

Zeal

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

From St. Vincent's teaching: To be burned out for God's sake; not to dispose of material goods or own resources in other way than only for God. This is what our Lord has done, having died for the love of the Father.

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Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first native born American to be recognized as a saint. She was born on August 28, 1774, as the second child of Dr. Richard Bailey and Catherine Charlton from New York. The relatives of Bailey and Charlton were among the first colonial settlers in the New York area, well-known French Huguenots. Elizabeth went to the Episcopal Church. Her mother died in 1777 when Elizabeth was three years old. Her father married Charlotte Amelia Barclay. To support two daughters new Mrs. Bailey became active in activities of church; she visited the poor in their homes to distribute food and necessary goods. She took Elizabeth with her in this work.

Richard and Charlotte had 5 children, but their marriage ended in divorce as a result of a family conflict. Elizabeth and her elder sister Mary Magdalene were abandoned by the stepmother. Her father went to London for further medical examination and the sisters lived temporarily with their paternal uncle and his wife. Elizabeth spoke French very well, she was a talented musician and experienced rider. She tended to self-reflection, which is obvious due to frequent entries in her diary.

25, 1794, at the age of 19, Elizabeth married 26-year-old William Seton, a wealthy businessman who traded imported goods. Five children were born in their marriage. The Setons had leading positions in New York and in Episcopal Church. Elizabeth with her husband's sister Rebekah, her close friend and trustee, fed sick and dying within family, friends and neighbors in need. Elizabeth was one of the founders and members of the Society for Assistance to Poor Widows with Young Children, and also served as a treasurer of this organization.

In 1802, due to the blockade of Napoleonic France by the United Kingdom, William Sepon lost several ships at sea, which caused the bankruptcy of his business. During most part of their marriage, Seton suffered from tuberculosis. He got sick, doctors sent him to Italy in a warmer climate, Elizabeth and their eldest daughter accompanied him. They arrived at Port Livorno, where the authorities in fear of yellow fever epidemic widespread in New York placed them in quarantine, William died there on December 27, 1803.

Elizabeth and Anna-Maria were hosted by the families of Italian business partners of her deceased husband. While staying in Italy, Elizabeth became interested in Catholicism. After her arrival to the United States she joined the Catholic Church. A year later she got the right to come to the holy Eucharist.

Elizabeth opened the academy for ladies in order to support herself and her children. In 1809 she accepted an invitation from the Salesians and moved to Emmetsburg, Maryland. A year later Elizabeth established free school of St. Joseph for education and upbringing of Catholic girls, as well as a community aimed to take care of children of the poor and the first house of Congregation of St. Joseph in the United States. Her school was the first independent Catholic school in America. This contribution was the foundation for establishment of a Catholic parish school system in the United States. The community of sisters had originally the name "Sisters of Mercy of St. Joseph", since then Elizabeth became known as "Mother Seton". In 1810 the sisters adopted rules written by Saint Vincent de Paul for the Daughters of Mercy in France. Elizabeth helped Irish immigrant John Hughes to become a

seminary student (he didn't pass entrance exams), he became a famous archbishop of New York in future, as well as a publicist, apologist and a religious scholar.

Elizabeth died of tuberculosis on January 4, 1821, at the age of 46. Her remains are buried in the temple of St. Elizabeth in the city of Emmetsburg. She was acknowledged as blessed by Pope John XXIII on March 17, 1963. The Pope then said: « *In a house that was very small but had enough space for charity, she sowed seeds in America which grew in great tree due to God's grace* ». Pope Paul VI canonized her on September 14, 1975. According to him « *Elizabeth Seton is a saint. Elizabeth Seton is a saint American. Each of us will say this with special joy and with the intention to honor the land and the nation of which she comes from as the first flower in the saints calendar. Elizabeth Seton was a pure American! Be glad of your glorious daughter. Be proud of her. And know how to preserve her fruitful heritage.*»

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God, you rewarded Saint Elizabeth Ann for zeal in seeking you with a gift of true faith; make us look for you with enduring love and find you with the living faith in daily service through her intercession and inspired by her example. (*Liturgy of St. Elizabeth memory*)

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Elizabeth was deeply devoted to Church, Eucharist, Virgin Mary, and a prayer. She was a woman of prayer and service. Her Eucharistic piety and faith in constant presence of God prompted her to follow Jesus Christ, the source of all mercy. Her initial intention was to join the Daughters of Mercy of St. Vincent de Paul, but France was in blockade during the Napoleonic Wars so this did not happen. It happened only a few decades later, in 1850, when the community of Emmetsburg merged with the monastic community from France, becoming their American branch, as their founder wanted. "Mother Seton" is described as a charming and educated lady. Her disruption in relationships with her close friends and acquaintances in New York and social pressure aimed to make her give up her new life, which she chose for herself, didn't stop her in following her religious vocation.

Elizabeth was also a fruitful writer. In addition to sizable correspondence Elizabeth wrote meditations, instructions, poetry, hymns, memoirs, and diaries. Her memoirs include both spiritual reflections and chronicles such as *The Italian Journal*.

Saint Elizabeth could be a living illustration of Vincentian virtue of zeal for the salvation of souls. Being a mother of five children, she wanted to sacrifice herself even more and to believe more. Being grown in the American Episcopal Church, she accepted the Catholic faith and even gave a new community to the Church - the Institute of the Daughters of Mercy of St. Joseph, where sisters still devote themselves to serving those, who will always be among us as Jesus said: the poor, the sick, the lonely. The prominent topics in her life include her desire to fulfill God's will, to enrich herself with Eucharist and Bible, being confident in Divine Providence and charity service for Jesus Christ in the poor. When she died in Emmetsburg, she called on those who gathered around her: "Be the children of the Church, be the children of the Church!"

Give us, God, such a spirit of zeal.