



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

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1774–1821 • United States of America

Born just two years before the American Revolution, Elizabeth suffered her first great sorrow at the age of three, when her mother passed away. Her father married again, and the wealthy New York City couple raised Elizabeth as a pious Episcopalian (a type of Protestant). She had a deep love for the Scriptures, and her stepmother would take her to perform charitable tasks for the poor.

When she was nineteen, Elizabeth married the rich and handsome William Seton. They had a happy marriage with five children. Their family grew larger when William's father died, and they took in William's six youngest siblings. Tragically, William developed tuberculosis, a deadly illness. He and Elizabeth traveled to Italy for his health, but William soon passed away. They had been married for just under ten years.

In her sorrow, Elizabeth offered everything to the will of God. William's business friends in Italy were incredibly kind, and through them she learned about the Catholic Faith. She converted to Catholicism because she believed in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and because she took comfort in knowing that the Blessed Virgin Mary was her mother in Heaven.

When she returned home, her family rejected her because she was Catholic. The laws limiting the rights of Catholics in America had only just been lifted, and Catholics were still not accepted in society. Elizabeth attempted to start a school for young girls to support herself and her children, but parents removed their children from the school when they discovered that Elizabeth was Catholic. So, she accepted the invitation from the Sulpician Fathers, a French order of priests, to start a school for girls in Maryland. This was the first free American Catholic parish school.

Because Elizabeth wished to dedicate her life to the service of God, Elizabeth took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and started the first American religious order for women, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. The sisters made special allowances for Elizabeth to continue caring for her children, and they voted her to be their mother superior. From then on, Elizabeth was known as Mother Seton.

Elizabeth suffered further sorrow when two of her daughters passed away, but she continued to live a life of humility and charity until she died at forty-six years of age. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, bless all those in Catholic education!