

January 6 **Elizabeth Ann Seton** Founder of the American Sisters of Charity, 1821

Elizabeth Ann Seton was born in New York City on August 28, 1774. She was the founder of the Sisters of Charity, the first community of sisters established in the United States. Elizabeth Seton was reared in The Episcopal Church, her family having been loyalists during the American Revolution. From a young age, she desired to aid the sick and poor. In 1795 she married William Seton, and their family came to include five children. During this time she also founded the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children. In 1801, the family business went bankrupt. In 1803, her husband showed the symptoms of tuberculosis, and they set sail for Italy in the hopes that the warm climate would cure his disease. The Italian authorities, fearing yellow fever, quarantined them in a cold stone hospital for the dying. William soon died and left Elizabeth a young widow with five children and few resources. While struggling with these losses, she was befriended by Roman Catholics and, as a result, was drawn to Roman Catholicism. Returning to New York, she encountered bitter opposition from her Episcopalian family for her new religious leanings. With five children to support, she found herself alone and in financial straits. She turned to Roman Catholic clergy for support and, in 1805, she formally became a member of the Roman Catholic Church. In 1806, she met Father Louis Dubourg, S.S., who wanted to start a congregation of women religious, patterned after the French Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul. In 1809 Elizabeth took vows and became “Mother Seton” to a small community of seven women, known as the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph, dedicated to teaching. The sisters were given land in rural Maryland and, in 1810, they opened St. Joseph’s Free School to educate needy girls. The Sisters intertwined social ministry, education, and religious formation in all their varied works. Seton dispatched sisters to operate orphanages in Philadelphia and New York City. Out of the pioneering work of January 4
28 Elizabeth Seton, five independent communities of the Sisters of Charity now exist, offering ministry and care for the most vulnerable. Elizabeth Ann Seton remained the Mother of the Sisters of Charity until her death on January 4, 1821

Collect Holy God, you blessed Elizabeth Seton with your grace as wife, mother, educator and founder, that she might spend her life in service to your people: Help us, by her example, to express our love for you in love of others; through Jesus Christ our Redeemer, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

Lessons

Romans 16:19–20

For while your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, I want you to be wise in what is good and guileless in what is evil. The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Psalm 119:105–112

105 Your word is a lantern to my feet *
and a light upon my path.

106 I have sworn and am determined *
to keep your righteous judgments.

107 I am deeply troubled; *
preserve my life, O Lord, according to your word.

108 Accept, O Lord, the willing tribute of my lips, *
and teach me your judgments.

109 My life is always in my hand, *
yet I do not forget your law.

110 The wicked have set a trap for me, *
but I have not strayed from your commandments.

111 Your decrees are my inheritance for ever; *
truly, they are the joy of my heart.

112 I have applied my heart to fulfill your statutes *
for ever and to the end.

13 I hate those who have a divided heart, *
but your law do I love.

Luke 14:15–23

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.’