Elizabeth Ann Seton

Born: 1774

Died: 1821

Feast day:

4 January

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DERRY DIOCESAN CATECHETICAL CENTRE

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was born into a wealthy Episcopalian family in New York City. Her father, Doctor Richard Bayley, was a doctor and one of the first health officials in New York City. Her mother, Catherine Charlton Bayley, died when Elizabeth was only three years old.

At age nineteen, Elizabeth married William Magee Seton on January 25, 1794. Together they had five children, Anna Maria, William, Richard, Catherine, and Rebecca. Elizabeth enjoyed a full life of loving service to her family, care for the underprivileged, and religious development in her Episcopal faith.

In the late 1700's Elizabeth's husband became ill and Elizabeth and her eldest daughter travelled to Italy in the hope that his health would improve. Unfortunately 8 days after their arrival her husband died.

While in Italy, Seton learned about Catholicism for the first time. She was especially drawn to the doctrine of the Eucharist as the real body of Christ.

She returned to New York in June 1804. After her return, she continued to feel conflicted between the Episcopal and Catholic faiths.

She converted to Catholicism in 1805. She was confirmed in 1806 and chose Mary as her confirmation name.

Elizabeth's conversion resulted in three years of financial struggle and social discrimination. She opened a boarding house for boys. When the student's parents discovered that she was Catholic, they removed their children from the home.

Elizabeth and her family were invited by several priests to move to Baltimore, Maryland. They moved in June 1808 to open a school for girls.

Catholic women from around the country came to join her work and, over time, they created a convent. The women soon moved to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where they formally began their religious life as Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph's on July 31, 1809. This was the first sisterhood in the United States. Elizabeth was named first superior and given the title of "Mother." She served in that role for the next twelve years.

While in Emmitsburg, two of Seton's daughters died from to tuberculosis, Anna Maria in 1812 and Rebecca in 1816. By that time, she herself was weak and increasingly subject to poor health. She spent the last years of her life directing St. Joseph's Academy and her growing community. She died at the age of 46.

Although she passed away at a young age, Elizabeth's legacy lived on. She life was beatified) by Pope John XXIII on December 18, 1959.

She was canonized, in 1975, by Pope Paul VI. She was the first native-born saint of the United States.

Elizabeth is patron of Catholic Schools; seafarers; widows; Shreveport, Louisiana; and the State of Maryland