HOMILY OF FR. TOMAŽ MAVRIČ, CM, SUPERIOR GENERAL FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANONIZATION OF SAINT ELIZABETH ANN SETON

Basilica of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Emmitsburg, Maryland, 13 September 2025

Readings: Sirach 26:1-4, 13-16; Psalm 44:1-4; 1 Corinthians 13:4-13; Luke 10:38-42

"Elizabeth Ann Seton is a Saint!" Pope Paul VI's proclamation on 14 September 1975 is the reason we are here today. We have gathered to celebrate the 50th anniversary of her canonization. It was a tremendous joy when, five decades ago, the Catholics of the United States, and indeed all Americans, could experience the realization that one of your own is a saint, the first native-born citizen of this great country to be so recognized.

I do not need to speak to you about Mother Seton's history. Most of you here present know much better that I do. If you do not, you can learn it from the wonderful exhibits in the museum just outside this basilica. I come as a pilgrim, and so I would like to focus more on her spirituality, what led her to become a Catholic, and why we consider all the Congregations that emanated from her foundation members of the Vincentian Family in the United States.

Elizabeth acquired a concern and respect for the poor from her father, who served as a public health doctor in New York City. She saw how he treated the lowly and vulnerable. After her marriage, she founded an association to help young widows with small children. She thus put into practice the Hymn to Charity, which we just heard in the second reading.

Today's first reading, from the Book of Sirach, speaks of the joy a good wife brings to her husband. Elizabeth certainly did so for her beloved Will. She bore him five children, caring for them with much love. She helped him in his business, working late at night on the books. When he fell ill with tuberculosis, she did all in her power to bring him healing, even traveling to Italy's better climate with him.

Elizabeth Ann Bayley was raised Episcopalian in New York City. Initially, she had a lukewarm faith, but gradually grew closer to Jesus through meditation on Scripture. It was this reflection, particularly on the psalms, which sustained her throughout the illness and death of her husband in Italy. It was there too, that their Italian friends welcomed the grieving widow and introduced her to Catholicism.

There are several central mysteries in Saint Vincent de Paul's spirituality including the Incarnation, the Trinity, the Eucharist, Providence, and Mary. Of these, Elizabeth Ann was attracted particularly to two of them: Providence and the Eucharist. Her life was a living example of following the will of God and trusting in his foresight. "The first end I propose in our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills it; and thirdly to do it because it is his will." Her trust was unflinching, knowing that God's Providence would

be there always to protect her. “The black clouds I foresee may pass by harmless, or if in Providence of grace they fall on me, Providence has an immense umbrella to hinder or break the force of the storm. What a comfort.” In this, she surely was in line with Saint Vincent’s reflection on this theme: “Let us be submissive to Providence; He will see to our affairs in His own time and in His own way.”

Elizabeth’s greatest attraction, however, was to the Eucharist. It was that which led her to the Catholic Church. As she wrote in one of her letters from Italy, “My sister dear, how happy would we be if we believed what these dear souls believe, that they possess God in the Sacrament and that he remains in their churches and is carried to them when they are sick.”

Upon returning to the United States, she struggled with the idea of becoming a Catholic. Most of her family and friends would be opposed to her conversion and New York was hostile to Catholics. However, she eventually made up her mind, writing, “I will go peaceably and firmly to the Catholic Church: for if Faith is so important to our salvation, I will seek it where true Faith first began, seek it among those who received it from God Himself.”

Shortly after professing her faith, she made her First Holy Communion, writing of her joy to Amabilia Filicchi in Italy, “At last Amabilia—at last—GOD IS MINE and I AM HIS! Now let all go its round—I HAVE RECEIVED HIM.”

In speaking to a dying Brother, Saint Vincent told him that “love is inventive to infinity,” explaining thus Christ’s institution of the Eucharist. Mother Seton recognized God’s presence everywhere, but especially in the Eucharist. “God is everywhere, in the very air I breathe, yes everywhere, but in His Sacrament of the Altar He is as present actually and really as my soul within my body; in His Sacrifice daily offered as really as once offered on the Cross.”

At the beginning of this homily, I mentioned that we consider all the Congregations that derived from Mother Seton’s foundation to be members of the Vincentian Family. That is because, even before the arrival of my Vincentian confreres in the United States, Elizabeth Ann Seton had adapted the Vincentian rule of the Daughters of Charity, which the Sulpicians had obtained for her from Paris, for her Sisters of Charity of Saint Joseph’s. Thus, we might consider her the foundress of the Vincentian Family in the United States.

What began as a mustard seed has developed into a large tree that continues to grow, as we discover new Congregations and lay Associations around the world. Our Family endures because we recognize the importance of collaborating with other branches, of feeling and accepting the Vincentian Family as my Family. I am not just a member of the Congregation of the Mission, but am also a member of the Vincentian Family. If each of us acknowledges this, then we will be more united and able to work together with one another.

Collaboration helps us in two ways:

1) from within: it strengthens our bonds, our friendship, our brotherhood and sisterhood. Our God-given talents are shared and we become more affective and effective in working together.

2) from without: we become a greater force to serve more effectively and affectively the people who have so many different needs.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth Ann imitated both Martha and Mary from today's gospel. She never neglected the practical duties of wife, mother, and foundress, but also kept her eyes fixed on the Lord. In fact, as she lay dying, it is reported that her Spiritual Director came to bring her the Eucharist. When he saw that she was agitated, he said, "Peace, Mother! here is the Lord of peace. Have you any pain? Do you wish to confess?" "No, no; only give Him to me," she replied, with a fervor that indicated the burning desire of her heart to be united to Jesus Christ.

May we too approach the Eucharist today with that intensity of love and belief, wanting only to be united to Jesus, Our Lord and Our God.

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