



To Promote the Canonization of Mother Seton

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## Elizabeth Seton Did It . . .

The ordinary man or woman stands in awe of saints. In one sense, this is not only understandable, but laudable, for saints are the greatest of all heroes, having conquered not merely armies, or fear, or the greatest of earthly problems, but themselves. In another sense, however, the ordinary man's awe of them defeats one of the purposes God had in mind when He helped them to be saints—His Will that they be models for us to imitate.

We rejoice and honor their holiness. We shake our heads in admiration of it. But we draw back at the very thought of imitating it. We tell ourselves that such goodness is not for us, that it is too extraordinary, too superhuman, for ordinary mortals like us. We tell ourselves—and with truth—that the heroes of God had special graces we shall never have. We tell ourselves—and again with truth—that God does not intend us to climb so high. But we carefully avoid reminding ourselves that God does expect us to reach our own perfection, a perfection less than that of the saints, a perfection limited by our own capacity and by God's plans for us, but a perfection all the same. God gives us all the graces necessary—and our conscience tells us so—to reach that perfection.

Our failure to reach it is due largely to the weakness of human nature, but the splendor of the saints, too, has its part in our discouragement. Their splendor so dazzles our eyes, that we fail to see the basic human beings underneath, human beings much like ourselves, set in a similar society or station in life, bedeviled with the same temptations, harried with the same problems—we are indeed all brothers under the skin.

Elizabeth Seton is a case in point. Though not yet a canonized saint, she has been declared heroically holy by the Church. All of us can see something of ourselves, perhaps a similarity of problems, in the story of her life.

Elizabeth Seton, because of the background of her birth and family and culture, seems at first glance the least likely candidate to be a saint. Her school class would certainly have voted her so, had they such an award. She was born with all of life's gifts: character, charm, and a dark vivacious beauty. She was born to prestige and worldly station: her father was a brilliant doctor; she numbered the first families of the land among her kin. She was born into a religious circle that fairly represented all of Protestantism, from the fanaticism of the strict Huguenot to the polite liberality of the Episcopalian. Indeed, she had a further inducement to no religion whatever, for her father, whom she worshipped, had little or none. With it all, she had a gay love of life, an abounding joy in the things of this world.

Elizabeth Seton had every reason to be all the world ex-

pected of her, and nothing more. Without anyone bringing the least reproach, she could have been merely a fine woman, the best of wives and mothers, a woman universally beloved, long remembered after death—and let it go at that. What is even more important, in fact the whole point, she could have saved her soul this way.

But Elizabeth Seton was completely honest. She knew that, in God's plans for her, "enough" was not enough. And she was courageous, refusing to shrink from the hard terms of perfection. No one saw more clearly than she the temptation to mediocrity, no one understood better the demands of the higher choice. It was surely agreeable, and justifiable, to live nicely and well. It required only a slight curtailment of the curiosity to seek the brighter, surer vision. Here, however, Elizabeth Seton was wholly the woman, and she fearlessly piqued her woman's curiosity, knowing full well what depths of personal hardship and suffering it might uncover.

This passion to get beyond what showed to ordinary eyes, this refusal to be just another good person, this firm resolve to grow, to broaden and deepen her soul's horizon, is the story of Elizabeth's life.

As a child neglected by her father, she could have found a certain solace in neglecting him. Instead, she forced herself upon his attention, running with the wildness of her nature from her schoolroom and books to kiss him as he passed by the window. Put to one side by an unloving stepmother, she could, as most of New York would have done, felt sorry for herself, calling loudly upon the world to witness the injustice shown her; but words of accusation or reproach for her stepmother never passed her lips.

Certainly, Elizabeth Seton would never have understood modern behavior. For example, she accepted motherhood with gladness. Five children in eight years surely interfered with the parties and receptions of the elite society in which she moved, but she would have died before she prevented one child. The mortal sickness of her husband, the loss of their wealth and the disgrace it brought, surely took the sheen off her love-match, but she would have been aghast at the very thought of reneging in any way on a sacred promise that was taken "until death do us part." Her trip to Europe was not the Grand Tour, but an unwanted and heartbreaking leave of her children, a hard and dangerous voyage, patient care of a dying husband, and at the end—loss, and the cloud of desolation. And when she returned home, it was not to seek the comfort she ached for, the loving arms, the soothing "There, there" of family and friends, but to announce a change, a dawning religion, that would alienate such comfort forever.

Elizabeth Seton, then, could have compromised with life,

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**Apostolic Postulation**

FOR THE CAUSE OF  
CANONIZATION  
OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

**Elizabeth Ann Seton**

Foundress of the  
SISTERS OF CHARITY  
IN AMERICA

HIS EMINENCE  
GAETANO CARDINAL CICOGNANI  
*Prefect of the  
Sacred Congregation of Rites*

HIS EMINENCE  
CLEMENTE CARDINAL MICARA  
*Cardinal Relator of the Cause*

HIS EXCELLENCY  
MOST REV. FRANCIS P. KEOUGH, D.D.  
*Archbishop of Baltimore*

VERY REV. LUIGI BISOGGIO, C.M.  
*Postulator General (Rome)*

VERY REV. JOHN P. MCGOWAN, C.M.  
*Vice Postulator*

**Mother Seton's Daughters**

*Communities of the Sisters of Charity*

- St. Joseph College \_\_\_\_\_ Emmitsburg, Md.
- Marillac Seminary \_\_\_\_\_ St. Louis, Mo.
- Mt. St. Vincent-on-the-Hudson,  
New York, N. Y.
- Mt. St. Vincent \_\_\_\_\_ Halifax, N. S.
- Mt. St. Joseph \_\_\_\_\_ Cincinnati, Ohio
- St. Elizabeth's \_\_\_\_\_ Convent, N. J.
- Seton Hill \_\_\_\_\_ Greensburg, Pa.



Central Office

**Mother Seton Guild**

EMMITSBURG, MD.

*Guild Membership*

- Yearly \_\_\_\_\_ \$1.00
- Perpetual \_\_\_\_\_ \$10.00

Deceased May Be Enrolled

Address all communications to  
MOTHER SETON GUILD  
EMMITSBURG, MARYLAND

**FAVORS ACKNOWLEDGED**

CONVENT, N. J.—The following return to his faith is through our prayers to Mother Seton. A young doctor stricken with polio and not being consoled and helped by a friend priest, lost his faith. A month ago through a newly ordained priest, a stranger to the doctor, he went to confession and received Holy Communion. We have been praying for this over a year so his mother asked me to send in the favor and will promote love for Mother Seton. S. A.

TUCKAHOE, N. Y.—Our daughter Teresa, aged 10, was severely burned on December 26, 1959. We enrolled her as a perpetual member in the Mother Seton Guild. Her life hung on a thread for four months, and the doctors advised us that there would not be too much hope. She has been home since June 3, 1960, and we feel confident Mother Seton helped through her holy intercession. MRS. K. H.

FRANKLIN PARK, ILL.—My brother was in the hospital, his body filling up with water. He has been a diabetic for 25 years. He has lost the sight in one eye and has blurred vision in the other, and his heart is very bad. The doctor told his wife he would never leave the hospital alive. I prayed to Mother Seton and promised to write a letter if his life would be saved. There was a change of doctors and hospitals, and in two months he was home. He still is not able to go to work, but if he stays on the diet and does take things slowly he will be all right. MRS. J. G.

TRAFFORD, PA.—I promised to spread devotion to Mother Seton if my niece would be accepted in a Catholic school for retarded children. I have prayed daily for 12 years to Mother Seton for this favor. My prayer was heard recently and the child was accepted and began school this past September. I kept a Mother Seton picture out where others might see it and be inspired to pray to her also. You may use this for publication if you wish. S. M. L.

PITTSBURGH, PA.—At the end of June I made a promise to Mother Seton that if she could get me a summer job, I would write and tell you of a favor granted. Jobs were exceedingly hard to find this summer and by the third week of June I had despaired of finding one. Then within a week after I asked Mother Seton, a two day job came through. The

night that I finished that, I got a permanent summer job. I am grateful and Mother Seton has a new campaigner. Miss V. T.

LONG BRANCH, N. J.—My husband had been without steady employment for many months. He also had a bad back which made it quite impossible to do heavy labor. I prayed to Mother Seton to help him find work. Just before Christmas he got a job. It wasn't hard labor, but it was still hard work. He succeeded at it and his back seemed to get better. MRS. R. L.

JENKINTOWN, PA.—On January 18, 1960, we went to our doctor for a check-up. Our doctor ordered my husband to another doctor, for what he thought would mean surgery on the left side of his forehead. We came home, thought it over and decided to wait and prayed to Mother Seton. I put her relic on his forehead. We are so happy to see a big improvement. MRS. J. O'N.

ROSEVILLE, MICH.—My two year old son was burned over 35 per cent of his lower body and legs with second and third degree burns. I received a prayer and booklet about Mother Seton, and my family, friends and relatives all prayed to her for my son's recovery. I believe that through the prayers to Mother Seton he was able to bear the pain and not disturb the burns from healing. The doctors thought at first grafting would have to be done, and he would have bad scars. No grafting was done and the doctor informed us that because he is so young, he may out-grow the remaining scars. MRS. J. F.

DENVILLE, N. J.—I had arthritis and along with it there developed a terrible itch inside my right ankle. It became so unbearable, I had all the flesh dug out to the bone despite the efforts of skin specialists, cancer clinics, etc., to give relief. A sister told me about Mother Seton and gave me one of her relics. Several days later a nurse bandaged my ankle and I placed the relic within the bandage. That night, after praying to Mother Seton, a great amount of water came from the opening and from then on a healing process took place. Not long after there was nothing to show of the horrible wound, but a dark discoloration of the skin, which is still there to remind me how fortunate I was to have enlisted Mother Seton's aid. E. C. B.

NO ONE, READING THE LETTERS OF ELIZABETH SETON, CAN EVER DOUBT HER ESSENTIAL HUMANNESS. While striving for and attaining the highest sanctity, she never lost her involvement with life, her interest in people, her love of friends, her pride in her children, her delight in nature. The following letter to her lifelong friend, Mrs. Eliza Sadler, a Protestant, was written after Mother Seton's conversion, after she had embraced the religious life, and when she was well on the way to the heights of holiness she eventually attained. It is not a spiritual letter in the strict sense, but it contains herself and the elements of life which she used well in forming her spiritual life. Every friend, every mother, every woman, indeed every human being, will see something of themselves in it:

May 12, 1811

*My dear Eliza,*

*You are in affliction, I know. Your silence gives me an uneasiness I try to shake off, but in vain. Is our dear and excellent Craig's<sup>1</sup> malady increased, or has the change of season benefited him as it has me?*

*Your uncle's death wounds you deeply. I would ask you a string of questions, but know it is but trifling to be so childish in that way, as I am often disposed to be. Yet you know the contradiction—how often we are interested at a distance for objects which, when near, we considered with security, almost unconscious of the extent of our interest in them.*

*It is some months since I had a line from Sister,<sup>2</sup> Due,<sup>3</sup> or yourself. Since the weather is more mild and settled, I am stronger. I have more enjoyment of a mother's consolations every time I have the children together (which is always once, sometimes twice, a week)<sup>4</sup> than I ever could have hoped for. Every one promises largely—what can I do but hope and pray. Precious beings, I should be truly proud to present them to you: MY Anna, MY William, MY Richard, MY Kate, MY Rebecca—specially if you could see her on her knees, milking her little white cow, and afterwards loaded with a little tin pail in each hand running over, and her eyes glistening with delight of the wonders she can do.*

*Kit's greatest pleasure is in feeding the lambs with salt from her hands; Anna's in decking the graves of dear C and H;<sup>5</sup> and the boys, in asking Mother unceasing questions about all their friends and connections, and their hopes and prospects in life. How often is poor Mother obliged to point upwards.*

*My dear Eliza, will you write me soon? Give me at least the hope that you will, sometime or other, come to the Mountain. If I had worlds, I would give them to show Sister, Due and yourself the beauty of its shades in the setting sun, the waving of the wheat fields, our woods covered with flowers, and the quiet, contented look of our habitation and its inhabitants. That is, in time of work; but in playtime our boarders make variety enough. Come, dear Eliza, at least try to come, say at least you will try to come; what is the atom of distance in this world, if only you can find the opportunity? Peace, dearest, and affectionate remembrances.*

Your

EAS

*Aunt Sadler and Uncle Craig is one of the unfailing sources of the children's remembrances. William will tell you everything his Uncle Craig ever said to him, every kind of indulgence. They can tell every article of your room upstairs—where the sofa stood on which you sat, the little bird, wooden cow, the white dog, etc.—and all ends with a sigh which goes round, and commonly finishes with a silent kiss from Mother. I tell you, come, dear Eliza.*

<sup>1</sup> William Craig, probably the brother of Mrs. Sadler.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Bayley Craig, Mother Seton's half-sister and an in-law of Mrs. Craig.

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Dupleix, a mutual friend of Mother Seton and Mrs. Sadler.

<sup>4</sup> The boys went to school at Mount St. Mary's, two miles across the valley from Mother Seton's school; the girls were with their mother.

<sup>5</sup> Cecilia and Harriet Seton, sisters-in-law of Mother Seton, who died and were buried at Emmitsburg.

# ... So Can We

(Continued from Page 1)

as she was repeatedly urged to do and for the best reasons, and been tolerably happy and respected, but did not. This, however, was not yet sanctity. In a sense, heroic as it was, it was merely a surface victory. Many another woman has met the rebuffs of life as courageously and unflinchingly as she, but they are not saints. The final glorious victory of Elizabeth Seton was not that she came to grips with life and won, but that she came to grips with herself and won. And she began to walk in this path of interior victory from her childhood.

Hurt to her soul by her father's thoughtlessness, she not merely suffered in silence, but took the greater leap forward by choosing God to be her Father, faithful and true. Not content merely to accept the ill-will of her stepmother, she actively showed her good for evil, by showering affection upon her half-brothers and half-sisters, the children of this same indifferent woman, minding them, teaching them their prayers, entirely free of all jealousy. Again, Elizabeth not only disciplined her passion for balls and dancing, but she subjected her conscience to a rigorous examination, noting in her day-book her awareness that thoughts of the latest beau or newest man-about-town had the power to distract her during prayer-time. Nor was the pleasant life of genteel society enough for her: she must share her good things with the less fortunate, as a "Protestant Sister of Charity." She was not satisfied merely to pray for the conversion of her casually religious husband; she importuned him by the day, the week, and the year, until she had led him to church and, at the last, to a truly holy death.

We could go on and on. The examples of Elizabeth's constant reaching forward and beyond are as numerous as the moments of her life. And it is especially significant that the examples given are all drawn from her Protestant days. She grasped early the limitlessness of God. She understood from the beginning that she could never know—and who of us can?—the boundaries of goodness, holiness, perfection, laid out for her by God. She saw that, were she to accomplish everything God had in mind for her, she must try and try

and try again, must push forward unceasingly, right up to her last breath, for only then could she be certain that she had arrived at her, or rather God's destination.

The lesson is obvious. No one can be content with the present. No one can coast through life. No one can say, "God is satisfied with me." Not until he knows for sure, when he sees God face to face, that He is satisfied.

Every man and woman, in the quiet, reflective moments, sees the truth of this. But it is this very seeing, this acknowledgment, that gives rise to a sort of despair. It is at this point that the weakness of human nature rushes in to discourage us—aided by the splendor of the saints: by the thought that they, too, reached this point, that they, too, made this acknowledgment, that they, too, felt the moment of despair, but that they pushed past and went on to win. It is this that overwhelms us: *how could we ever...*? And we leave it, sadly, at that.

Let us push past in our own way. Let us get to the bottom of things. Let us dwell, not overmuch upon the splendor, but upon the humanity of God's holy ones.

It should occur to us, for example, that a soul like Elizabeth Seton, caught in the web of beauty and personality and charm, had a much greater struggle than we. It should brighten our spirits to reflect, for example, that we are much further along the spiritual road than she was when she started. It should strengthen our resolve to reflect further that, basically, she did nothing that we could not do; for, basically, it is a question of hard work, of "no-nonsense," of sticking at it—and every-one, with the help of God's grace, is capable of that.

The end, the attainment, is a question of degree. Elizabeth Seton, God willing, shall go on to achieve canonization, while we, very probably, shall be immortalized only as names on tombstones. But in heaven she shall not be more satisfied than we, if we have realized the potentialities God has put in us.

Let us think about it, let us resolve—for it can be done.

## Mother Seton Guild

Emmitsburg, Maryland

Form 3547 Requested

The Mother Seton Guild, as the Apostolic Postulation, is the official organization for the Cause under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, Rome.

Guild members not only share in the noble work of making Mother Seton better known and loved by means of literature, etc., but their membership subscriptions and donations make possible this promotion.

The MOTHER SETON GUILD BULLETIN is issued quarterly to Guild members.

**LET US GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR OUR VENERABLE MOTHER SETON**