



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

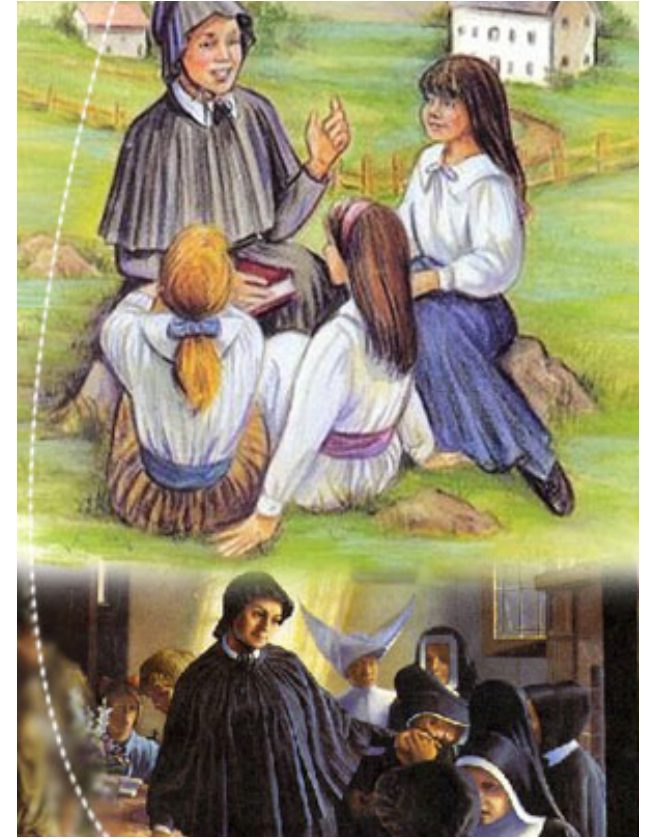
the many ways in which she  
embodied motherhood



She was mother to five children of her own and seven of her husband's orphaned siblings.



There were students who leaned on her for maternal guidance, as did a religious community that grew to worldwide proportions.



Many people of her own time and since have felt her nurturing comfort.





Like so many today, the Setons saw their fortune turn from prosperity to financial ruin. The shipping business went bankrupt in 1801 and the family's Manhattan home and possessions were lost.



As the family's financial problems escalated, the husband, William, suffered from tuberculosis.



Elizabeth experienced the sorrow of widowhood and the daunting prospect of life as a single mother. She rose to the challenge, encouraged by her faith in God.



It is often said that "mother" is a child's first teacher. Certainly that was true in the Seton family where Elizabeth's initial students were her own children, and her husband's siblings whom she tutored.



As a single mother she turned to teaching to support her family, although her efforts were frustrated by anti-Catholic sentiment that made it difficult for her to secure and maintain students.



Elizabeth was a native New Yorker but in 1808, she accepted an invitation to move to Baltimore to work at a Catholic school. The following year, with her children and a small group of women, she embarked for the then-remote town of Emmitsburg, Maryland.





Now “Mother Seton”, she pioneered St. Joseph's Academy and Free School, the country's first free Catholic school for girls staffed by religious women.



From a handful of students (including her daughters) at the start, the education program begun under Mother Seton's influence grew in many ways, including the establishment of St. Joseph's College for Women.



Today, Emmitsburg's Mother Seton School is a direct descendent of Elizabeth Ann Seton's first school. She had a great influence on the beginnings of Catholic Schools in America.

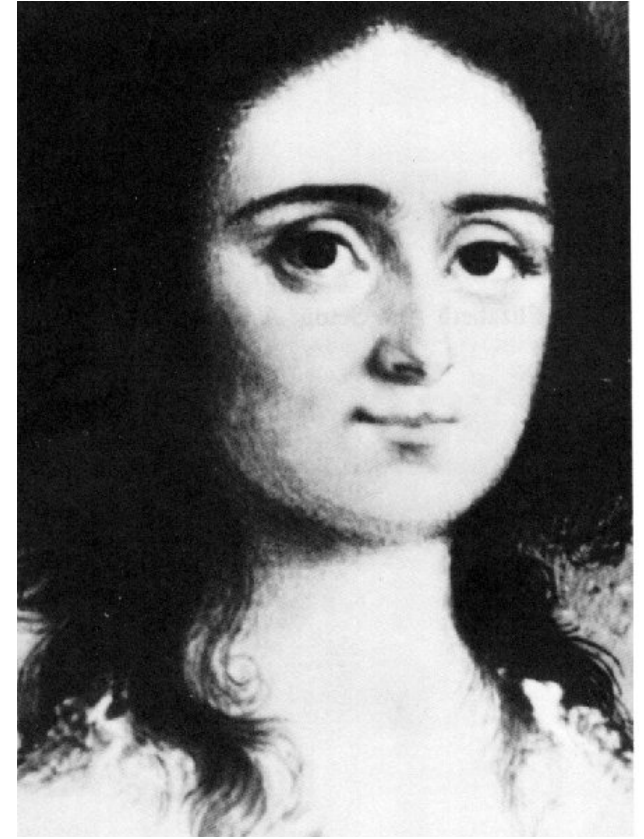




Mother Seton founded America's first native religious community for women, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. This can be considered an extension of Elizabeth's passion to comfort and care for the suffering, a motherly attribute that characterized her life.



Even as a fashionable New York matron, she was known for nursing the sick and dying among family, friends and neighbors.



Before similar tragedy struck her own family, she had helped to found a society for the "Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children."



Under her leadership, the Sisters in Emmitsburg served in orphanages, schools, hospitals and as advocates for the poor.



During the Civil War, Elizabeth Ann Seton's Sisters were nurses in Army hospitals and in improvised field hospitals. They nursed the wounded and were called "angels of the battlefield" by both Union and Confederate soldiers.



Mother Seton found joy and fulfillment in her life in Emmitsburg, writing in 1811, "The solitude of our mountains ... skipping children over the woods ... This is no dream of fancy and only a small part of the reality of our blessing."





Elizabeth knew deep sadness-- two of her daughters, Anna and Rebecca, died of tuberculosis. At age 46, Elizabeth also perished from the disease. By her side was her one surviving daughter, Catherine Charlton.



Elizabeth Ann Seton was a mother in every respect, loving her own children, her extended family, her spiritual daughters, her students and persons in need, with maternal care.



In 1975 she was canonized, the first citizen born in the U.S. to be declared a Saint in the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, this woman whose stature became larger than life was also, simply, a mom.



From the article

**“Elizabeth Ann Seton: a mother for all seasons”**

written for the Frederick News-Post by Elizabeth Scott Shatto, with assistance from the Daughters of Charity and the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.