

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in New York City on August 28, 1774 to a prominent Episcopal family and lost her mother at the age of three. She married a wealthy businessman William Magee Seton in 1794 and they had five children. After her husband's business failed, they went to Italy. He died from tuberculosis in 1803 and she was left to support her family.

Elizabeth witnessed Catholicity in action through family friends while she lived in Italy. She returned to New York. Three basic points led her to become a Catholic: belief in the Real Presence, devotion to the Blessed Mother and conviction that the Catholic Church led back to the apostles and to Christ. Many of her family and friends rejected her when she became a Catholic in March 1805.

Her life was marked by personal losses, including the death of her husband and two of her five children, which ultimately strengthened her faith and led her to become a symbol of charitable service. Following her conversion, she committed herself to charitable work and education. She moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland in 1809 to work in education to support her children. Elizabeth established Saint Joseph's Academy, the first American parochial school for girls. She also founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, the first American religious community for women. This community is still active today. Mother Seton also established the first American Catholic orphanage. All this she did in the span of 46 years.

She died January 4, 1821 from tuberculosis. She was beatified in 1963 and canonized in 1975, making her the first native-born American to be named a saint.

Elizabeth Ann Seton had no extraordinary gifts. She was not a mystic or stigmatic. She did not prophesy or speak in tongues. She had two great devotions: abandonment to the will of God and an ardent love for the Blessed Sacrament. She wrote to a friend, Julia Scott, that she would prefer to exchange the world for a "cave or a desert." "But God has given me a great deal to do, and I have always and hope always to prefer his will to every wish of my own." Her brand of sanctity is open to everyone if we love God and do his will.

Her legacy is one of loss, grief, and struggle, but also of love, service, and devotion. She is the patron saint of grief, Catholic schools, educators, widows, and orphans.