

January 4: St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821)

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton, born August 28, 1774, was linked by birth and marriage to the leading families of New York, and enjoyed the fruits of high society. Reared an Episcopalian by her mother and stepmother, she learned the value of prayer, scripture and a nightly examination of conscience. Her father did not have much use for churches but was a great humanitarian, teaching his daughter to love and serve others.

The early deaths of her mother in 1777 and her baby sister in 1778 gave Elizabeth a feel for eternity and the transitory nature of the pilgrim life on earth. Far from being brooding and sullen, she faced each new “holocaust,” as she put it, with hopeful cheerfulness.

At 19, Elizabeth married a wealthy businessman, William Magee Seton. They had five children before his business failed and he died of tuberculosis. At 30, Elizabeth was widowed, penniless, with five small children to support.

While in Italy with her dying husband, Elizabeth witnessed Catholic faith in action through family friends. Three basic points led her to become a Catholic: belief in the Real Presence, devotion to the Blessed Mother and conviction that the Catholic Church led back to the apostles and to Christ. Many of her family and friends rejected her when she became a Catholic in March 1805. To support her children, she opened a school in Baltimore. From the beginning, her group followed the lines of a religious community, which was officially founded in 1809.

The thousand or more letters of Mother Seton reveal the development of her spiritual life from ordinary goodness to heroic sanctity. She suffered great trials of sickness, misunderstanding, the death of loved ones (her husband and two young daughters) and the heartache of a wayward son. She died January 4, 1821, and became the first American-born citizen to be beatified (1963) and then canonized (1975). She is buried in Emmitsburg, Maryland.

JANUARY 2021

Prayer from Taizé

Holy Spirit, you constantly renew our communion with God. You strengthen our confidence that evil has only a limited time. We entrust to you all those who lack hope, and by our prayer we want to prepare the way for your coming.

Prayers of Intercession for our parish

- Let us pray that the Lord will help us to share with everyone the hope, joy, love and peace brought to us by the birth of Christ.
- Let us pray that, as we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we rejoice and are not afraid, placing our trust in God who hears us and for whom nothing is impossible.

Some tweets by Pope Francis

- Hunger is not only a tragedy for humanity. It is shameful. Faced with this reality, we cannot remain insensitive or paralysed. We are all responsible.
- Prayer is the centre of life. If there is prayer, even a brother, a sister, becomes important. Those who adore God love His children. Those who respect God respect human beings.
- Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships, from the anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic flurry of activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy.
- All of us are able to give without expecting anything in return, to do good to others without demanding that they treat us well in return. As Jesus told his disciples: 'Without cost you have received, without cost you are to give.'
- Lord, Father of our human family, you created all human beings equal in dignity; pour forth into our hearts a fraternal spirit. Move us to create healthier societies and a more dignified world, a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.

January 23: Saint Marianne Cope (1838-1918)

Though leprosy scared off most people in 19th-century Hawaii, that disease sparked great generosity in the woman who came to be known as Mother Marianne of Molokai. Her courage helped tremendously to improve the lives of its victims in Hawaii. In January 1838 a daughter was born to Peter and Barbara Cope of Hessen-Darmstadt, Germany and named after her mother. Two years later the Cope family emigrated to the United States and settled in Utica, New York. Young Barbara went in August 1862 to the Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis in Syracuse, New York. After profession in November 1863, she began teaching at the parish school.

Mother Marianne held the post of superior in several places and was twice the novice mistress of her congregation. Elected provincial in 1877, Marianne was unanimously re-elected in 1881. Two years later the Hawaiian government was searching for someone to run the Kakaako Receiving Station for people suspected of having leprosy. When the request was put to the Syracuse sisters, 35 of them volunteered immediately. On October 22, 1883, Marianne and six other sisters left for Hawaii where they took charge of the Kakaako Receiving Station outside Honolulu; on the island of Maui they also opened a hospital and a school for girls.

In 1888, Marianne and two sisters went to Molokai to open a home for “unprotected women and girls” there. She took charge of the home that Damien de Veuster, later canonised, had established for men and boys. Marianne changed life on Molokai by introducing cleanliness, pride and fun to the colony. Bright scarves and pretty dresses for the women were part of her approach. She continued her work faithfully; her sisters attracted vocations among the Hawaiian people, and still work on Molokai.

Mother Marianne died on August 9, 1918 and was canonized in 2012. Cardinal Martins, speaking of her special love for persons suffering from leprosy, said “She saw in them the suffering face of Jesus. Like the Good Samaritan, she became their mother.”

Helena, the mother of Constantine, discovers the relics of the cross of Christ, and reflects on the Three Kings:

"Like me," she said, "you were late in coming. The shepherds were here long before; even the cattle. They had joined the chorus of angels before you were on your way...."

How laboriously you came, taking sights and calculating, where the shepherds had run barefoot! How odd you looked on the road, attended by what outlandish liveries, laden with such preposterous gifts!

You came at length to the final stage of your pilgrimage and the great star stood still above you. What did you do? You stopped to call on King Herod. Deadly exchange of compliments, in which began that unending war of mobs and magistrates against the innocent.

Yet you came and were not turned away. You too found room before the manger. Your gifts were not needed, but they were accepted and put carefully by, for they were brought with love. In that new order of charity that had just come to life, there was room for you too. You were not lower in the eyes of the Holy Family than the ox or the ass.

You are my special patrons and patrons of all late-comers, of all who have a tedious journey to make to the truth, of all who are confused with knowledge and speculation, of all who through politeness make themselves partners in guilt, of all who stand in danger by reason of their talents.

Dear cousins, pray for me, and for my poor overloaded son. May he, too, before the end, find kneeling space in the straw. Pray for the great lest they perish utterly....

For his sake who did not reject your curious gifts, pray always for all the learned, the oblique, the delicate. Let them be not quite forgotten at the throne of God, when the simple come into their kingdom.