

January Feature

Good morning, today we come together to celebrate Mass in honor of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton. In the year 1790 she was 16

old. Picture a comfortable living room. In it is Dr. Bailey who is quietly reading. Elizabeth enters...

A Special "First Lady"

Anno: The scene: a comfortable home in New York City; the year: 1790. Dr. Bailey is reading as 16-year-old Elizabeth enters.

Eliz: Good afternoon, Father.

Dr. B: Elizabeth, my dear. You look lovely as always.

Eliz: Father, you spoil me. I must be the luckiest young lady in New York.

Dr. B: When your mother died, I feared that I would not know how to make you a proper young lady. But I need not have worried. You have your music, your French, the theater . . . but I think you have something else on your mind.

Eliz: Yes, Father, I'm in love.

Dr. B: And who, I pray, is the lucky young man?

Eliz: It is William Seton. His father is in the shipping business.

Dr. B: Ah, yes. But let's not be hasty. You're still young.

Anno: For the next three years, Elizabeth had eyes only for her William. They were married in 1809 at Trinity Episcopal Church. William went into his father's business. Before long, there were five Seton children. The Setons were a happy family.

William (playing his violin as Elizabeth enters): Elizabeth, my dear. Are the children in bed?

Eliz: Yes, William. I love them all dearly, but I also love this time we have by ourselves.

Will: What will you do tonight?

Eliz: This is my night to sew. Please play a song for me.

Anno: But the good life did not last long. When William's father died, he took over the business. But ships were lost in storms and pirate attacks. Soon the business was failing.

Will: I'm a failure. How can I ever take care of you and the children?

Eliz: God will show us the way.

Will (hugging her): What would I do without you? (Coughs.)

Eliz: Take care of yourself, and don't worry. We need you.

Anno: But William grew worse. He developed tuberculosis. Elizabeth, thinking that a sea voyage might help, took him and their oldest child to Italy. Antonio Fellichi, a family friend, waved as the boat docked.

Eliz: William, see! It's Antonio!

Will: It will be good to see him.

Purser: You will not be allowed to land yet because of a yellow fever epidemic in New York. You must be in quarantine for 40 days.

Anno: If it had not been for the help supplied by Antonio, the Setons would have starved or frozen to death. Finally, they were allowed to land, but it was too late. Two days before Christmas William died.

Antonio: Elizabeth, William would not want us to go on sorrowing. He wanted you to be happy.

Eliz: I know you are right, Antonio.

Anto: Let us visit the museum today. And perhaps you would like to go with our family to Mass on Sunday.

Anno: Elizabeth did go to Mass—several times. Later she said that as she knelt in front of the Blessed Sacrament, she found real peace. She

missed the other children, so she returned to America, where she found a small apartment and opened a school in it. But her thoughts often returned to the Blessed Sacrament.

Eliz (speaking to Holy-Trinity pastor): Dr. Hobart, I must speak to you. My heart is troubled. I am thinking about becoming a Catholic.

Dr. Hobart: I knew those Catholics in Italy would poison your mind. If you become a Catholic, I want nothing more to do with you.

Eliz: I'm sorry you feel that way. This is important to me: (Leaves.)

Anno: A year later, she walked into St. Peter's Church.

Eliz: Father, I want to become a Catholic.

Priest: Welcome home, my child.

Anno: But most of her family felt otherwise. Parents removed their children from her school. Times were hard for her. Then a letter arrived from Baltimore, inviting Elizabeth to teach there.

Fr. Du Bourg: Welcome, Mrs. Seton. You are the answer to our prayer. Our children need you.

Eliz: It is good to be needed again, Father. This building will make a fine home for us and a school for all who seek it. I would like to give my life to God by teaching His children.

Fr. D: Perhaps it will be possible. Let us write to Bishop Carroll.

Anno: With the permission of the Bishop, Mrs. Seton became "Mother Seton," founder of the Sisters of Charity. With seven other Sisters and her own three girls, she went 50 miles to the town of Emmitsburg. There she opened the first Catholic school in the United States.

(All players slowly come on stage from both directions.)

All: St. Elizabeth Seton, we thank you. St. Elizabeth Seton, pray for us. (Curtain)—Ruth A. Matheny, Editor