

Elizabeth Ann Bayley grew up during the Revolutionary War and the founding of our new country. Her family was friends with influential Americans such as John Jay and Alexander Hamilton. Born in New York in 1774, she never would have expected to become the first canonized Catholic Saint born in the United States of America—especially because she wasn't even Catholic!

Elizabeth married William Seton in an Episcopal church and they went on to have five children. Unfortunately, William became ill with tuberculosis. He and Elizabeth traveled to Italy in seeking a cure, where they stayed with their friends. The Filicchi welcomed the Setons into their home and shared their Catholic faith with them. Elizabeth was fascinated by their faith in the Eucharist: They believed that Jesus really meant it when he said that the bread wine offered at Mass are truly transformed into *his body and blood*!

Elizabeth noticed how the Italian people expressed their belief and devotion in the Eucharist. She saw them participate in Eucharistic Processions through the streets. She knew that they would pray before the Blessed Sacrament in their chapels and bring Holy Communion to the sick. Elizabeth even attended Holy Mass and was deeply moved by the reverence and belief of the people.

Sadly, William died in Italy in 1803. Elizabeth came home to New York, but she continued to learn more about the Catholic faith. The knowledge that Jesus Christ was waiting for her in the Catholic Church was always on her mind. During her morning walks, she said, "I see nothing but the little bright cross on St. Peter's steeple," marking where the Blessed Sacrament resided in the nearby Catholic church.

Elizabeth became Catholic in 1804, despite her Protestant friends questioning her new beliefs. She told them, "Nothing is so very hard to believe in it (the Eucharist), since it is he (God) who does it. Years ago I read in some old book, when you say a thing is a miracle and you do not understand it, you say nothing against the mystery itself, but only acknowledge your limited knowledge and comprehension which does not understand a thousand things you must yet own to be true."

Elizabeth's joy when she was finally able to receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is an important lesson for Catholics today. When she received her first communion in 1805, she wrote to the Filicchi family about it, using capital letters to convey her excitement: "At last, Amabilia, at last! GOD IS MINE and I AM HIS."

She moved her family to Baltimore, Maryland where she helped start America's Catholic education system, became a religious sister in 1809, and founded the Sisters of the Charity of St. Joseph. The Eucharist remained her resting place. She arranged her desk such that she could see the chapel's sanctuary lamp through her doorway. Then as she lay dying in 1821, she had her sisters to position her bed so she could see the tabernacle.

Elizabeth Ann Seton's story is at the heart of America's Church; and the Eucharist is at the heart of her story.

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton



St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Woodcut Print by Connor Miller

American Eucharistic Witnesses

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Timeline

CAN YOU PUT THESE EVENTS FROM THE LIFE OF ELIZABETH ANN SETON IN ORDER?
ADD A NUMBER NEXT TO EACH FACT, USING 1 FOR THE FIRST EVENT AND 10 FOR THE LAST.

- _____ TRAVELED TO ITALY
- _____ FOUNDS SISTERS OF CHARITY OF ST. JOSEPH
- _____ BORN IN NEW YORK
- _____ BECOMES A RELIGIOUS SISTER
- _____ JOINED THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND RECEIVED HOLY COMMUNION
- _____ CANONIZED- FIRST SAINT BORN IN AMERICA
- _____ BECAME A MOTHER TO FIVE CHILDREN
- _____ MOVED TO BALTIMORE, MARYLAND
- _____ MARRIED WILLIAM SETON
- _____ HELPED FOUND AMERICAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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TIMELINE ANSWER KEY: 4,9,1,8,5,10,3,6,2,7

Reflection Questions

ELIZABETH WAS FIRST INTRODUCED TO CATHOLICISM AND THE EUCHARIST BY HER FRIENDS THE FILICCHIS AND THE PEOPLE OF THEIR ITALIAN COMMUNITY. HOW HAVE OTHER PEOPLE HELPED YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR FAITH?

ELIZABETH WITNESSED EUCHARISTIC PROCESSIONS, PRAYING BEFORE THE TABERNACLE, AND REVERANT MASSES. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE WAYS TO PRAY WITH JESUS IN THE EUCHARIST?

WHEN ELIZABETH TOLD FRIENDS THAT SHE WAS BECOMING CATHOLIC, THEY DISAGREED WITH HER BELIEF IN THE EUCHARIST. READ THE QUOTE WITH HER RESPONSE (ON THE BOTTOM LEFT). WHAT HELPS YOU BELIEVE IN THE MIRACLE OF THE EUCHARIST?