



2025 History Essay Contest

Homeschool 5th Grade Winner

The Life and Devotion of Elizabeth Ann Seton

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Who could have imagined that an Episcopalian woman, Elizabeth Ann Seton, would convert to Catholicism? Despite the people around her who would cut her off and threaten her, she started Catholic education in America, founded the Sisters of Charity, and became Abbess Mother Seton, the first woman canonized in North America.

St. Elizabeth was an inspiring example of Christian charity. Even at a very young age, she was a very kind and religious person. When she married a wealthy ship owner, William, she became very wealthy. Even though she was so well off, she went to the grossest, muddiest places to help the poor and nurse the sick. She had five children with William and she was living a very happy life until one day William came home, very pale, and told her that pirates were seizing their ships and they were ruined. That was only the beginning of their troubles. William was so stressed by the losses he became ill. They had to sell lots of their possessions in order to buy food. Trying to improve William's health, they sailed to Italy to visit some friends of William's. They sailed on the *Shepherdess*, taking along their eldest daughter Annina. When they reached Italy, they were immediately put in quarantine because they could possibly have yellow fever. They were quarantined for three weeks. The prison was cold and dark. Their friends who were wealthy bankers sent them blankets and food and toys for their daughter. Elizabeth jumped rope to keep warm and to cheer up William. When they were finally taken out of prison,

they arrived at their friends' house and were welcomed with warm hospitality. William started to feel better and asked the doctor if he could go for a stroll. The doctor refused. William became very angry. The doctor, thinking the argument would do more harm than the walk, let him go. But afterwards, William felt dizzy, and he died shortly afterwards.

That was one of Elizabeth's first of many losses to come. Her heart was broken and she was devastated. Her friends tried to cheer her up, and invited Elizabeth to come to church with them. She agreed and went to a Catholic church for the first time. It was so beautiful and lovely it brought tears to her eyes. That was when she decided to convert. And convert she did.

As soon as she got back to America, she was baptized a Roman Catholic and attended mass weekly. Her friends and relatives were appalled. They never talked to her again, and never spoke of her in public. Despite these challenges, she remained a devout Catholic and didn't back down. By this time, Elizabeth had to sell everything. Even when she was finding it hard to put food on the table, she still helped the poor and the sick. After word got around that she had converted to Catholicism, a couple who was looking for a Catholic teacher asked her to teach in their school, and she accepted. That was when her teaching career began. The priest in the local area heard that she was teaching a Catholic school and asked her if she could pray to start a new Catholic school. She accepted, and started to pray for it. Prayers were answered shortly after. A rich man donated \$1,000 dollars and some land. With the money she built a small school building out of wood. The building had leaks, and the windows weren't secure enough, so rain and snow got in. Still, she taught the school and didn't complain. There were still more problems. There were too many people and the building wasn't big enough so she prayed for a bigger building. Her prayers were finally answered. A man donated more money which she used to make a bigger stone building. It had lots of leaks and problems as well.

Even though she often had to sleep on wet beds, Elizabeth wanted to become a nun and start her own nunnery, so she asked permission from the bishop. When he finally sent a letter granting her permission, Elizabeth took her vows on July 19, 1813, and became "Mother Seton", starting the Sisters of Charity. She continued to help the poor and the sick and prayed, fasted, and did penance. The Sisters also helped her care for the poor, sick and hungry.

Mother Seton set a good example for everyone. She had great faith, and never gave up. She

taught us to pray and hope to love God and respect him. She helped the Church a great amount, causing children to learn about the one true God to read the Bible and to understand and learn from it. Without Mother Seton, the Catholic education system might not exist, that's how important her life was. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton died on January 4, 1821. Because of her great contributions to the Catholic Church in America, Mother Seton was canonized a saint on September 14, 1975. Her feast day is January 4. She was the first American woman to be canonized a saint.

Bibliography

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