

Elizabeth Ann Seton: Wife, Mother, Teacher, Saint

1.N: Elizabeth Ann Bayley was born in 1774, two years before the declaration of independence was signed.

She grew up in New York City. She liked to go with her father, a doctor, as he made his rounds. He was often called to the bedsides of poor immigrants who were sick and sometimes dying far from their homes.

Dr. Bayley: Elizabeth, to be sick and a stranger in a strange land is a terrible thing.

E: Yes, Father. I'm glad we can come and help them. Will we have time to visit Widow Ellis and Granny Holscher?

Dr. Bayley: Yes, Daughter. We will make time to visit them all and take them medicine.

2. N: Elizabeth Ann grew up trusting God. She trusted God in her marriage to William Seton and in the births of their five children. But her trust was tested. Her husband's business failed, and then he fell ill. There was a little money in the house and little time for play, as Elizabeth devoted herself to her husband's care. Still, she did not forget her children. When her husband was asleep or resting, Elizabeth could be found jumping rope with the children. She knew that children need to play and to laugh even in the saddest of times.

E: Come Richard and William, come girls! Your Father is sleeping and we must be quiet. He needs his rest. It will help him get better. But we can go outside and play a while. What shall we play?

C: Let's play Farmer in the Dell!

R: Yes, and then we can play London Bridge is Falling Down!

A: Let's play Jump Rope, too! Where is our jump rope?

3. N: Elizabeth's Husband grew weaker. The doctor suggested taking him to Italy, where the sun is warm and the air is mild. Elizabeth, William, and Anna, their oldest daughter made the long voyage, and reached the docks of Livorno. There in Italy Elizabeth's husband died, far from home, a stranger in a strange land.

E: Oh Anna, how sad that father died. His sufferings are over and he is at peace on the arms of the angles.

A: Mother, we alone and very far from New York. What will we do?

4.N: Elizabeth felt alone and afraid. But friends of her husband's family welcomed her into their home. She saw that they lived what they prayed, and she was moved by their hospitality.

Elizabeth went to Church with them and saw how they loved their faith especially the Eucharist. She decided to join the Catholic Church. She had always been a Christian, but Elizabeth wanted to join the community that had received her with such affection and understanding. In 1805 she walked into Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome and knelt there saying, "My God, here let me rest."

There would be little rest for Elizabeth. When she returned to New York, she and her children lived in poverty. She was barely able to support them as a teacher, even though she was a good teacher. Children liked her because she understood their lively natures.

Word of her gifts in the classroom spread all over the community. Even Bishop John Carroll of Maryland heard of her. He wrote and asked her to come to Maryland and to start a teaching community of women.

Bishop: we have many catholic families in Maryland. We need schools. Will you come here to teach?

E: I have been praying for direction and I seek to do God's will. Yes, Bishop, I will come to Baltimore.

5. N: Elizabeth was happy to be needed. She packed up and moved her children into a ramshackle house in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The roof had so many holes that in the winter snow fell onto their beds as they slept! But Elizabeth had a merry heart. She was doing the work she loved, among the people she loved, for the God she loved.

So when she wrote about her troubles, she compared them to the bites of flies and mosquitoes, which bothered people but do not destroy them. She urged her community to "Remember the sure, the never failing protector we have in God."