I thought that he daily carried the good God in his hands and received Him in his heart. I heard this earlier from the teacher who often explained Holy Mass to us. However, shortly after, I suffered a great sorrow; I was not allowed to attend lessons given by our priest, because the children of my age all had to leave. I would like to stay so once I found myself thinking of not leaving and hiding myself among the older children. But obedience distracted me from this thought. But as often as I went out the door, I looked back mournfully once again. I cried several times.

25. I reached the tenth year and was fortunate to be allowed to attend the lessons given by our priest once a week, like all children of my age. This was announced by the teacher a day before class. I was really looking forward to this first lesson. We, as the youngest, were sitting just in front of the pulpit. Now, my eyes were fixed on the priest, who spoke of obedience and encouraged us to go to school diligently. My sense of respect for our priest became more and more intense. I thought that our priest must be such a saint as the one of whom I have heard in a reading. Then, turning my eyes to the



crucifix hanging near the pulpit, I said in my heart: "Jesus, I always want be obedient to our priest so that I can become holy." This thought was so vivid in me that twice I wanted to get up from my seat and go to the our priest to kiss his hands and feet and make him promise to obey him at all times. But fear alone stopped me.

26. Every time after the religious instruction given by our priest, I returned home and considered carefully what I heard; if I forgot something I was worried. I went to my parents and told them what I remembered asking them for help to remind me of what I had forgotten. From my tenth to eleventh year of age, my joy in attending religious lessons increased. Always, with much yearning I anticipated the day of religious class.

27. I had a great respect not only for our priest, but also for the teacher. When I heard that something was said against one or the other, I wept and asked God to change the hearts of these who allowed themselves such evil talk. Seeing my schoolmates insult the teacher, I asked God, with tears, no longer to allow such an insult. When our priest was offended, I was even more moved, and again, with tears, I said: "How can one offend this servant of God, who speaks about God? I hope to be never like them."

As we were leaving classes or school, I felt aversion to those children who insulted our priest or the teacher. I wanted to distance myself from them. I had to fight back the feeling of wanting to use force or become violent.

28. At the age of eleven, I heard from our priest the teaching of the sacrifice of Holy Mass. He explained to us that all the suffering of Christ is celebrated during Holy Mass. During his teaching, I fixed my eyes on him. Still ringing in my ears his words about Jesus' suffering in the Oil Garden: "Look children, what Jesus, our dear Savior, suffered because of our sins and how suffering had caused Him to bleed. Look children, how violent this suffering must have

been. Suffering is already violent when it causes sweating, but what must it be when the suffering caused out bloody sweat? These sufferings of Jesus have caused our sins.”

These words made such an impression on me that my whole body trembled. I fixed my eyes on our priest thinking I saw in him the picture of the suffering Savior. I burst out in inner sigh: “My Jesus, throughout my life I no longer want to commit sin. Oh, no more sin!” After the lesson, I came home and was sad all day long thinking I would never commit any sin. At the table, I did some sacrifice in the meal because of Jesus’ suffering. The next morning I went with great eagerness to Holy Mass. At the prayer speaking of Jesus’ Passion, the suffering of Jesus came back to me so vividly that a desire aroused in me to live lonely somewhere in a forest in a cave and meditate on the suffering of Jesus. During the Consecration I saw, as our priest explained, the cruel crucifixion so vivid that my whole body trembled. From that day on, my desire to attend Holy Mass was even greater.

29. From this time on, I was more and more drawn to contemplate the suffering of our Divine Redeemer. More often I went to a hidden place of the house and there, alone and unnoticed, I meditated on the suffering of Jesus.

Kneeling down, I trembled every time when I meditated about Jesus’ suffering in the Oil Garden or His cruel crucifixion. With the growing desire to contemplate the suffering of Jesus and of the love to our suffering Redeemer, the love and respect for our priest increased in me, because he gave me such sacred and comforting instructions, and I saw in him the Person of Jesus Christ.

30. A teaching of the prayer, which our priest gave us, made a special impression on me. He explained to us that God is present with us when we pray, and that we should have Him in mind and only to think of Him. After this lesson, I always wanted to be alone when I prayed. I imagined the present Jesus. From this time on,

I seriously started to fight against the distraction in prayers. I no longer dared to look around, or to be indifferent to kneeling and folding my hands. Immediately, I imagined the presence of the infinite majesty of God, and as our priest told us, we should be afraid to appear before Him with less decency than we would before a noble man.

31. I loved obedience at all times. Nevertheless, in the twelfth year of my age, I had to fight against impatience and opposition to do what I was asked. I sighed about this passion and wished very much, to hear instruction about the children's obedience. My wish was fulfilled soon. Our priest gave us such a lesson, which made a great impression on me. I especially noticed that he said: "See children! If you do not obey your parents, you do not obey God. Consider the Divine Child, Jesus, how obedient He was, and follow him." This doctrine I wanted to engrave deeply in my heart so during the day I could repeat them to myself several times, and at the same time, remember the promise I made earlier to obey everything that our priest taught us. As often as the passion of disobedience attacked me, I went aside and prayed with the lifted hands: "O Divine Child, Jesus, grant me the grace to be obedient, pious, and good." Doing this I overcame temptation.

32. At this age, my desire to progress in perfection was very great and it excited in me a keen desire to be able to keep in mind all that I have heard at Religious lessons. However, it often happened that I could not keep everything in mind and that, despite my thinking, when I came home, I could not remember it. Then I became sad because of my forgetting, and turned my eyes toward heaven with tears in my eyes. When I had these feelings, I felt the urge to go to a lonely place. I went to the stove, knelt down, raised my hands toward heaven, and prayed, "O my Jesus, I could willingly suffer, just grant me the grace to keep the teaching in my mind."

33. A teaching about the Most Holy Sacrament on the Altar, which our priest gave us, made a very deep impression on me. Especially the explanation of the prayer: “O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine, all praise and all thanksgiving be every moment Thine!” During class I sighed and prayed, “O my Jesus! When will the moment come that I may receive You in the Holy Communion. Oh, how I desire to prostrate myself before You at this moment and worship You.” When I found myself in the field afterwards, I turned my eyes toward the church saying: “O Sacrament Most Holy, O Sacrament Divine, etc.” Once I was alone in the garden, kneeling down and raising my hands toward heaven, I said the same prayer. As often as I passed the church, I walked very slowly to repeat this praise, near the Blessed Sacrament, several times.

34. Another time when I heard the instruction how great devotion and worship one should come to the Blessed Sacrament with, I felt sadness in my heart, because I was afraid not to be able to keep all the words of this important lesson. Therefore, during the lesson I began to pray: “O my dear Jesus, help me to keep all these words in my heart. I long to love You for a long time, but I am so weak; make me think about this teaching at all times.”

35. After this lesson (I was about twelve years old), I spent all my time in work or prayer. However, I always tried to complete the work entrusted to me quickly so I would have more time to pray. In this zeal for prayer I had aversion to everything I had loved as a child. But my self-will also stirred in my zeal; for when my parents called me from my prayer to do work, I felt in myself a kind of obstinacy; through this I often faulted and told my parents to leave me so I could pray for a while, and I would finish my work at a later time. On these occasions, I always repeated the prayer: “O my Jesus, when will I know how I should love You?” Once I heard inner voice: “I do not want your prayer but obedience.” After this inner admonition,

I tried to understand the flawed nature of my obstinacy and my refusal. Yet, once again my parents called me from prayer to work. I did not immediately follow the call of my parents; I continued my prayer. Suddenly, the prayer was taken from me. I was startled and looked at the cross; I heard again an inner voice that said to me, "Obedience is dearer to me than prayer." Feared, I stood up crying and saying, "O my Jesus, now I sinned against obedience." From this time on, I can overcome my stubbornness and opposition.

36. To make progress in this conquest, and to mortify my self-will, I always endeavored to do excellently, which was contrary to my will. I often knelt and prayed: "O my dear Jesus, grant me the grace that I may love You from my heart and then do what pleases You."

37. Because at this age I was much more informed of the majesty of the holy sacrifice, my respect for the priests was much greater than before. Whenever I saw a priest pass by, I would gladly, if not fearful, throw myself on my knees before him, kiss his hands, and ask his blessing. Because I did not dare to do so, I watched him as long as I could. Internally, I was asking for his prayer. My esteem for the priests came to me primarily from the consideration that the priests carry the good God in their hands daily and receive Him into their hearts.

I also had a great respect for the nuns. When I saw a school or hospital Sister pass by, I watched her with pleasure. I said in my heart, "Dear God, give me the grace to serve You like this good Sister. Dear God, will You make me also a Sister when I am of age?"

38. Now, the dislike for the world increased in me. I also felt a strong desire to practice physical acts of repentance. I started this by kneeling on something hard while I prayed. With tears in my eyes I asked: "O my Jesus, grant me the grace that I may not be an hour in the day without loving You."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *From then on, written by Mr. Joseph Fleck.*

39. The love for loneliness always became stronger in me, in order to be free to pray. Even myself, I always felt more strongly attracted to inner prayer and constant intimate relationship with God without completely understanding.

With this inner feeling, the trust in the Blessed Virgin Mary increased greatly in me. More often I prayed to her with fervor. “O Mary, my dear Mother, you have taught me to pray. Now, teach me how to love Jesus.”

40. A teaching of God’s love that I heard increased a strong desire in me to leave the world in order to better serve God. Soon afterwards, I met a Sister. When I saw her from afar, I turned my eyes toward heaven<sup>2</sup> and sighed: “O my dear Jesus, will I obtain this grace from You and have the fortune to serve You once in the Order?” After returning home, I went to a lonely place (where my bedroom is now), I knelt down on a piece of wood in tears and prayed with lifted hands: “O my Jesus, send me as much suffering as You want, just grant me the grace to love You, hide myself in a religious order, and serve You. Oh my Jesus, I want to love You, serve You, and give my life to You.” I had in mind the sufferings that are to be endured in a religious order, and because I especially wish to be the least in the order. So I prayed and cried for a while. From this moment on, my desire to live in a religious order had really begun to grow.

41. About half a year before my first Holy Communion (I was 13 years old), when I attended Holy Mass and the Holy Communion was distributed, I was struck with such a strong desire to receive Holy Communion that I could not abstain from loud weeping. I prayed: “O my Jesus, how long must I wait to receive of the Holy Communion? Oh, how great is my desire for You, my dear Jesus. Oh sure, if I may receive You once, I will love You even more and serve You more diligently.” Sighing, I thought: “Oh, if I may

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<sup>2</sup> *In the original, this word was omitted; it was added.*

appear there at the Communion pew, oh, I would like to prostrate myself before You with devotion and worship You; Oh have mercy on me and help me to prepare myself well.” The same day my heart was troubled by the sadness of whether or not I knew all that was necessary for receiving Holy Communion worthily. Afterwards, it often happened that I spent whole days in such distress. I often went to solitary places, and repeated with tears the prayer which I prayed during the Holy Mass. When I met one of these people whom I saw in the morning receiving Holy Communion, I thought with a sigh: “O how happy is this person that she carries our good God in her heart.” I assured myself that the people, who received Holy Communion in the morning, certainly spent the whole day with our good Lord.

42. The lessons, by which we prepared for receiving the First Holy Communion, I attended with joy, and was eager to listen to the beneficial teachings and explanations from our priest. From all the teachings, I did not remember any more easily as those that showed us how our good Lord can be offended.

Although I had a lot of trouble learning the lessons of the catechism by heart, it did not deter me from going into Christian teaching. I took refuge in prayer, and with God's help, I have almost always been able to remember the lesson. At this time, I found a special pleasure in contemplating the Passion of Jesus and adoring of the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.

43. Some months before the First Holy Communion, the intense desire to be fully prepared, and also the fear that I would not prepare myself well, seized my heart so powerfully that sometimes I sank into sadness. But this did not happen, because I understood the importance of preparation and also because of my love for strict obedience to all that our priest said, because he always admonished us urgently that we really should be well prepared.

I already suffered physically during this time but I did not tell my parents about all of the sufferings. I offered these sufferings to our dear God praying: “O my Jesus, I will gladly bear these sufferings of love of You, give me only a heart after Yours and prepare it so that I may be worthy to receive You in the Holy Communion.”

In a lonely place of our house, where I often prayed, I had a cross. I returned to this place, and kneeling I took the cross into my hands, kissed it, and wet it with my tears contemplating the sufferings of my Redeemer. I prayed: “O my Jesus, how can I receive You worthily, for I am so obstinate and impatient. Oh, my Jesus, help me!” Every time I prayed like this my heart was relieved and I became more courageous, so for several hours I felt an inner comfort and joy, and I could think in my heart nothing other than: “O Jesus, my love! Jesus, my joy!”

44. Without knowing what it was, shortly before the First Holy Communion I often received Holy Communion spiritually. Where I was alone and could not be noticed by others, I knelt down, lifted my hands, opened my mouth and thus imitated all those persons whom I had seen devoutly receiving Holy Communion. With this attitude, I prayed in my heart: “Oh my Jesus, how I want to prepare myself for receiving the First Holy Communion. Oh, my Jesus, I could kneel before You with right devotion and love.” As often as I got up from this prayer, I felt a great consolation within me; I was so passionately moved by love for Jesus that I had to breathe faster.

45. During preparation to make Confession, our priest told us a terrible story of a person who during the confession had not confessed knowingly a grave sin and afterwards received Holy Communion unworthily. This story caused me great anxiety which I bore for a few days. What strengthened me with this fear was the thought that after all, I did everything I should do. Nevertheless, I went to my confessor and revealed to him my fear. The confessor reassured me and the fear left me. But in the morning, on the day



of the First Holy Communion when I was dressed, I was again attacked by the same fear. I became very pale with fear, so that the people who dressed me said: "What are you doing? You look quite like a dead man!" This was a violent temptation to disturb my inner devotion, which left me soon.

46. This fear was followed by an unspeakable inner joy even as I went to church. In the church I could not abstain from the inner bliss of tears. During the Holy Mass, I fixed my eyes motionless on the tabernacle. I kept repeating the words: "O my Jesus, this is the happy moment when I may receive You!" With a longing, I saw the moment when we would go to the altar to receive Holy Communion. When I went to the altar, I was no longer aware of anything around me, and when receiving the Holy Communion, I did not even notice our priest who gave it to me. I did not feel myself anymore; I was like out of myself.

47. After returning to my place from the Lord's table, I was completely absorbed in devotion; I was carried away and I prayed the following prayer: "O my Jesus, now I possess You in my heart. How long I have been longing for You in my heart! My dear Jesus, now surely You will stay in my heart. Look, I am giving myself to You completely. Now you adorn my heart with the virtues that are the most pleasant to You; I do not want to insult You anymore; help me always, my dear Jesus. O Mary, my dear mother, come and help me to adore my Jesus, Whom just I received into my heart."

"O my Jesus, now a little request; I will serve You alone in my whole life; but, dear Jesus, allow our priest to be with us always, and give him always strength and health; see, for the great happiness that I now enjoy, I owe to him. Leave him as long as I live; now I promise You, dear Jesus, I will obey him in everything. Dear Jesus, surely You would hear my request. What a good priest You gave us! I want to be always grateful for that." During this request, all the teachings I received from our priest came to my mind.

“My Jesus, I have one more request. Give a special grace to our priest as a gratitude which I owe to him, because I can give him nothing else. My Jesus, surely You will grant this grace!”

I had to pray this prayer after receiving Holy Communion while the others read aloud the prayer of thanksgiving, but I heard nothing. Only at the end did I come to myself again and I was shocked that I did not pray the proper prayer with others. From that moment, this prayer became imprinted in my heart, so that I always remembered it in the future.

Throughout the day I was so engrossed in worship and thanksgiving that I was not interested in anything else, even with the necessary food.

48. At the same day of the First Holy Communion in the afternoon, when we renewed the baptismal vows, and because of this I was to stand before the baptismal font, a kind of fear came over me. I looked at the tabernacle and prayed: “O my Jesus, help me to keep these promises, which I renew now and strictly keep, that I renounce the world and everything that belongs to it and serve You faithfully in everything. Jesus, surely You will help me in this.” After I finished this prayer, I was called by name to the baptismal font. Fear left me and I courageously walked to the baptismal font. To the question: “Do you reject Satan? And all his works? And all his empty promises?” I answered emphatically, “We do.” And while we responded to the final question, “Will you remain faithful to Jesus Christ?”, we answered, “We will, with His grace we always want to believe in Him, hope for Him, and love Him from our whole heart.” Then I saw a glory over our priest, which enkindled in me the love for suffering, and the love and reverence for Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament. This impression lasted a long time in me.

Returning to my place, I prayed: “Dear Jesus, now I renewed my baptismal vow, help me to remain obedient in everything that we heard from our priest. But now my dear Jesus, You must allow our priest to be with us forever. Fill him with Your grace. I cannot thank

You enough for the great grace You give me through our priest.  
I want to follow exactly what he tells me.”

49. After the church service was over, and I was back home, I could talk almost to no one. I felt a constant joy within me and was drawn to love and give thanks. Several times I had to go aside to vent my heart's desire. Then I raised my hands toward heaven for a few moments, praying: “O my Jesus, thank You that I have been allowed to receive You today.” At dusk I went alone into the garden. I looked at the sky; I often repeated the prayer: “O my Jesus, stay with me always.” When it was time to go to sleep, I thought: “Should I rest now? I would rather spend the whole night in prayer and thanksgiving.” But, being too weak to do so, I went to sleep after praying for a long time.

## II. FROM THE FIRST HOLY COMMUNION TO THE FIRST ILLNESS

1. The next day after the First Holy Communion, when I woke up in the morning, I thought about how to spend this day in thanksgiving. After my usual morning prayer, I went to the Holy Mass during which I wept. I was worried that I would not follow everything I heard in yesterday's teaching. I said: "O my dear Jesus, I will obey everything I have heard. Today I want to spend the day in obedience, in silence, and in prayer. If only I could attend the Holy Mass daily. During the Consecration, and especially at the priest's communion, I was very touched. I thought: 'Oh, my Jesus, if only I could participate in the devotion, prayers, and communion of our priest.'" I could spend the whole day in silence and in inner prayer. In the evening I returned to a lonely place in our house to pray aloud. I knelt down and prayed as follows: "Oh, my Jesus, one day is already over since my First Holy Communion, and I must wait fourteen days to receive You again<sup>3</sup>. Oh, how long it is! Oh, if only I do not commit sin. O my Jesus, I willingly do everything, but now when I have to work so much, I am afraid to lose You, because I cannot think so much about You anymore. Stay though with me always." After I returned to my parents, I talked a little. I was thoughtful and worried that I would not follow what I was taught.

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<sup>3</sup> In this time it was not customary to receive Holy Communion daily. – Eight days after the First Holy Communion, Elizabeth asked her confessor for permission to receive the Eucharistic Christ for the second time. The Church was not opened to this practice as it is today. Because Reverend Reichard did not want to act against this custom (to receive the Holy Communion every 14 days) and make exception, which could cause him problem, he did not grant Elizabeth's request. However, he had not resisted her urgent demands and allowed her to receive the Holy Communion in eight days. With his consent, Elizabeth could receive the Holy Communion every eight days. Finally, he let the teenage maid receive the Holy Communion daily, because he could not contradict her urgency. In L. Pfleger: *Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer*. (Slovak text translated into English.)

2. Immediately after my First Holy Communion, I was deeply involved in work. I liked to work, but I was worried that it would disturb my inner concentration and conversation with God, which really happened in the first ten days after my First Holy Communion. The work was so persistent that I spent hours without thinking that I was dwelling in God's presence. After the first ten days, I remembered everything that I promised on the day of the First Holy Communion and thought about my current tepidness. Fear and shame seized me, which aroused my zeal. Therefore, I resorted to a first penitential act. One evening, I weaved together rods and before I lay down to sleep, I knelt by my bed with bare knees on rods and prayed long with tears and sighs to my dear God. Among other things, I prayed: "O my Jesus, help me, that I have no joy in anything but You; If only I could leave the world. I am afraid that I offend You. O dear Jesus, have mercy on me. Now, for the second time, I will receive the Holy Communion, help me to keep my resolution to never offend You again."

After these prayers I was thinking about suffering for a while. Suddenly, the thought of doing something at work that would hurt my body came to me. With this purpose I said to God: "My dear Jesus, grant me the grace that I always think of You at work." After this prayer my sadness disappeared and my heart was filled with new courage and joy.

3. From this time on, I always sought to practice a little mortification while I worked or walked with the intention to obtain God's grace to love Him more and more, and to know what I should do to please Him. So when I went to the field, especially when I was alone and unnoticed, I would walk along a rough road and sometimes I threw myself on my knees on a hard stone or a lump of earth. At work, I continued without rest, even when hard work hurt me so badly and the sweat plagued me. With the drops of sweat I shed, I thought of the blood drops of my Redeemer.

During these little physical mortifications, I often repeated in my heart this request: “My Jesus, give me what I desire of You, give me the grace to know what I should do to please You and not to grieve You.” From now, I obtained a special love for inner prayer which I practiced more easily in all my works.

4. With great desire I longed for the day of my second Holy Communion, which took place fourteen days after the first one. My joy in the eve of the Holy Communion was so great that I hardly slept through the night. I counted every hour and twice I got up but my parents sent me to sleep again. The last hours before receiving the Holy Communion seemed very long to me. I cannot explain what I finally felt in the church when I received the Holy Communion. As I already said, the first ten days after my First Holy Communion I was a little apathetic, and I enjoyed the company of my peers with whom I received the First Holy Communion. Because of this, my heart was restless, therefore, after the second Holy Communion, at the front of the Most Holy Sacrament, I renewed the intention of avoiding the company of peers, being alone and joining God. I prayed: “O my Jesus, if I stay away from these fellowships You will help me to know and love You more. O my dear, I have such a longing for You, but I do not know how to really love You. Teach me, what I should do. O my Jesus, I have a great desire for You.” The desire arose in me so much that I cried. My faith in Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament was so vivid that I felt myself in front of Jesus and I talked with Him quite familiarly, childlike, and without fear.

5. Once, a book of the virtues of Mary came to my hands. I read it and was attracted especially by Mary’s virtues of humility and modesty in her speech and behavior. Through this reading, I was so touched that I trembled. I put the book down and went aside, knelt down, lifted hands, and said: “O Mary, I will follow you; Yes I want, I want to follow your virtues. O Mary, help me! Be with me. I also want to be a virgin and follow your virtues.”

In my childhood, my parents taught me “Hail, the Queen of Heaven”. Now, I constantly prayed this prayer within my heart raising my eyes to heaven, to obtain grace of modesty and chastity through the intercession of Mary, wherever I go, at work, or in the company of people.

I asked her especially for moderation of my eyes, so that nothing could penetrate into my heart and offend my God.

6. After the First Holy Communion, my confessor allowed me to receive Holy Communion every fourteen days. Yet, my desire for the Holy Communion was so great that the waiting time was too long for me. So in eight days, I went back to my confessor and asked him, trembling, to allow me to receive Holy Communion again. The confessor asked me why did I want it. I answered him that I have a great desire to progress in virtue and piety, which was the reason I asked for the Holy Communion. My confessor asked me some questions, such as how I do my prayer, how I obey my parents, and how I behave in church during Holy Mass. I answered my confessor that in all this I try to please our good Lord. My confessor told me: “Go now, my child to the Holy Communion and ask God to increase this desire in you.”

7. When receiving this Holy Communion, the desire to be allowed to receive the Communion every Sunday strongly ignited in me. Because of this, I prayed after the Holy Communion: “O my Jesus, if I can receive You every Sunday in the Holy Communion. I would gladly do everything. Oh, let it be known to my confessor, I do not dare tell him about it. Have mercy on me and show it to my confessor.” I burst into crying and sighed in my heart: “O my Jesus, if only I knew what I should do to obtain this grace from You.”

The next Sunday I asked the confessor again the permission to receive Holy Communion, but this time I was denied. I had to wait fourteen days. Due to this refusal, I became more timid and did not dare to ask my confessor again. So I prayed for him every day:

“O Jesus, my Divine Love, I want to obey my confessor; I remember the promise I made to You, O dear Jesus. Oh, I will do all that my confessor tells me and follow his recommendations exactly. But now, I could receive You only every fourteen days. Oh, how hard that is for me! But still, I want to be obedient. Oh, let my confessor know, dear Jesus, my desire for You. I dare not tell him. Help me, my dear Jesus!”

Regardless of my fear, I went again to ask the confessor permission to receive Holy Communion every Sunday. This time, I received this permission unless he would take it back from me. From that time on, I received Holy Communion every Sunday.

8. Soon after, on a Sunday, after I came home from receiving Holy Communion, I went to the garden behind our house. I knelt down there behind a kind of shrubbery, turned my eyes toward heaven, and prayed: “O my Jesus, how gladly I would leave the world to serve You alone in solitude in a monastery. Help me, my dear Jesus. See, the world hinders me. Oh how I want to honor and praise Your name all day long! O my Jesus, I am afraid of the dangers of the world. O Mary, my dear mother, take me under your protection. I want to be your child, I want to follow your virtues; but how can I achieve this, O Mary, my dear mother. Intercede for me so I may serve my dear Savior in a religious order. But, my dear mother, I do not want to live in a closed monastery. O Mary, my dear mother, I would like to live in a religious order in which I could work for the glory of God, for the salvation of souls, and for the glory of Your name. But, my dear mother, I desire something that I cannot do, for I have no education. Yet, how easily God can help me! Say only one word, and I will receive everything. How I wanted to be the last in a religious order. Have mercy on me!” After this prayer I felt such a love for God that I had to breathe quickly.

9. At this time, I had to fight against passions again. Because, as I have already said, I wanted to follow Mary, our dear mother in her



humility and modesty, I wish that other people, especially my siblings, would also practice these virtues. I was too sensitive, so when I saw them doing the opposite, I rebuked them sharply. I became anxious about my fierceness, and I experienced difficulty in repressing it, and practicing gentleness and serenity in this regard. The other passion that arose in me was the self-will in practicing devotion. Because every Sunday I was allowed to receive Holy Communion, I wanted to say my confession on Saturday evening, so I always enjoyed this evening and arranged my work to be free of any obstacles. Yet, it often happened that my parents ordered me to do other work at this time. This awakened in me an indignation, so several times I sinned against obedience and followed my will. Likewise, it happened that, against the wishes of my parents, I often attended Holy Mass at weekdays which I never wanted to miss. One day I went to Holy Mass against the will of my parents. On the way I became worried and said to myself: "O what unrest it is, if I am not obedient! I cannot do this! I do not want to be like this anymore; I prefer to be obedient. I prefer to participate in Holy Mass spiritually and fulfill the orders of my parents. Dear Jesus, You can give me the same grace as I would attend Holy Mass. See, now I am restless, because of fear I would act against Your holy will. Upon this I made the intention to obey my parents on these points praying: "O my Jesus, the only love of my heart, You see my desire and my wish to attend Holy Mass, to worship You and give You thanks. But see, I must obey my parents. Guide my parents and grant me what my heart demands, to know You and to love You." Then, I revealed this restlessness and my resolution to my confessor, as well as my intention to make inner sacrifice, and to do what I dislike. The confessor answered: "My child, really put it in practice. Be faithful to your resolution, for this pleases God. Behold, my child, the more you will listen to these inner admonishment, our dear God will increase His grace and enlighten you."

These words of my confessor were deeply engrained in my heart. In every temptation against obedience, I remembered them, so I was able to overcome the temptation more easily.

10. From this time on, I felt the urge to pray more zealously than before, so I began to spend a good part of the night after receiving Holy Communion lying on the ground in prayer. There aroused in me a great desire to be completely free of the world and myself and to belong to Jesus completely. With sighs, kneeling with lifted hands, I said the following prayer: “O my Jesus, have mercy on me! I want to belong thoroughly only to You; I do not want to belong to the world any more, I want to get rid of it completely. O Jesus, I desire to love You. Teach me how to love You. O Mary, my dear mother, pray for me to keep my heart true to Jesus, my Divine Spouse. Oh, I long to live a sacred life pleasing to you (this I said with tears). If I only knew everything that hinders me. Have mercy on me and hear my sighs. O Mary, my dear mother, pray for me; I want to also remain a virgin, I want to follow you, O Mary, my dear mother, in the virtues. Oh, if only I knew how to prepare my heart for Jesus, my Spouse, whom I choose, and to please Him. My Jesus, surely You listen to me and will hear my sighing and exhortation. Oh, my God, no longer any sin. O Mary, my dear mother, today I meditate on your sorrows (I read some of the seven sorrows of Mary in a little book), O pray for me so I do not cause you any pain.” Because my bedroom was next to my parents, they heard my sigh. My father got up and came to my room, and when he found me kneeling, he told me to go to bed rather than stay up late, so I would not get sick with flu. At that time my health condition was already weak. I obeyed my father. It happened several more times that my father interrupted me during my prayers and vigils.

11. From the very beginning, I felt a stronger urge to repent. I wanted to begin by sleeping less and by doing so, hurt my body. Then, the thought came to my mind to put a board in my bed

and under my head a piece of wood. Before doing so, I asked my confessor permission, which he denied and allowed me only to lie on the bare straw sack. But soon afterward he allowed me, twice a week on Wednesday and Friday, to put a plank and a piece of wood into my bed, but only for a certain time. Through this penitential exercise, my affection for prayer and contemplation became much warmer, and my aversion grew stronger for anything that could hinder me and for worldly things. My confessor soon forbade this last penitential exercise, for the reason that I would not be able to fulfill my duties. He also did not allow me to get up during the night. Then I turned to my Divine Spouse by the following prayer: “O my dear Jesus, do You not want me to do these penances? Otherwise, my confessor would not forbid me. I want to obey my confessor, but have mercy on me and take away everything from my heart that is an obstacle for You. O my Jesus, I am afraid of the world. What will happen to me, if You do not have pity on me? I will gladly do what You desire of me, but my dear Jesus, I want to become a saint even if it should cost my blood. Take care of me!” At these last words I burst into tears. Then I asked for my confessor: “Oh my Jesus, give my confessor health (for he was sick at that time). Strengthen him, so he can continue to give us, poor children, many lessons and teachings. But also, my Jesus, let my confessor know Your will; I want to obey him in everything. Help me to make my heart very apparent to him.

After I said this prayer, I was able to open my heart to the confessor even more. In addition, I was able to practice my inner prayer more easily and constantly ask God to protect me from the world, even though I do penance. Willingly, I obeyed my confessor, and thereby I became quite calm and happy. Also, I was more attracted to solitude and contemplative prayer.

12. But this joy and inner peace of mind did not last long, because shortly thereafter my zeal for inner prayer left and in spoken prayer I was callous and dry. I fell into great fear; I feared that my past

confessions would not have been valid. I doubted if my Holy Communion were sacrilegious. I thought that I had not rightly and completely confessed my sins. I could do nothing but cry in fear. If I wanted to pray, I trembled and saw nothing more than sins that I did not confess. The thought haunted me that I am lost. I saw hell open in front of me.

In this fear I went to my confessor. I moaned and complained, but I could not even name the terrible sins that I saw before me. The confessor reassured me, saying to be calm. I answered him: "If only I am not lost!" My confessor replied to me: "Do not pay attention to these thoughts, they are temptations." After a brief exhortation, he told me that I should not omit or abbreviate my prayers and reflections. I replied that I could not continue like this because of great fear. The confessor repeated in a serious voice: "Observe what has been said to you, be obedient and calm, break your self-will and now go to the Holy Communion." Later, I fell though into temptation; from great fear, I shortened my prayers and failed in contradiction with obedience.

Because I sought consolation and had not found such with my previous confessor, I left him and went to another. He spoke to me words of consolation; but instead of providing relief my heart was pressed even harder. After confessing a second time to this new confessor, I felt a fierce repugnance for every comforting word he had said to me. I was very restless, I sighed, and I said to myself before receiving Holy Communion: "I cannot be like that any longer; I will go back to my former confessor and will not leave him anymore." My inner suffering grew and reached a high point. Because of great anxiety, I no longer dared to turn my eyes to the cross nor to heaven.

In this sad situation, I threw myself at home once more before the cross and prayed with sighs: "O my Jesus, have mercy on me! Do not let me get lost! I can no longer endure this; though my confessions and communions were not valid, now I want to do them well; please help me. I will turn back to my confessor who

introduced and led me to the First Holy Communion and directed me so far. I want to obey him; I can do nothing more, my God, but obey him, even if he does not receive me warmly. What could I do? I do not deserve anything else. Yes my Jesus, I want to strictly follow this and do not want to leave him anymore. I will never do anything else but what he has commanded me to do. O Jesus, have mercy on me.”

A few hours after this prayer, I returned to my ordinary confessor. I opened my heart to him and complained to him my troubled inside; He wrote down some rules of conduct for me, and demanded I observe them. Notwithstanding I found it difficult, I promised strict obedience to my confessor. As soon as I had promised obedience, I felt inner relief and my sufferings became more bearable. I left the confessional and in spirit I repeated the words: “I want to be obedient, nothing more than obedient.

13. Regardless of my intention to be strictly obedient, my inner suffering still continued. I had no taste for prayer, nothing but resistance and disgust, but I did not shorten my prayers. I said: “I pray because my confessor ordered it; I pray out of obedience.” Although God seemed to leave me and not hear me, I did not neglect my prayer. Sometimes I was overcome by such boredom in prayer and contemplation during the time the confessor had commanded me to use that my whole nature disgraced in me. All day I could only sigh and pray as the confessor told me: “Have mercy on me, have mercy on me! Help me, my Jesus!” For about a year, my inner afflictions continued and became so intense that my body was weakened and my health got worst. However, I not only kept my prayers, but I often doubled it, and thus my suffering became easier. Because in my suffering I could do nothing but obey my confessor, the tempter attacked me from this side also. He whispered to me: “Your confessor does not know you, you have not sufficiently revealed to him your heart. Obedience cannot help you, you do not need to obey.” Because I was alone in the field, I knelt down several times, raised my hands to heaven, and prayed: “O my Jesus, have

mercy on me! I cannot uncover my inner-self better, help me and have mercy on me. Let my confessor know my heart. Oh, I wish he knew it well. Oh, my dear God and Savior, to whom shall I turn than to my confessor? I have no one else, O have mercy on me!” In this prayer I made my resolution: “Now I stay with my confessor, I obey him, no matter what happens. In God's name, I will obey.

14. From this moment on, I was truly obedient to my confessor. Even in the most violent drought, I remained steadfast and calm. But inwardly sighing I always asked for perseverance. When I had to go out to work in the field and was alone, I knelt down in places where I could not be seen, raised my hands to heaven, pleading for the grace of perseverance in the good and for mercy so that I would always avoid every opportunity to sin and be saved from every danger in the world. By such prayers, as well as others, I did not neglect my work; for after prayer I diligently worked. I was always very sad inside. I used to sigh: “Oh my God, how hard it is to live in the world and not love you. But though I cannot love you, I will still keep my prayer.”

Despite my sadness, I stayed in prayer for some hours a day. Yes, to gain more time to pray and seek help from God alone, I rarely talked to my friends as I did before, which sometimes annoyed them. Once, when I was back in the field, I went to a lonely place to pray at noon break (the place is called the Liesklam). Here I must say that this time I was not alone, though I had always sought the possibility to do the work in the field alone. Even if the work was to be done by two people, I asked my parents to do it alone. My parents feared that I would try too hard, and did not always allow me to do so. But most of the time they allowed me to do it and I was happy to work alone to be able from time to time to pray during work while kneeling and not be disturbed by others. So I often took turns working and praying, taking on the heavy work without knowing how I could accomplish it without becoming tired. Now I come to the prayer which I prayed in the Liesklam: “O my Jesus, how can I live in this

world? I am afraid to lose You, O my Jesus, and to be unfaithful to You. I will gladly do everything, give me only the grace to keep always my heart chaste. I would like to serve You in virginity. You see and know my desire. My dear Jesus, grant me the grace to serve You in virginity and to die as a virgin. Not only by name I want to be a virgin, but let my heart be sprinkled with those virtues that you demand of a virgin. My Jesus, help me and cleanse my heart from the worldly things so that I seek nothing but You. My Jesus, I want gladly to suffer everything You want. Oh my God, have mercy on me! O Mary, my dear mother, intercede for me these virtues.”

After these prayers, I felt more and more resistance for the world and a greater love for loneliness. This resistance and this love were pressed into my heart. I was constantly practicing the inner prayer through which I constantly implored God for progress in the virtues. I was so absorbed in this inner prayer that I mostly did not pay attention to what externally surrounded me.

### **III. FROM THE FIRST ILLNESS TO THE AGE OF TWENTY**

At the age of seventeen, I experienced both inner and physical suffering. I was afflicted with a nervous disease that plagued me severely for three months and its attacks scarred me very badly. The seizures were followed by a serious chest disease that lasted almost three years. At the beginning, my illness was very painful; but even more intense were my inner sufferings. Death was near to me and I was seized by the apparent temptation that there was no hope for me to be blessed. I could not speak because of much pain; I could only give signs. In my terrible internal and external suffering, I had only one remedy, a little cross on my bed. I kept it in my hands, pressed it to my heart and my lips. In this extreme need, I clung to it, as if it were my only means of salvation. Since I could not say any words, I spoke inwardly with my crucified God sighing and lamenting over my wretched situation, begging, and united with Him, whose image I embraced.

One day, while suffering I embraced and kissed my little cross, the doctor came and watched me but I did not notice it. The doctor feared that the cross in my hands might cause too much agitation in my feelings and be detrimental to my illness. Therefore, he ordered that the cross be taken from me. They followed the doctor's order and my crucifix was taken from me without my being aware of it.

On the same day, when I searched for my little cross while enduring sufferings, I did not find it. Since I could not speak, I asked for it by gesturing. But they did not understand my desire, or did not pay attention to it.

Because of this, my suffering increased. My inner sigh was accompanied by external signs, and led me throughout the day and the following night yearning for my dear little cross. Finally, after midnight, when several of my relatives were watching over me in my room and seeing my fierce desire but not knowing what



I wanted, became aware that the cross had been taken from me. Suddenly, the cross hanging on the wall above the table fell down with a loud roar and landed on the bench as if someone had put it there. The cross was made of clay and did not break. This coincidence made a special impression on all present; they were shocked and said: "See, there is what she has demanded." They immediately gave me the fallen cross, which I eagerly grasped with both hands and pressed on my chest. From this moment on, my inner suffering left me, and I became calmer by the hour. Afterwards, this cross was put back in its place and I was given my little cross, which was never taken away from me again.

During this long illness, nothing special happened to me. In my lingering sufferings I always remembered the requests which I repeated to God from my childhood, to keep my heart chaste, to reach holiness, and to constantly fulfill the most holy will of God in everything. In my sufferings I often thought: 'I would like to suffer, if I only achieve these.'

When Protestants visited me during this illness, I felt sorry for them because these people do not live in the truth. Then, I thanked God that He let me be born of Christian Catholic parents. "Oh how happy I am" I often said, "that I am a child of the true Church." This thought of being born of Christian parents drew me to reverence and obedience to my parents.

In this illness, I renewed my dearest wish to serve God in the Order. I often said to my Divine Spouse: "O my Jesus, if You give me health and call me to the Religious Order, I will dedicate to You every moment of my life and use all my words for Your glory." I did not want to die yet, I asked for an extension of my life and demanded God to serve Him still longer. As the illness became worse, I feared that I would not get well and would not enter the Order.

## ***FROM THE FIRST ILLNESS TO THE SECOND ILLNESS***

My first illness, as I said, lasted for three years, and ended in 1834. From the age of 20 – 27 my health condition was pretty good. Through the illness and sufferings, our good Lord multiplied in me the graces He had previously given to me. The love for loneliness grew in me and I was more zealous to do penance. However, I was always held back by my confessor for fear that I would be hindered from fulfilling my duties. I became more confident in my prayer and more intimate in my meditations. During my daily duties, I practiced even more than before constant conversation with God through inner prayer. I do not remember a time that I spent ten minutes either at work or with company without inner conversation with God.

After my illness, I was glad to be in the company of young women of my age, who had the same beliefs as me. It was a pleasure to talk with them about God, Divine things, virtue, and especially about the value of the virginity. I was fortunate enough to find several such devout and God loving virgins. We were intimately united and always strived for one purpose, perfection. To achieve this goal, we turned to our priest and asked that he admit us to the third order of St. Francis of Assisi. Our priest gladly approved our request and accepted us into the third order. After receiving this grace, our zeal in practicing piety became more passionate. We received Holy Communion more often. We often visited Jesus in the Most Holy Sacrament; and we found more joy in the public devotions practiced in our parish. No scorn or mockery could stop us. The joy of our hearts was: to be virgins, the brides of Jesus.

In the morning, upon my awakening, I was frightened by the thought that I may insult God by a sin. For that reason I sighed every time: “Oh, if only the day were over again. O my Jesus, save me today from sins.” In this attitude, I said my morning prayer, my contemplation and thus, praying internally, I began the day. I continually recommended myself under the protection of the dear Mother of God. I often repeated the prayer: “Through your holy

virginity and Immaculate Conception, the Most Chaste Virgin, cleanse my heart and flesh.”

One morning, when I prayed in this way, I sighed and contemplated how to protect myself from sin throughout the day, three means for avoiding sins came to my mind, namely, speak little and speak only when it is necessary (minimal talking only when necessary); carefully close the ears to useless conversation (listening attentively); and above all, guard the eyes and allow them no curious or inquisitive glances (being careful not to allow my eyes to go astray). That very evening I went to talk to one of my friends (today Sister Agatha) about these means of preservation. The more the means shone on me, the more I asked God to engrain them in my heart and to give me the powers to apply them. In the next confession, I told my confessor that I want to overcome my bad desires through these means of protection. The confessor, considering for a while, said to me: “My child, not only do I give you permission, but I recommend you practice them; and keep them carefully. I expect that our good God will grant you great graces.” These words have made a strong impression on me.

### ***CHASTITY OF THE VIRGIN***

After Elizabeth and her fellow-sisters of the third order had prayed for this virtue, Elizabeth fell into ecstasy and saw her Divine Bridegroom as a young man holding a palm branch in his right hand and the other hand raising in the air. Jesus addressed her with these words: “Look my daughter on Jesus, your Divine Spouse.” Stretching her hands toward Him, she exclaimed: “Jesus my love!” whereupon the Divine Spouse rose a little and floated in the air. Then she heard from His mouth the following:

“See my daughter, Jesus your Divine Spouse is the one who protected your heart to this very hour. (*Now, Jesus reminded her the hour and the place when she made the vow of chastity at her age of fifteen*). Now, let be fulfilled what you have always asked me from

your youth, namely: the suffering, which would always keep you from the corruption of the world. Look, my daughter, if a virgin wants to keep her heart chaste, she must be careful not to allow her eyes to go astray, close her ears, and flee from the worldly things. The more a virgin seeks to preserve her chastity, the more she is to attach her heart to me; she should constantly act in my presence, and always speak confidentially to me in her heart. A virgin should not be in contact with the world; she should be seen only where the duties call her, in my house, in her work, and even during her occupation her heart should be with me.

I will always come to help you with my grace; I will give myself to you every moment as a possession. Oh, how sweet a virgin soul is to me, in which I have my pleasure; but even the slightest shadow of this virtue displeases me. O how little cares the world about the virgin state; but I love it and prefer it before all. See, my daughter, a virgin should always turn to me with childlike trust, for she has the right to do so; she should not fear of me slavishly, for it opposes my love.

Then she was well and in detail taught how a virgin should carefully care of her external senses, to be indifferent for everything in the world, and internally detached. The whole lesson was an extensive development of the teaching of the Apostle (St. Paul Epistle to the Corinthians) on the behavior of a virgin. It is not possible to give this teaching in its entity, only in parts, and on occasions when our Lord wants and can give it.

This instruction made such an impression on Elizabeth that from that day on, she became indifferent to and unaffected by all worldly sensual objects. She looked everywhere for her Divine Spouse. Everything that was not Him was alien to her, worthless, and contemptible.

**Biographical Sketch of  
Reverend John David Reichard,  
Paris Priest of Niederbronn and  
Spiritual Director of the Congregation  
(1796 - 1867)**

John David Reichard was born on October 17, 1796, in Wasselnheim, Lower Alsace. His father John George was tanner. He married a Protestant woman who did not stop her son who was preparing for his priestly vocation under the direction of a keen parish-vicar Jacob Geiss.

He received his priestly ordination in June 1819, after studies in the Seminary of Strasbourg. The Seminary was led by priests who were interested in young clergy receiving a serious education and being steadfast in a difficult time at the end of the Empire. After his ordination, he became a Chaplain in St. George Parish, in Hagenau. He was lucky that Reverend Felix Carol Poisignon (born in 1730), a highly respected priest in all of Alsace, introduced him to pastoral services. Reverend Poisignon greatly influenced him in further spiritual direction. It was a great school of pastoral practice and a priestly improvement. Each year he went to a solitary place in the near pilgrimage town, Marienthal, where he made his retreat. His successful activities in Hagenau stimulated Bishop to entrust him with a demanding parish in Niederbronn. He came to Niederbronn in January 1823, at the age of 27.

A small spa town, Niederbronn, lies on the Alsace plain, at the foot of the Vogues, between Lorraine and the spa town Württemberg. It is not an unknown village, for in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, the Romans appreciated the goodness of its thermal water. As a spa town, Niederbronn through the centuries experienced variable successes. Over time it was poorly neglected, but in 1835 it came to the forefront of client interest which significantly affected the life and destiny of Elizabeth Eppinger. Richness of this region lies in agriculture, fields, and forests, which are cultivated by small farms.

There are also some industries, mainly, steel mills which developed within forests providing the needed heating material.

The region under the county Haunau-Lichtenber is Protestant since 1570. After wars in 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the population of the county was eradicated, the wave of immigration brought to the country new inhabitants among them Christian families as were Eppinger ancestors. Around the year 1800, from 2000 inhabitants about 4/7 belonged to the Reformed Church, less than 3/7 belonged to the Catholic Church, and about 150 inhabitants were Jews. Both parishes—the Catholic and the Reformed—enjoyed the same church, in which they carried out worship services one by one.

Looking at the people entrusted to him, Reverend Reichard soon understood that he was sent to renew their faith by teaching, social and charitable works, and Christian relationships with everyone. He appreciated the prayer and read the Scripture. He lived according to the objectives of his office, in strict self-discipline and self-denial. During his parish visits, Reverend Reichard met Elizabeth Eppinger. Then, he saw her again among pupils who came for religion lessons. During preparation for the First Holy Communion, he sensed how much this child (Elizabeth) longed “to know God”, and also how difficulty it was for Elizabeth to be obedient with her temperament and strong will. Later, the girl asked him permission to receive Holy Communion more often than was customary of this time.

Reverend Reichard is mainly a confessor for Elizabeth. He helped her to awake in her heart and mind a religious dimension and stood by her in her sickness. Then suddenly, without a clue, became a witness of mystical events with unimaginable consequences for him, his parish, town, and the Church. He became a parish priest of “Ecstatic of Niederbronn” taking on himself challenges and inconveniences that occurred with it. Later, he was asked to be the first collaborator on the work which Elizabeth Eppinger was called to found, and which brought him a title “Cofounder”(in the spiritual meaning). It is worthwhile to mention that Elizabeth learned to read but did not write, aside from signing her name. Reverend

Reichard played the key role in her life and work. Everything that Elizabeth, later Mother Alphonse Marie said Reverend Reichard faithfully wrote down. Dr. Marcel Burg, archival expert, examining these writings testifies that all words which Elizabeth said and Reverend Reichard wrote down, reflect her thoughts very faithfully, some places even exactly. The findings of Dr. Burg confirm the fact that all writings of Reverend Reichard are in the Alsace dialect (similar to German language) which Elizabeth spoke. Reverend Reichard was, in his whole being, an example of a virtuous man with strong faith. As a parish priest and confessor he recognized in the life of a modest peasant girl the work of the Holy Spirit. He accepted the signs which accompanied the foundation of the Congregation, and at the age of 53 he took part in the work that lacked any human assurance. He was always a solid supporter and a spiritual director and mentor of the Foundress, Mother Alphonse Marie.

The health conditions of Mother Alphonse Marie as well as Reverend Reichard worsened. Reverend Reichard retired to small town Singlange. In the middle of July 1867, he was asked to return to Niederbronn because the health condition of Mother Alphonse Marie significantly worsened. On July 22<sup>nd</sup>, Mother Alphonse Marie fell into a coma. The next day, Reverend Reichard had a heart attack and died on July 24, 1867, at the age of 71. The task, as the Spiritual Director of the Congregation, given to him by the Church in 1849, he carried out responsibly and fully, never sparing his being. He was a selfless servant of the Work about which he was convinced that would never have arisen without God's will.

## **The Cross Between Niederbronn And Reichshoffen**

From the Autobiography of Mother Alphonse Marie we learned that little Elizabeth often worked at the fields of her father close to Reichshoffen. She loved to pray before the cross. From the age of five, when she went with her mother to field, she stopped by the cross between Niederbronn and Reichshoffen. At the age of fifteen, one afternoon while she working at the field, she heard an inner voice to consecrate herself completely to God. She ran to the cross standing on the way between Niederbronn and Reichshoffen. She prayed earnestly for the grace to get to know her vocation more clearly and to be faithful.

This cross still stands at the same place even though many years have passed since then. The cross is venerated not only by all Sisters from near and far but people from the whole region. In 1999, shortly after the celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of foundation of the Congregation, founded by Mother Alphonse Marie, the administration of both villages Niederbronn and Reichshoffen decided to pave along the path, leading to this cross. Because of construction of the road, the work on the sidewalk to the cross was badly damaged.

After this sad event, the Sisters at the Generalate in Oberbronn were surprised by the attitude both Mayors and even more by the worker—Muslim, who damaged the cross accidentally. All of them expressed pity because they understood the utmost importance of this cross for the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer. They solemnly committed that this sacral monument they would restore.

During the Holy Week in 2002, the Sisters with joy found that the restored cross stood on the original pedestal. In July, of the same year, they received message that by the cross will be placed a memorial plaque with explanation of the uniqueness of the cross. They received also an invitation for this celebration which was held on July 26, 2002. The Mayors of both villages, representatives of the Governing Council, journalists, and the Sisters met by the cross



and became witnesses of re-unveiling cross and the memorial plaque on which was written:

***“Here, at the foot of this cross  
young Elizabeth Eppinger  
(1814 – 1867)  
completely abandoned her life to God.  
In 1849, she founded  
the Congregation of the Sisters of the Divine Redeemer.  
Since then, the Niederbronn Sisters  
are spread worldwide  
to help the most needy.”***

Sister Lucella Maria Werkstetter, Superior General and the Mayor of Niederbronn unveiled this memorial plaque while singing a hymn about veneration of the cross by the Sisters of the General Leadership and the Communities of Niederbronn and Jagerthal.

In their speech, the Mayors of both villages expressed their respect to the Congregation which existence would be always connected with the young woman from Niederbronn who by doing the charitable work made known the name “Niederbronn” on four continents.

Sister Lucella Maria Werkstetter expressed gratitude for reconstructing the cross, placing a memorial plaque, and having a friendly relationship with inhabitants of villages to the Congregation. She recalled the mission stemming from the charism of Mather Alphonse Marie.

Reconstructing the cross will inspire the Sisters of all Provinces and Delegates to return to their roots and remain on this place, the place where at first once stood their Foundress. Let this outer sign—the Cross—encourage the Sisters of Mother Alphonse Marie to meditate on the Mystery of Redemption, so they become witnesses of God’s unending love and mercy for all they are sent today.

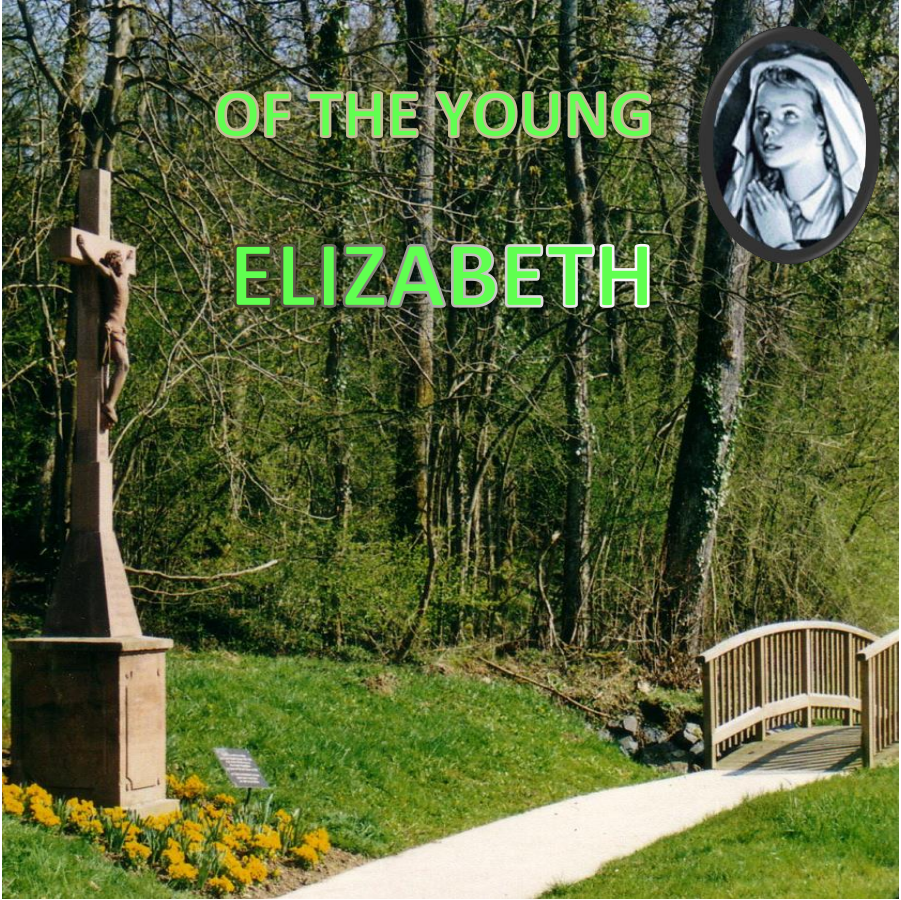
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# THE LIFE

OF THE YOUNG

ELIZABETH



# EPPINGER

John David Reichard