

E LENA SPIRGEVIČIŪTĖ was born in Tvirtovės, Kaunas (Lithuania) on 23 December 1924, the daughter of Stasys and Elena Spirgevičienė, both civil servants. She began school at the age of seven and later joined the Scout movement. After finishing her primary studies, Elena was enrolled at the "Saulė" Girls' Gymnasium of Kaunas, directed by the Sisters of St. Casimir. In 1941, she was moved to the VIII Gymnasium and graduated there in 1943. The years spent in school formed both her Catholic consciousness and Lithuanian nationalism. One of her relatives later spoke about her: "Elenutė was clever, vigilant, and respectful to older people. She listened carefully to advice when it concerned matters of noble living."

Much of what we know about Elena's inner life comes from her diary. Her first entry was dated 12 October 1940, and her last was 2 June 1942. Her writings reveal not only a young woman grappling with life's daily ups and downs but also a determined individual with profound insights into Christian living. She wrote, "Honesty, modesty, and intelligence are important. I am trying to embody these qualities, and I believe I will succeed." Though she was devout, Elena sought to balance her faith with her peers' expectations. She participated in school social events but upheld her



modest demeanor, stating, “It is very fitting to wear a uniform to a party. I am not seeking to make acquaintances; I just want to dance and have a good time – that’s all.” During a retreat, she reflected, “I have decided to be a good Catholic, but it is difficult without the Lord’s support, and I feel lost. I want to be good, not to lead an empty life, but to contribute something worthwhile and be useful.”

The incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union in August 1940, followed by its occupation by the Nazis in July 1941, plunged its people into an environment filled with anxiety and death. In September 1941, the Nazis ordered the mass shooting of Jews living in the Vilijampolė ghetto in Kaunas. Elena witnessed these horrific events and recorded them in her diary. Despite the despair surrounding her, she continued to write about love and life. By February 1942, Elena began to express her attraction to the consecrated life: “Something fills my heart. I rejoice at having understood happiness. But I am seriously considering that greater peace could be found behind the railing of a convent. The name itself speaks of solitude, silence, and peace. Lord, these are serious dreams; I truly desire this. I would leave everything behind. Oh, I wish the war would end soon! I



would finish school and enter there, Father, to be closer to You! Evening parties and dances that I sometimes attend, when examined more deeply, are mere vanities and immodesties. These can only be avoided through You, Lord... I want this, not because I lack beauty. No, such thoughts do not occupy my mind. Beauty is ephemeral; one grows old, stoops, and all signs of beauty fade away... I want to be beautiful within."

Elena's daily life was unremarkable. While she dedicated a significant amount of time to reading, she also assisted her mother with household chores. Without being asked, she was attentive to others, quietly and quickly helping wherever needed. Those who knew Elena remembered that, although she enjoyed spending time with her friends, she loved talking about God, the Church, and other religious topics. Men were drawn to her, but she never had a boyfriend. This concerned her mother, who was unaware of Elena's interest in pursuing the consecrated life. Instead, she criticized Elena for her choice of clothing, her quiet demeanor, and what she perceived as Elena's religious fanaticism. She failed to see anything exceptional in her daughter and tormented herself with worries about Elena's future as a homemaker.

In 1943, Elena graduated from the Gymnasium with mostly good and excellent marks. Aspiring to become a pediatrician, she enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine at Kaunas State University. However, her studies were abruptly interrupted when the Nazis closed the university. Not wanting to waste her

time, Elena chose to study German and French privately. She also took some short-term courses in Kaunas designed for prospective teachers. In the autumn of 1943, she was assigned to teach in the Jonava district. However, the violent confrontations between the Nazis and Soviet partisans made living in Kaunas perilous. Given this situation, Elena decided to stay with her parents and wait out the war before fulfilling her teaching assignment.



On 3 January 1944, around 10:30 p.m., the Spirgevičiai family was disturbed by loud voices outside their home. The father stepped outside and encountered four armed men claiming to be police officers. They insisted on entering the house to check the residents' documents. He complied and let them in. Once inside, the four men aimed their loaded guns at the family and revealed

that they were Soviet partisans. They pinned the father against the wall and demanded alcohol, food, and clothes. In panic, Elena's aunt, Stasė Žukaitė, attempted to escape but was shot dead by one of the partisans. The group then gathered all the household members into one room.

One of the men noticed Elena and began making inappropriate advances toward her. He then took her to another room, trying to persuade her to give in to his desires. When she firmly refused, he brought her back to her mother, insisting that her mother convince Elena to comply. For about half an hour, he dragged her around and threatened to shoot her if she refused, saying, "We are not playing games! One of you is already dead. Her fate could await you as well." One can only imagine Elena's mother's reaction upon seeing her daughter in danger. As she was being dragged from one room to another, her father asked her, "What do they want from you?" She replied, "Father, don't you know what they want from any young woman? I will not surrender... I'd rather die..." Elena understood that her aggressors, drunk and aggressive, were determined to fulfill their desires, but she remained steadfast. Her family could barely make out the inaudible conversations taking place in the other room, except for Elena's resolute "No!"

Although the partisans had gathered everything they wanted, they did not leave quickly. Instead, they sat around a table, chatting for a long time. Afterward, they took Elena aside once more and demanded angrily, "Give in, or you will die!" Without any hesitation, Elena firmly responded, "I would rather die!" She then asked to say goodbye to her family. Standing calmly with a serene expression, she made a large sign of the cross over her family and told them, "I will die, and you will live." These were her last words. There was no fear or panic in her demeanor as she returned to her aggressors. With the barrel of a pistol aimed at her, the four men repeated their demand. Her re-

fusal was met with a thunderous gunshot. Elena's distraught mother rushed through the door and found her daughter slumped on the sofa, lifeless.

The news of this tragedy shook the entire town. Crowds gathered at the Church of St. Anthony, where Elena and her aunt were laid in open coffins, both dressed in white. The story of Elena's courageous decision to die rather than submit to the advances of her male assailants deeply moved the mourners. She was buried with great reverence in the town cemetery. When this cemetery closed in 1957, Elena's remains were moved to Eiguliai Cemetery in Kaunas. A majestic monument was erected in her honor, featuring the following epitaph: "Died tragically while defending her honor, leaving an unforgettable legacy as a great Lithuanian for her people. A martyr's wreath for you and national honor for us."



INFORMATION ON THE CAUSE

1. COMPETENT FORUM: Kaunas

2. ITER:

- ❖ rescript of “nihil obstat”: **22 October 1999**
 - opening of diocesan inquiry: **15 January 2000**
 - closing of diocesan inquiry:
- ❖ decree on validity of diocesan inquiry:
- ❖ particular congress of DCS theological consultors:
- ❖ ordinary session of DCS cardinals and bishops:

3. POSTULATOR: Rev. Andrius Končius

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