

Mother Seton's Story

The *Courier-Journal*, in this final article, concludes the *Mother Seton Story*, as told by Edward Steimer, staff writer for the Pittsburgh Catholic. Episcopalian-born Elizabeth Bayley Seton may be the first native-born American citizen raised to sainthood in the Catholic Church. Following her role as wife, mother (of five children), and widow, this onetime belle of New York society embraced the Catholic faith and founded the American Sisters of Charity.

By EDWARD STEIMER

Before summer came in 1809, while Mrs. Seton, her three daughters and Cecilia O'Conway were still living in the house on Baltimore's Paca Street, three more young postulants had joined them there.

Cecilia had learned about Mrs. Seton through Father Pierre Badae, a Sulpician priest who was teaching at nearby St. Mary College and who gave religious instruction to the Seton school's pupils, preparing them for First Holy Communion.

It was he who introduced Maria Murphy to the little band. She came, like Cecilia, from Philadelphia. Then in May came two more, Mary Ann Butler, also from Philadelphia, and Susan Clossy of New York. Soon it was learned that some young Baltimore girls were interested and in the Emmitsburg area were others who looked forward to the blessings they hoped to enjoy under the spiritual guidance of Elizabeth Seton.

Elizabeth Named Directress
With five aspiring nuns already under one roof, Archbishop Carroll and Father Dubourg began to plan. The first prerequisite allowed them to take simple vows for a year, appointing Elizabeth as directress.

In June, on the feast of Corpus Christi, the five sisters appeared in public for the first time, attending Mass in the nearby St. Mary College chapel. Soon after this Cecilia Seton arrived from New York, so Mother Seton's first convert now became one of her first nuns.

Elizabeth was now, as a spiritual mother, known as Mother Seton, a title bestowed upon her by Archbishop Carroll. "I can give you no just idea," she wrote at this time, "of the precious souls who are daily uniting under my banner which is the Cross of Christ. The tender title of Mother sets me every where, even from lips that have never said the common salutation among strangers."

With so many aspirants to enter the community, she first took a "back force" to Emmitsburg to give the Stone House ready. These four were her daughter Anna, Cecilia Seton, Sister Maria Murphy and Harriet Seton, Cecilia's sister, who had followed Cecilia from New York. Both of the Seton sisters, Harriet especially, were in very ill health but insisted on accompanying Elizabeth. Harriet was as yet not a Catholic.

Elizabeth and Sister Maria wore the new nun's habit. They went by covered wagon with the feeble Harriet lying inside. The others walked much of those 50 miles: "The dogs and pigs came out to meet us," Mother Seton commented humorously, "and the geese stretched their necks" in astonishment at sight of the motley company.

At Emmitsburg they found the stone farmhouse not yet completed. It was two miles from a new seminary just then being established by its first president, Father John Dubois, a refugee from the French Revolution who later became Bishop of New York. It is Mt. St. Mary Seminary, to which Father Dubois later added Mt. St. Mary College.

Nuns Live in Cabin
While building his seminary, Father Dubois had been "roughing it" in a small two-room log cabin which he now turned over to the pioneer nuns and went to stay at the seminary. There they lived until February, 1809—five in two crude rooms!

The mountain scenery and healthful climate of that part of Maryland are wonderful in the autumn, and both Harriet and Cecilia improved in spite of the tough housing. Harriet became a Catholic and was baptized. Mother Seton's second convert. However, Harriet died in December.

That winter of 1809-10 was a hard one in the log house, which



HER TOMB — this structure at Emmitsburg encloses the remains of Mother Elizabeth Seton, who died there Jan. 4, 1821. It is located in the mother-house cemetery.

was a mere shack without glass in the windows, through which the snow blew. The nuns shoveled it out. They went with little food at times, and several were ill with head colds. "All hearts," wrote Mother Seton, "applied themselves to mortification with such good will that they found the hardest coffee, the buttermilk soup, and the stale lard, too delicate food."

School Opens
They moved into the Stone House in February, 1810, although it was only roughly completed, and opened school on Washington's Birthday, with a

Judge Backs Girl's Bid To Be Nun

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giving a general and Christian education."

They were graduated from the eighth grade at St. Agatha's and attended St. Mary's Academy, Portland, for two years. They then attended public school.

Alice then went to Holy Names College, Spokane, Wash., on a scholarship, on an agreement with her parents that she would make her own way at school, the judge said.

"As a consequence she secured employment at Holy Names College in the kitchen and cafeteria at 85 cents per hour," he stated. "During this school year, and prior thereto, the annual income of the parents was in the approximate sum of \$11,000 and their contributions were in the nature of clothes, some spending money and fare home on occasions."

Washington's Historic Note To U.S. Catholics Recalled

Baltimore — (NC) — A photo copy of an original four-page letter of George Washington to the Catholics of the United States has been reproduced in the current issues of *The Catholic Review*, archdiocesan weekly.

THE IMPORTANT document is preserved in the archives of the Baltimore Cathedral. Dated, March 12, 1790, it is a reply to a congratulatory message sent late in 1789 to President Washington, and signed by Bishop John Carroll on behalf of the clergy, and by four prominent Catholic laymen in the name of the Catholic laity.

One of the signers was the Bishop's cousin, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence.

large enrollment. But another sorrow came in April, when Cecilia Seton died.

Seven other postulants had already joined the original five at Emmitsburg during the winter. In March came Elizabeth Boyle, a convert who became Mother Seton's closest colleague and later first superior of the New York mother-house.

The Stone House was already overflowing, and a new structure, the White House, was erected and occupied Feb. 29, 1811, when Father Dubois carried the Blessed Sacrament from the tiny chapel in the Stone House to the new chapel in the White House.

French Rule Adopted

Together with her ecclesiastical superiors, Mother Seton had decided to adopt the rule of St. Vincent De Paul's French Sisters of Charity. Father Benedict Flaget (later Bishop of Bardonia, Kentucky) brought this rule from France and it was adopted and approved with minor modifications by Archbishop Carroll in 1817. Mother Seton was formally elected the first superior, and later twice reelected.

The new order's school for girls at Emmitsburg was its only support at this time, but soon another was started for little boys, and still another in 1818 for German Catholic children in Philadelphia. Just before her death Mother Seton was planning a new school in New York. These were the beginnings which gave her the distinction of "foundress of the parochial school system in the United States."

Mother Seton was 47 when she died in 1821 at Emmitsburg. About 15 of her nuns had already preceded her to the little St. Joseph Cemetery, including Anna Marie and Rebecca, her daughters. More than 50 of her nuns survived her.

She died after praying the "Agnus Christi" at St. Ignace, with her nuns around her and her last surviving daughter, Catherine nearby. Her very last word was "Jesus!"

Alice joined the Catholic Church November 28, 1866, on her 18th birthday at Spokane. Lois had joined the Church earlier.

THE GIRLS' rupture with their parents occurred in June, 1957, when Mr. Miller declared that they had either to renounce their faith or live apart from their parents and support themselves. Mrs. Miller agreed with her husband. The girls then left home.

Alice informed her parents by letter during the Christmas holidays of 1957 that she planned to enter St. Mary's Convent. At that time, the judge's ruling declared, Mr. Miller "admonished Alice that he would make a 'nervous wreck' out of her by means of legal proceedings to prevent her entry into the defendant order."

One of Mr. Miller's attorneys said he believed the father would appeal Judge Hiebert's ruling.

PARABLES FOR TODAY

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cause he is without merit but because he is without means.

Today we are attracted by noise like the children who ran after the Pied Piper. We listen not to the man who speaks the truth, but more often to the man who speaks the loudest and longest. Too often we mistake the scoundrel for the saint and only because the scoundrel may wear soft garments and live in the palaces of kings while the saint may be hidden in a hairshirt and rags.

THE QUESTION raised here has nothing to do with the old conflict between the haves and have-nots. We are making no comparisons between riches and poverty. We are only saying that the world is very unreliable, even unreasonable, when it comes to seeing men just as they really are. The justice of God, in other words, is not the justice of men. God sees us in all our secret nakedness of soul. The world sees us only against the bleak background of its own silly passions and prejudices.

This striking difference between the justice of God and the judgment of the world is made very clear in Christ's parable about the rich man Dives and the poor man Lazarus.

Here Our Lord draws a contrast between two men as they appear to the world and as they appear to God. Dives is described as the rich man, clothed in purple and fine linen, and dining sumptuously every day. Lazarus is a miserable beggar, sitting at the rich man's gate, and begging crumbs from his table. Only the dogs come to lick Lazarus' sores.

In this first scene Christ shows us Dives and Lazarus as the world and we see them. Dives is respected and admired for what he has. He is held in esteem and envied, in spite of what he is not and in spite of what he has not. The beggar at the gate is a foul figure dismissed as "a blot on the summer morn."

THE SECOND scene of Christ's story rolls back the curtain on the world of eternity. Both Dives and Lazarus have died. Both have received from God the reward of their deeds and misdeeds. Here in eternity the judgment and the jokes of the world are reversed. Now the lowly beggar rests in heaven or in "Abraham's bosom," as Christ says. The richman is buried deep in the flames and fires of hell.

Now we hear the once merciless Dives appeal to Abraham for mercy. "Send Lazarus," he begs, "that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue. For I am tormented in this flame."

Abraham's reply is the reply of divine justice. "Son," he tells disillusioned Dives, "remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things. Now he is comforted and thou art tormented."



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THE END OF Christ's story is like the end of the world. Dives and Lazarus are finally seen as God sees them. While they were in the world Dives and Lazarus each had a secret side unknown and unseen by the world. Hidden both in the richman and the beggar was a man that nobody knew but God. Only God saw through the shame and sham of Dives who had so much in this world that felt he needed nothing else. Only God saw the secret of the beggar's soul, that he had a treasure stored up in heaven even while he lived in rags and rejection.

CHRIST'S PARABLE is pointed at our modern society like the sharp sword of the avenging angel. It warns us that who men are in this world may hide the fact of what they really are.

What men have often blinds us to what they do not have. There is only tragedy for the men who own the world — its praises and its pleasures—and own nothing else. As Christ pointed out, a man may own the whole world and not own his own soul, even lose his own soul.

This terrible truth of the justice of God is the lesson that Christ taught the world from the very beginning. It is the lesson which too many of us learn only at the end when it is too late.

Like Cardinal Wolsey we discover the true value of the world's judgement only when the world has abandoned us. Then we can only say as Wolsey did: "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, He would not have abandoned me in mine age, have left me naked to mine enemies."

The pomp and prejudice of the world passes soon enough. In the end the only thing that matters is not what the world thinks of us but only what God thinks of us.

THE STORY of Dives and Lazarus contradicts not only the pomp and praise of the world. It contradicts also the world's prejudice and propaganda against justice.

Men are wrong when they say that there is no justice in this world. It is not true that goodness is never recognized in this life. God recognizes it.

When Dives was feasting on his fine food and Lazarus was begging the crumbs God was watching. God always sees just what we are today even though He holds His final judgement until the end.

Even when the world tramples on its beggars, scorns its saints and stonies its prophets, there is justice. God always sees in all of us the truth — the man nobody knows.

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'Noisy Ghosts' In Seaford?

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pled, but that because of original sin or possible personal sin in a participating adult, a person is more or less subject to the power of the evil spirit.

There are a number of conditions to be met before exorcism may be employed. A most important one is that it may not be used without special permission of the bishop in whose diocese the act is to be performed.

There is no special form of exorcism for haunted houses or for poltergeists. However, the ordinary rite of exorcism has been used in regard to places thought infested with mischievous spirits—sometimes with success and other times not.

Poltergeists may leave as suddenly as they have appeared. However, in a number of cases, the place being exorcised has been burned down by poltergeists and when a new building is built on the same spot, they do not return.

THE FOLLOWING conditions must govern the use of exorcism:

• In each case, diabolical possession must be established as a fact.

• The exorcist should be a priest of a holy and blameless life who is intelligent, courageous and humble. Often he is newly ordained. He must prepare for the act by prayer and fasting.

• The medical or scientific facts of the case should be left to those qualified in those fields.

• If a person is to be exorcised, he should be prepared by confession and communion and

by prayer and fasting, if possible.

• The rite should be performed privately in a church or chapel, if possible, with only members of the family of the possessed as witnesses.

• The ritual should be carried out with confidence in God and in the authority vested in the exorcist.

• The Holy Eucharist should not be brought near the possessed person because of possible irreverence. But holy water, the crucifix and relics of saints should be used.

• If the evil spirits do not leave, the exorcism should be repeated until they do.

INVESTIGATORS of poltergeists have discovered that in apparently authentic cases certain circumstances usually exist

and they can be used as a norm to determine whether mischievous spirits are involved. The circumstances are:

• The presence of one specific person who witnessed these extraordinary happenings is essential for recurrence of the phenomena. In some cases, a second person's presence has seemed necessary.

In either case, if the person is not present in the house, nothing happens, but when he or she returns to the scene, the noises and strange actions begin again.

• The key person is often a girl reaching adolescence and sometimes a boy going through the same stage, but rarely is it a grown adult.

• There appears to be no reasonable motive or explanation for the happenings.

Priest Denies News Report Of Plans For Exorcism

Seaford, N.Y. — (NC) — The priest who blessed the house here in which a large number of reportedly unexplainable events have happened has denied a report he plans to use the Church's rite of exorcism.

INFORMED OF the report in the current issue of a large secular news weekly (Time, March 17), Father William J. McLeod of St. William's Abbot Church said "there is absolutely no basis for the statement."

Father McLeod blessed the house of the James M. Herr

mann family on February 11, about a week after the start of a series of mysterious events. The family, members of the parish, requested the blessing.

THE PRIEST reported he was told that after the blessing, the apparently inexplicable events ceased for several days, but then began to recur again.

According to Mr. and Mrs. Hermann, bottles have become unscrambled and some of the contents spilled, household objects have been propelled from their places.

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