



Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton **1774 - 1821**

Elizabeth Bayley Seton was born in New York City to a prominent Episcopalian family. Her mother was the daughter of an Episcopalian clergyman, while her father, Dr. Richard Bayley, was not only a noted physician, but also professor of anatomy at King's College, an institution later to develop into Columbia University. Elizabeth lost her mother early in life, and, she became very attached to her father. She often accompanied him on trips to Ellis Island to help the sick and poor among the immigrants. She was a very devout churchwoman.

Elizabeth married a charming young businessman, William Magee Seton, and she bore two sons and three daughters. But their happiness was shortlived. William lost his fortune as well as his health. The family went to Italy in an attempt to effect a cure, but William died there in December, 1803. Elizabeth remained in Italy, living with friends, until May of the following year. During the time of her stay, Elizabeth's natural piety was strongly attracted to Roman Catholicism. When, upon her return to the United States, this attraction became apparent, she met a good deal of opposition from her family and friends. Nonetheless, she persevered, and on March 4, 1805, she was received into the

Catholic Church. This step, which estranged her from her family, left her in financial difficulty. She therefore welcomed the invitation from a priest to establish a school for girls in Baltimore. The school opened in June, 1808. She gathered around her a group of like-minded women, and there was the possibility of establishing formally a congregation of nuns. In the spring of 1809 the community, based on the school in Baltimore did in fact form a religious community, the Sisters of St. Joseph, and from that time on, Elizabeth, as their superior, was known as Mother Seton. The Sisters took over the rule of the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul and from 1812 on were known as the Daughters of Charity of St. Joseph. The Order spread rapidly. The nuns established orphanages and hospitals, but they gained most renown for their commitment to the then burgeoning parochial school system, which became one of the glories of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Elizabeth Seton died on January 4, 1821. Elizabeth was canonized by Pope Paul VI in 1975, the first native born North American to be raised to the altar.