50th Anniversary – Canonization of St. Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Basilica of the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

Emmitsburg, Maryland

14. IX. 2025

1. **Exaltation of the Holy Cross**
2. **Moments ago, in the Gospel acclamation, we exalted in the Cross of Christ.**

**“We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you,**

**because by your Cross you have redeemed the world.”**

**The exaltation of the Cross has nothing to do with glorifying suffering as such,**

**but everything to do with giving praise and thanks to God’s Incarnate Son.**

**In obedience to the Father’s saving will,**

**he came into the world, took on our humanity, preached the Good News,**

**healed our infirmities, and was obedient to the point of laying down his life**

**to save us from our sins and to open for us the way to heaven.**

**Thus, “God highly exalted his Son,” as St. Paul says,**

**and gave him the Name above every other name.”**

**And that is why we exalt in the Cross and acclaim Jesus as Lord,**

**acknowledging with deepest gratitude**

**that, “There is no other name in heaven or on earth by which we are saved.”**

1. **But how do we exalt in the Cross? How can we say with St. Paul,**

**“…may I never boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,**

**through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world”?**

**How can we say with an ancient Christian writer that,**

**“The fruit of this tree is not death but life, not darkness but light”?**

**Do we merely praise the Crucified Love of the Savior with our lips?**

**Is it just a matter of words and feelings?**

**The valiant woman whose canonization we celebrate anew teaches otherwise.**

***St. Elizabeth Ann Seton exalted the Cross by her life in all its amazing iterations.***

1. **Early Years**

**To be sure, she was born into wealth and privilege.**

**Her father, Dr. Richard Bayley, and her mother, Catherine,**

**were prominent in New York society.**

**Devout Episcopalians, they extended themselves in charity,**

**especially to immigrants disembarking on Staten Island,**

**many of them suffering from yellow fever.**

**Unfortunately, her mother died when Elizabeth was only three years old**

**and her baby sister died the next year.**

**When her father remarried, all seemed to be going well for a time,**

**that is, until Dr. Bayley and his wife, Charlotte, separated.**

**That ushered in a period of great loneliness and darkness in her life.**

**As she grieved and longed for a loving mother,**

**the Cross was already asserting itself in her young life**

**Even so, she did not allow herself to wallow in self-pity**

**but instead embraced her faith and extended herself in charity to others.**

**The Providence of God was already cultivating her soul for great things.**

1. **Marriage**
2. **Her marriage to William Seton opened a new and happy chapter in her life.**

**They were deeply in love and together brought into the world five children.**

**To the end of her eventful life, Elizabeth would be a devoted and loving mother.**

**Meanwhile, Elizabeth was growing in the depth of her faith,**

**and began to experience a deep longing for a closer union with her Lord,**

**a union that would result in her sharing more deeply in the Cross of her Savior.**

**Not only did her husband’s business go into bankruptcy,**

**it was also found that William was suffering from tuberculosis.**

**On the advice of a physician, William and Elizabeth went to Italy**

**where it was thought that the warmer climate would do him good.**

**But it was not to be, and while still a young woman, Elizabeth became a widow.**

**Never angry with God, never bitter, she instead deepened her spiritual quest.**

**Through the kindness and witness of the Felichhi family,**

**who were devout Catholics as well as friends of her late husband,**

**she found herself attracted to the Catholic faith, especially**

**the Church’s teaching on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.**

**Witnessing a Corpus Christi procession through the streets of Livorno, Italy,**

**she wrote to her sister: “How happy we would be if we believed**

**what these dear souls believe, that they possess God in this Sacrament, and**

**that he remains in their churches, and is carried to them when they are sick.”**

**Not only was Cross asserting itself in her life, it was bearing good fruit!**

1. **Conversion and Founding of the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s**
2. **Upon returning to New York, she converted to Catholicism.**

**This brought her much joy as she embraced the fullness of faith**

**but this gift and grace proved costly**

**as many of her former friends strongly disapproved of her decision.**

**Nor was her spiritual quest complete.**

**Confirmed by Archbishop John Carroll,**

**she felt drawn to a life of complete dedication and service**

**that eventually led her, first to Baltimore, then here to Emmitsburg**

**where she founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph’s.**

**Even as we know well the story of this foundation, let us not imagine**

**that we fully appreciate how risky and how difficult it was.**

**Drawing her strength from the Cross, she brought to life in the United States**

**the charism of St. Louise de Marillac and St. Vincent de Paul**

**and set in motion beautiful ministries of Catholic education and healthcare.**

1. **The Cross, the Tree of Life**
2. **In her writings, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton acknowledged the power of the Cross.**

**In one of her prayers she asked Jesus for the grace**

**to “kiss the path of Calvary sprinkled with Thy blood,**

**since it is that path alone which leads me to Thee.”**

**Among her meditations is an extended reflection entitled,**

**“Of the Communion of the Cross” in which she teaches that**

**“we receive no grace in the communion of the Holy Eucharist**

**but in proportion as we receive it the communion of the Cross…”**

**She also says that our communion with the Cross is deepened in suffering.**

**“The lover of Christ,” she said, “can never have enough of his Cross.”**

**With deepest faith and purity of heart her gaze penetrated**

**beneath the pitiable appearance of the suffering Savior to his underlying glory,**

**the glory to which we attain when we bear our sufferings in union with him.**

**Thus she demonstrates for us how “how to spin straw into gold”**

**and to find in the challenges and trials of our lives**

**that newness of life which derives only from the Cross of Christ.**

1. **No matter what your vocation, no matter the highways and byways of your life,**

**chances are that St. Elizabeth Ann Seton walked the same road.**

**From eternity she reaches out to show us**

**that true holiness of life is attainable in every vocation,**

**amid every responsibility, amid every trial and suffering.**

**From eternity, she teaches us to exalt the Cross in our own lives.**

**And so, with grateful hearts, we proclaim, as did Pope St. Paul VI 50 years ago,**

**“Elizabeth Ann Seton is a saint!”**