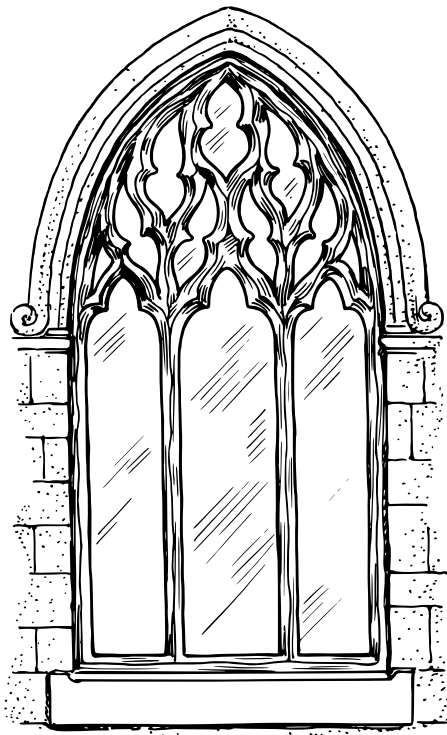


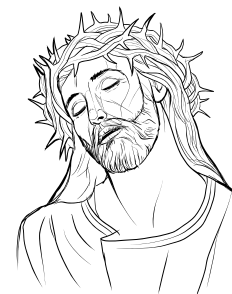
# A Week with Elisabeth Leseur

*An Invitation to Meditate, Pray, and Act  
with an Extraordinary Servant of God*



*"We are truly instruments in the hands of the  
divine Artist"*

WRITTEN, PUBLISHED, AND DESIGNED BY GINA DADAGLO



# Introduction

I first became aware of Elisabeth Leseur because she, like me, was married to a non-practising Catholic. I can't remember who suggested that I might find inspiration from reading her diary, but it began a devotion that will last my lifetime.

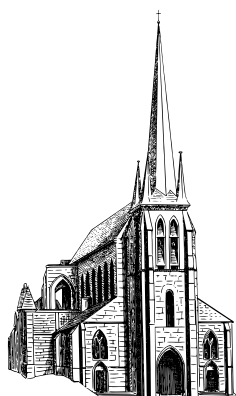
Servant of God Elisabeth Leseur was born into the Parisian bourgeoisie, living a life of material comfort and socialising with the thinkers who were en vogue at that time - largely atheists. But instead of using her circumstances as an excuse not to live a life dedicated to Christ, she trusted that God wanted to use her as an "instrument" in bringing His kingdom to a world that seemed to be turning away from Jesus. Her love for Our Lord burned deep within her, and it was her prayer that He would be known through her without a need to "preach", which she did not believe to be a fruitful approach to evangelisation.

Elisabeth is best known for her marriage to Felix, an atheist throughout their marriage, who experienced a conversion after Elisabeth's death and went on to become a Dominican priest (and Fulton Sheen's spiritual director!). Elisabeth had dedicated her life to prayer and sacrifice for the good of her husband's soul, believing in the power of redemptive suffering to bring souls to Christ. She experienced much suffering herself as a consequence of poor physical health, which she united to Christ on the cross for the good of her husband and other dear ones.

But there is so much more to Elisabeth than her unusual marriage. She has been dubbed a "married St. Therese of Lisieux" because of her commitment to contemplation, sacrifice, and asceticism. Although she longed to be a "contemplative in action", her health frequently prevented her from "action". Rather than growing discouraged, she took it to be God's will that her life should be devoted to prayer rather to physical work. She took this call very seriously, shaping her days around times of prayer in a manner reminiscent of the religious life.

I believe that the most important lesson we can take from Elisabeth is that God, the "divine Artist", will not let our lives go to waste in the coming of His kingdom. No matter what mistakes we've made, the good and bad choices, our strengths and our weaknesses - if we turn towards God and ask Him to use our lives for His glory, then He will transform us into indispensable parts of His plan.

My hope is that this devotional will introduce you to Elisabeth, and that she will become a friend for you as you seek to live for God even when it feels like your circumstances make that very difficult. I urge you to get to know her even better by reading *The Secret Diary of Elisabeth Leseur: the Woman Whose Goodness Changed her Husband from Atheist to Priest*.



Thank you for reading, and God bless.

Gina



## *How to use this devotional*

This devotional encourages you to encounter Elisabeth Leseur through her writing over the course of seven days. Although your circumstances may be quite different from hers, I pray that you will find much of what she says to be relevant and salient.



### *Meditate*

Each day begins with a quote from Elisabeth's diary. Read the quote through once in its entirety, and notice what jumps out to you. Which words or phrases speak to you? Read it through again. You may wish to highlight or underline the things that jump out. Perhaps it sparks an idea or a recollection. Sit prayerfully with the text and your response to it for a few minutes.



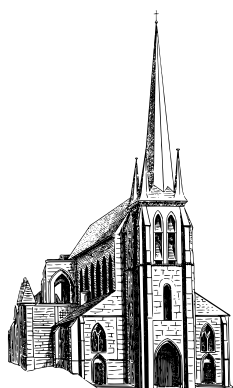
### *Pray*

I have written a prayer to accompany each day's meditation. If it is helpful then great, but if it doesn't help you then feel free to discard it! I encourage you to pray with whatever stands out to you from the meditation, and ask God what He wants you to take from it.



### *Act*

Elisabeth was a firm believer that our prayer lives should transform our actions. Although she was inhibited significantly by her health, she was recognised among her friends and family for truly living her faith. This was something that impressed even the most hardened hearts. Each day, I suggest an action flowing from the meditation and prayer for how Elisabeth's spirituality can help us live out our faith.





# Day 1



## Meditate

"[I resolve] to try always to understand everything and everyone. Not to argue; to work instead through contact and example; to dissipate prejudice, to reveal God and make Him felt without speaking of Him; [...] to love without tiring, in spite of disappointment and indifference."



## Pray

Elisabeth Leseur, you sought always to understand others without judgement or presumption; you sought to make God known by example of your intimate relationship with Him, rather than by demanding how others ought to act in His name. Through your intercession, I ask for the graces needed to listen closely to those who think or act differently to me, and to shine something of the light of Christ upon others simply by loving them. Amen.

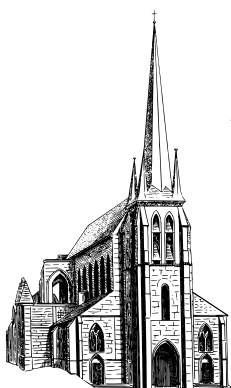


## Act

Today, seek out an opinion or viewpoint that differs from your own - look on a news site that you wouldn't usually, or ask a friend to explain their thoughts on a topic that you know you disagree about. Really listen to this perspective; notice the things that make you feel uncomfortable, and ask yourself why. Look also for the places where you agree more than you realised. Take time to acknowledge Jesus within the person whose words bother you (whether it's a friend or simply the person who wrote what you are reading).

Feel free to respond honestly if they ask you to explain your perspective, but otherwise simply listen, and thank them for sharing with you.

Afterwards, pray for this person from a place of love, to the best of your ability.





## Day 2



### *Meditate*

"The soul can be a cell as white and empty of worldly influence as the cell of a monk. The crucifix and some books - that is to say, God and work: this is what fills the solitude of nuns and monks; this is what can make a solitary of the woman who is completely beset by external noise and activity."



### *Pray*

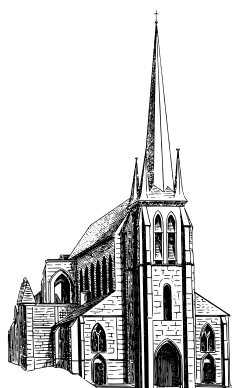
Elisabeth Leseur, you understood that the call to a life of "God and work" is for each of us, regardless of our vocation. Help me to make each part of my day an offering to God: the quiet moments of contemplation and the chaotic moments "beset by external noise and activity". Let my soul rest in the peace of Christ, even when the storms of the world are raging around me. Amen.



### *Act*

The imagery in this quote is powerful: our souls can be like the cells of monks and nuns, free of the clutter of worldly distractions and focused on Christ. What would be in your 'soul cell'? In your mind's eye, build an image of a scene that helps you feel peaceful and close to God. It could be a monk's cell, an Adoration chapel, or somewhere in the natural world. What would be in there? A crucifix, the Bible, perhaps a favourite image of the Blessed Mother, or the writings of a favourite saint? Maybe you would have some journaling materials or things to create art with?

When you find yourself losing peace due to the circumstances of your day, call this image to mind and use it as a way to recentre yourself on God. Remember that He is there with you always, in the cell of your soul, and that each moment of your day is an opportunity to meet Him there.





# Day 3



## *Meditate*

“How plainly visible is Providence in the history of my soul and my life! It must be the same for all, if one knows how to discern its beneficent action; when I look back, in spite of misfortune and tears, I can only bless and adore. I begin this new period of life - long or short, calm or sorrowful, according to God’s will - with these words from the depth of my soul: I believe, I adore, I hope.”



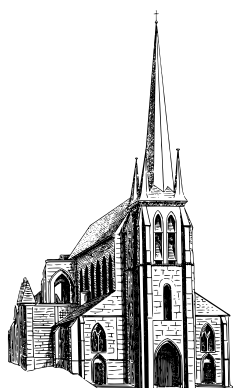
## *Pray*

Lord, you granted Elisabeth Leseur the faith to bless even her misfortune and tears, and to trust in Your goodness no matter what the future should bring. I pray for this same certainty that You are at work in all circumstances, and to adore You in times of sorrow and of joy. Amen.



## *Act*

Take a bit of time today - it only needs to be a few minutes in the shower, or while you sip your coffee - to reflect over how God has worked in your life. Maybe you didn’t turn to God until later in life, and yet you still see His handiwork in the years before you knew Him. Perhaps you have always had a relationship with Christ, but nonetheless have made mistakes. How has God used those mistakes to ultimately lead you closer to Him? Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for all the ways that He has used your choices - good and bad - to come closer to you. Resolve to adore Him today no matter what the day brings you.





## Day 4



### *Meditate*

“Sometimes the very desire for action leads to the neglect of action. Looking for some wonderful opportunity to give oneself, to devote oneself, one forgets the humble brother close at hand who is waiting for a word of comfort, a saving gesture. Let us not linger in contemplation of the road ahead; let us follow the narrow path. Let us not look too far or too high, but right in front of ourselves, right next to ourselves. The good to be done is perhaps there.”



### *Pray*

Elisabeth Leseur, you dedicated your life to Christian charity. You were committed to alleviating the burdens of the poor, but also to tending the wounds of your beloved friends and family. Help me respond to the needs of the people closest to me: my family, my friends, my colleagues, my neighbours. Help me to glorify God by acting upon the needs of this day. Keep me from becoming so lost in the great needs of the world that I miss the needs of those around me. Amen.



### *Act*

It can be so easy to get lost in grand plans to battle grave injustice, all the while neglecting the needs of those God has placed in our inner circle: our husbands' need to hear words of affection; our childrens' need to feel their mother truly present and delighting in them; our gruff relative's need to be reminded that he is welcome in our family life. This isn't either/or. It's both/and. As Catholics, we have a duty to take action to battle the many injustices ravishing our world.

But first, we must attend to the needs of those “right in front of ourselves, right next to ourselves.” Who among your family and friends could use “a word of comfort, a saving gesture” today? Attend to the needs of “the humble brother close at hand” today.





# Day 5



## Meditate

"The future will be what we make it; let us reflect on this thought so that it may inspire us to act. Above all, let us realise that all collective reform must first be individual reform. Let us apply ourselves to transforming ourselves and our lives. Let us influence those about us, not by vain preaching, but by the irresistible force of upright convictions and the example of our lives."



## Pray

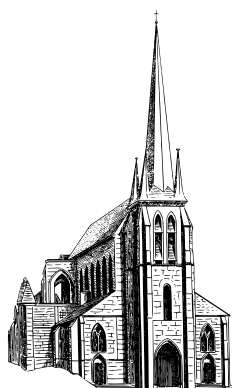
Elisabeth Leseur, you understood that the Lord places us in our circumstances because He has a purpose for us, here and now. You recognised that in order to see change in the world around you, the first place to seek those changes is within. Your life of love, charity, and devotion influenced even the most hardened of hearts. Pray for me that I will reflect the love and mercy of Christ in all that I do, and that my desire for a better future will be fuelled not by hatred or self-righteousness, but by tender love and charity. Amen.



## Act

When we look at the news or at social media, it is easy to feel consumed by despair at all that is wrong with the world. Our hearts ache, our souls grow weary. Often, this causes us to lose patience, love, and charity with the people we interact with: our families, our friends - online or IRL - and even ourselves. Today, notice your reactions to troubling news. Does it trigger a loving response, or an indignant one? Are you inclined to react with charity, or with accusations (mentally or verbally)?

Try to reorient your responses to reflect Christ's love - even if that means not responding at all, and simply offering a prayer for Christ's peace to reign. If necessary, take a break from consuming media to be a loving presence to those around you.







# Day 6



## Meditate

"A woman has duties toward her mind, and ought to increase the sum of her knowledge and enlarge her intellectual horizon, so as to be capable some day of playing her part as mother, and, at the same time, of taking her place in the society in which she lives, for it stands in need of light from us all, faint though it may be. When we labour... in order to strengthen our mental powers and let others benefit by our work, we may be sure that it will be fruitful and that God will bless it."



## Pray

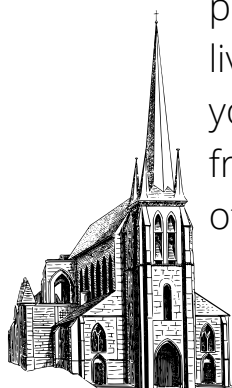
Lord, You blessed Elisabeth with the knowledge that her intellect was as important to her womanhood as her role as a wife, daughter, aunt, and sister. Grant me the desire to increase my knowledge of the Faith, and to use this knowledge to lovingly draw others closer to You and Your Church. Amen.



## Act

Elisabeth believed firmly in the importance of educating ourselves about the faith. She read the Gospels and Epistles daily, as well as studying the works of saints and the teachings of the Church. The importance of this practice was to not only strengthen her own faith, but to better serve her family, her friends, and her society. Only by having a robust knowledge of her faith could she expect to live it vibrantly, and to be able to remain unruffled by the faithlessness that saturated her world.

Choose a book of the Bible, a Church document, a book about a saint, or part of the Catechism and begin reading it through eyes that seek to really live what you learn. Each time you pick it up, ask the Holy Spirit to be with you as you read and to draw your heart to what God wants you to take from it. Ask for Elisabeth's intercession in giving you a thirst for knowledge of the faith.





# Day 7



## Meditate

"I believe much more in individual effort, and in the good that may be done by addressing oneself not to the masses but to particular souls. The effect one can exert is thereby much deeper and more durable. Did not He who remains the Eternal Model in all spiritual things do the same? And it did not hinder Him from transforming the world."



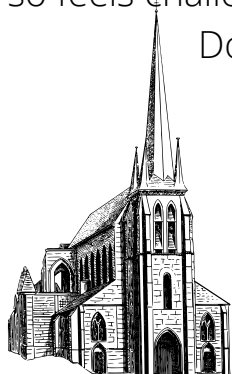
## Pray

Lord, You entrusted to Elisabeth certain souls whom you wished her to dedicate her life to, through prayer and penance. Please show me the particular souls You have chosen for me to adopt spiritually, and the path by which you want me to lead them to You. Help me to model myself always upon Your example, trusting in the belovedness of the one sheep gone astray.

## Act

Is there someone in your life who you believe - perhaps subconsciously - is beyond God's love and mercy? Or who you believe has strayed so far from God that they will never return? Pray about it for a few minutes. Perhaps it's a sibling, or a friend; a parent, or a child. Maybe, like Elisabeth, it's your spouse. Commit to "adopting" that soul. Write down a few ways that you will try to lead that soul to the Lord. For example, offering a sacrifice for them each day; praying a novena for them or regularly saying a rosary for their soul. Try to be particularly loving towards them - especially when doing so feels challenging; have Masses offered for them.

Do not hope to see the fruits of your efforts on earth, but in Heaven.





# *Further reflections*

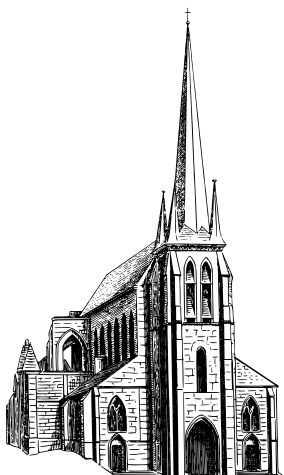
## *On unbelievers*

"It is not in arguing or in lecturing that I can make [unbelievers] know what God is to the human soul. But in struggling with myself, in becoming, with His help, more Christian and more valiant, I will bear witness to Him whose humble disciple I am. By the serenity and strength that I mean to acquire, I will prove that the Christian life is great and beautiful and full of joy." Page 10

"Those who are separated from us by birth, education, belief, the poor savage whom we never see, those who are most abject and most guilty - all are entitled to our love, all should be brothers to us. Do they not all stand before God, beloved by Him? Has not each a soul like our own, which should only be the more dear to us for being far from the one Light?" Page 16

"Grace alone can bring about a conversion; without it, we can do nothing for a soul. But can we not prepare the materials for grace? Can we not put into people's minds new ideas that, when touched by grace, may one day rise and live? It is a humble work, demanding much patience and tact, and it must be performed without expecting any result but what is willed by God and known only to Him." Page 167

"I must work for souls without trying to ascertain the results of my labour, leaving for to God the work of conversion or sanctification, which He alone can accomplish, and looking upon myself as a humble instrument in His hands, an instrument used for purposes of which I myself am ignorant." Page 215





# *Further reflections*

## *On prayer, sacrifice, and suffering*

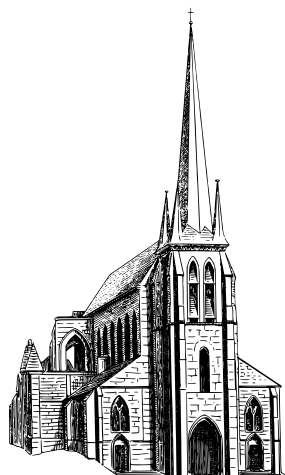
"We pray, suffer, and labour in ignorance of the consequence of our acts and prayers. God makes them serve His supreme plan; gradually they take their effect, winning one soul, then another. They hasten the coming of the Kingdom of God and by the other beings, act, and desires they give birth to, they will exert an influence that will endure until the end of time." Page 19

"It is best for God alone to dispose of what we offer Him; if we knew the results of our efforts, if the mysterious influence worked by our prayer and sacrifice were revealed to us, pride, always near, would have its way." Page 57

"In prayer we do not see the result of our efforts, however certain they may be; we are truly instruments in the hands of the divine Artist. We can remain humble even while knowing the great joy of working for God's glory and the good of souls." Page 88

Prayer after Communion: "O my God, through the precious Blood of Jesus and His five blessed Wounds, grant me today five graces: the conversion of a sinner; the conversion of a heretic or an infidel; the salvation of someone dying in peril of everlasting death; a vocation to the priesthood or to religious life; and, for some new soul, the grace of entering into and savouring the mystery of the Eucharist." Page 111

"What can we give to others when we have gathered nothing for ourselves? Let us first create a reserve of thought, energy, prayer. Our superabundance will flow out to others, and this stream of life will never exhaust itself, because it will have its source in God." Page 168





## *Further reflections*

"I believe that suffering was accorded by God to man with a great intention of love and mercy.

I believe that Jesus Christ has transformed and sanctified suffering and made it almost divine.

I believe that suffering is the great instrument of redemption and sanctification for the soul...

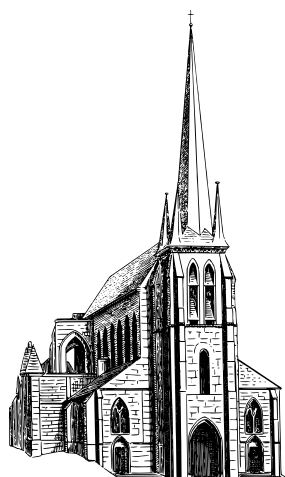
I believe that God is love, and that suffering, in His hand, is the means used by His love to transform and save us." Page 178

## *Miscellaneous*

"The Holy Eucharist is indeed food for the soul; to say so is a commonplace, but how true! Apart from the conscious joy it sometimes brings, even lacking that joy, the soul is left stronger and more alive; the Eucharist transforms it, although the soul may not be aware of this mysterious operation at the time" Page 75

"Little duties, little efforts, the better for being seen by no one, except by Him in whose eyes nothing is little." Page 157

"I must be content not to go more quickly than God, and know how, in dealing with certain souls, to go at a walking pace or even more slowly still. Once more, let me repeat that the hour and the means are in God's hands, and that my business is, as a humble worker, to pray, suffer, and act, in full reliance on Him, and with absolute humility." Page 226





## *Further reflections*

“According to the design of Providence, each of us is intended to do some special work and has a task assigned to him that is determined beforehand. Human society would be beautiful and harmonious if each man in his appointed place accomplished all the work set by the Master of the household, and if we, labourers of the first hour, tried to discover His will at every stage of our lives. This cannot be, because from the beginning, evil entered into the world...” Page 261

“Every human being is an incalculable force, bearing within him something of the future. To the end of time, our daily words and actions will bear fruit, either good or bad; nothing that we have once given of ourselves will perish, but our words and works, handed on from one to another, will continue to do good or harm to remote generations. This is why life is a sacred thing, and we ought not to pass through it thoughtlessly, but to appreciate its value and use it so that, when we are gone, the sum total of good in the world may be greater.” Page 272

All quotes contained in this devotional come from  
*The Secret Diary of Elisabeth Leseur:  
The Woman Whose Goodness Changed Her Husband from Atheist to Priest,*  
by Elisabeth Leseur

