

LITANY TO SAINT ELIZABETH SETON

Elizabeth, loving daughter:

encourage in all children obedience and love.

Elizabeth, troubled teenager:

speak to today's confused, sometimes abused young people.

Elizabeth, faithful wife:

grant gifts of love and generosity to all spouses.

Elizabeth, caring mother:

share your mother's heart with all parents.

Elizabeth, grieving widow:

look with compassion on all bereaved wives.

Elizabeth, loyal friend:

teach us to share friendship generously.

Elizabeth, heroic searcher of truth:

guide all who, with fear and doubt, seek the way.

Elizabeth, courageous convert:

strengthen the newly baptized as they embrace the faith.

Elizabeth, sorrowing mother:

console those parents suffering the loss of a child.

Elizabeth, steadfast religious:

inspire young women to follow in your path.

Elizabeth, inspired educator:

share your gifts with all teachers.

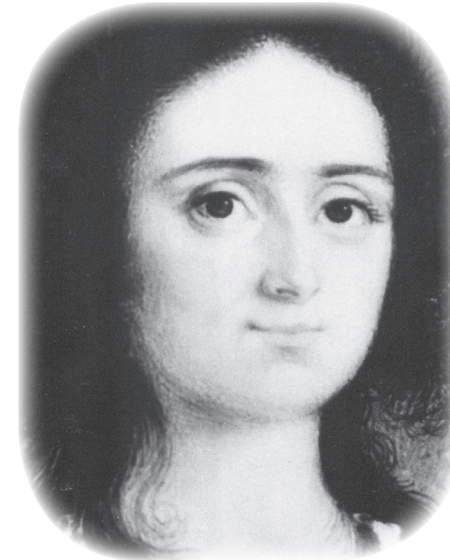
Elizabeth, a woman for all women:

bestow your charism of love and service on all women today.

- Sr. M. Irene Fugazy, SC (NY)

SAINT ELIZABETH ANN BAYLEY SETON

1774-1821



Elizabeth Ann Seton



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ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON'S STORY

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton began the Sisters of Charity, the first religious community of women founded in the United States. She was born into a prominent Episcopalian family in New York City, August 28, 1774. Her father, Dr. Richard Bayley, was a physician, professor of medicine, and one of the first health officers of New York City. Her mother, Catherine Charlton Bayley, daughter of a Protestant Episcopal minister, died when Elizabeth was only three years old.

Elizabeth married William Magee Seton, scion of a wealthy New York mercantile family with international connections, January 25, 1794, at the home of her sister, Mary Bayley Post. Five children were born between 1795 and 1802, Anna Maria, William, Richard, Catherine, and Rebecca. As a young society matron, Elizabeth enjoyed a full life of loving service to her family, care for the indigent poor, and religious development in her Episcopal faith, nurtured by the preaching and guidance of Rev. John Henry Hobart, an assistant at Trinity Church.

As the eighteenth century drew to a close, a double tragedy visited Elizabeth. Political and economic turmoil took a severe toll on William Seton's business and on his health. He became increasingly debilitated by the family affliction, tuberculosis. Hoping to arrest the disease, Elizabeth, William, and Anna Maria embarked on a voyage to Italy. On their arrival in Leghorn, they were placed in quarantine; soon after, December 27, 1803, William died. Waiting to return to their family, Elizabeth and Anna Maria spent several months with the Filicchi brothers of Leghorn (Livorno), business associates of her husband.

For the first time Elizabeth experienced Roman Catholic piety in her social equals. She was deeply impressed, especially by the doctrine

of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. She returned to New York in June 1804, full of religious turmoil.

After almost a year of searching, she made her profession of faith as a Roman Catholic in March 1805, a choice which triggered three years of financial struggle and social discrimination. At the invitation of several priests, she moved with her family to Baltimore in June 1808 to open a school for girls.

Catholic women from around the country came to join her work. Gradually, the dream of a religious congregation became a reality. The women soon moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where they formally began their religious life as Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's July 31, 1809. Elizabeth Seton was named first superior and served in that capacity for the next twelve years.

As the community took shape, Elizabeth directed its vision. A Rule was adapted from that of the French Daughters of Charity, a novitiate was conducted, and the first group, including Elizabeth, made religious vows July 19, 1813. In 1814 the community accepted its first mission outside Emmitsburg, an orphanage in Philadelphia. By 1817 sisters had been sent to staff a similar work in New York.

During her years in Emmitsburg, Elizabeth suffered the loss of two of her daughters to tuberculosis, Anna Maria in 1812 and Rebecca in 1816. By that time she herself was weak from the effects of the disease. She spent the last years of her life directing St. Joseph's Academy and her growing community. She died January 4, 1821, not yet forty-seven years old.

Elizabeth Seton was canonized September 14, 1975, by Pope Paul VI as the first native-born saint of the United States.

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