



## Saint of the Month: Heaven's Heroes



### Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton January 4

**Goal:** To provide a lesson for children about a saint or saints who exemplify a deep relationship with God and illustrate how to share the lessons learned from the saints with others

**Materials Needed:** This lesson plan, accompanying story, and any necessary materials for follow up activities.

#### Objectives:

1. To assist children in developing the understanding that all of God's people are called to a life of holiness
2. To help children respond appropriately to the question: What is a saint?  
One who:
  - is proclaimed by the Church, after their death, to have lived a life of holiness
  - teaches others about Jesus by their example
  - lives like Jesus
3. To introduce one of our Church's saints, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, telling as much of story that you feel will interest the children at your grade level
4. To learn that Elizabeth Ann was a saint because she lived in a way that respected the Gospel of Jesus
5. To learn that we are called by God to share the Gospel with our lives
6. To help the children develop listening skills

#### Procedure:

1. Use the follow up questions (below)
2. Present follow-up activity below (optional). Any follow-up activity can be substituted.

#### Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

On September 14, 1975, Pope Paul VI declared a new saint in the Church: Elizabeth Ann Seton. She was the first American born person to be canonized by the Church. In her short life of 46 years, she filled many roles: a society belle, a wife, a mother, a teacher and a Catholic religious Sister. Born Elizabeth Ann Bayley, this American saint, was not always Catholic: she was a convert. She was born in 1774 in New York City; her family was Episcopalian and very wealthy. Her mother, the daughter of an Episcopal priest, died when Elizabeth was three. She grew up learning French, music, and good manners. She read her Scripture—especially the Psalms—every day and went to church on Sundays. When she was 19 she married William Seton, who was a wealthy businessman. At first all went well; the couple was happy and had five children: Anna Maria, William, Richard, Catherine and Rebecca. But business problems in William's company caused them to have serious financial problems. Soon, William became very sick with tuberculosis and needed much rest. During this time Elizabeth began to work with newly arrived from Ireland. She was saddened by their terrible living conditions but she found no despair in them because they had strong Catholic faith and constantly prayed.

There was much disease in the United States at this time and yellow fever became an epidemic in New York. Although the disease did not touch her family, Elizabeth's husband's tuberculosis also worsened at this time. Elizabeth remembered the Psalms she had read in her childhood. They once again put her heart at ease and she told her children: "We will not

worry; God will get us through this." A doctor recommended a warmer climate for William, so Elizabeth sold everything they had to get enough money for herself, her husband, and her oldest child, Anna, to go on a voyage to Italy.

The younger children stayed in New York with friends. Mr. Seton improved on the journey. Upon arrival in Italy they could not leave the ship: it was quarantined because it had come from New York where yellow fever was an epidemic. Elizabeth prayed continuously as her husband grew worse and died, leaving her a widow with five small children. She moved in with Catholic friends in Italy, who invited her to Mass with them. When she knelt before the Blessed Sacrament, she was filled with a peace she had never known. Elizabeth decided to go home and get on with life for herself and her children.

In New York she found a small apartment and decided to open a school for girls in her home. Soon she was making a fair living. Elizabeth began to think more and more about the Catholic faith. She prayed for a full year before she walked into a Catholic Church and told the priest: "I want to become a Catholic."

These words changed her life. Many friends thought she was making a mistake and would have nothing to do with her. Parents took their children out of her school. Soon, she was running out of money and asked God, "What shall I do?" She had her answer when she received a letter from a priest in Baltimore asking if she would come there: they were in need of Catholic teachers. Elizabeth trusted in God's direction and set out for Baltimore with her children to live and teach.

During the next year, though she still had her children to care for, Elizabeth felt God calling her to become a religious Sister. Bishop John Carroll gave her permission to do so and to start a new community, the Sisters of Charity. Their mission was to care for the children of the poor. Elizabeth's new name was Mother Seton. Mother was sent with seven Sisters and her three daughters in a covered wagon for their new home in Emmitsburg, Maryland. There she opened St. Joseph's Free School. Both black and white children attended, which was unheard of at the time. Elizabeth's school was the first Catholic school in the United States. Soon so many pupils began attending that the sisters had to build a larger school and a convent to train novices so they might go out to other cities and teach. She also opened the first Catholic orphanage in Emmitsburg. During this time three of Elizabeth's own children died. While her life was marked by great loss, she continuously turned to God for guidance and strength. Despite so many hardships, Elizabeth never lost sight of her life's goal: to do God's will.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton died in 1820 at the age 46.

**Pray:** God our Father, please help us to learn from the example of Mother Seton. Let us to turn to you for guidance, to listen in prayer, and to follow Your will for our lives. Amen.

**Follow-up Questions:** (add, omit, re-word as appropriate for your grade level)

1. Think about Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's life in three time frames: early, middle, and late. How did God make His will known to her in each of these periods?
2. How did this saint's life impact the history of the Catholic Church in the United States?
3. Saint Elizabeth showed great courage throughout her life. Do you think that means she was not afraid? Why or why not?

**Follow-up Activities:**

1. Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton travelled from New York to Baltimore to Emmitsburg, Maryland—about 250 miles. During this month, set a goal for each student to raise 250 pennies for the missions. Send the donation to Missionary Childhood so that more Catholic schools and orphanages can be opened around the world.
2. Play Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton's Trail Game (rules and instructions attached). The winning group gets World Mission Rosaries from Missionary Childhood!
3. Many children in the missions are still affected by tuberculosis and yellow fever. Research these diseases—where they have been eradicated and where they still exist. Make small group presentations to your class about what you find out. Then, brainstorm about ways you can make a difference for children who still suffer today.