

PASTORAL PERSPECTIVE

By Bishop Joseph L. Hogan

American Citizen of Heaven

By the time you read this article, an event of great significance for the American Church will have been a reality of three days.



Pope Paul VI will have canonized Mother Elizabeth Ann Seton, proclaiming her "A Citizen of Heaven and worthy of veneration by the Universal Church."

I write these reflections before leaving for Rome with some sixty pilgrims. The celebration will be held Sept. 14 in St. Peter's Square rather than in the Basilica because of the enthusiastic response of American Catholics. I shall report my impressions upon my return.

What is so unusual about her canonization? The fact is that she is the **first native born U.S. Citizen** to be so acclaimed. This means that almost two hundred years after our birth as a nation, the whole Church is summoned to respect America as a soil in which authentic and heroic sanctity can flourish. I feel deeply privileged to be able to be in Rome for this milestone in our national history.

In the past we have had a few whose extraordinary sanctity has been officially recognized as "venerable" or "blessed" (stages which can be prior steps to canonization). But most of these were imports to our land, who came as missionaries to assist the struggling infant American Church. The closest we had come before was the canonization of St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, an American citizen with native roots planted in Italy. We could never be sure of the greater influence in her life — her native soil or her Chicago experience. With Mother Seton there is no room for doubt. She

was "as American as apple pie" — spent her whole life here except for nine months in Italy, where her husband had gone in a futile effort to recuperate his failing health.

I lived in an International House of Studies in Rome from 1949 to 1951 and came home with the distinct impression that there was a conviction abroad that America provided no climate for the growth of saints. How would you feel if the Rector of the House isolated all American students from the rest of the 'community' lest, as he said, "You may contaminate the student body."

On another occasion, a kind Cardinal Pizzardo, the head of the Congregation of Seminary and University Studies, authorized the Angelicum University faculty to allow me to take my final exams and defend my doctoral thesis at a time convenient for my return home for my brother's priestly ordination. My Moderator, after recovering from this shock, asked me how much I had to pay for this unusual concession. Devilishly, I replied: "Only fifty dollars, and the Cardinal said that for an added fifty dollars he would be willing to take the exam for me."

This experience makes my joy overwhelming as the world is presented proof that the United States offers the potential for even heroic sanctity for its citizens.

I truly believe that our land has, from its beginnings, been sanctified by saints who have walked among us and who remain with us. You have known as I have parents, grandparents, relatives and friends who have left us a rich legacy of fidelity to Gospel demands. We recall their blessing to us in the Liturgy of November 1 — the day that is the common feast of the unheralded Saints.

But it is a great day when one of our very own receives such public and universal

recognition. It is, I believe, especially providential when the scoundrels among us get so much publicity for their deviant conduct, that we are offered good news to inspire us.

Mother Seton's formative years coincided with the birth of our Country. Born in 1774 as the First Continental Congress was assembling to establish our independence as a nation, she is truly a Charter American Citizen. She typified the faith and courage and optimism that exemplify the spirit that has made America great in the past — the spirit that alone can guarantee its greatness in days to come.

She lived this creed: Do God's will each day in the manner He wills it and because it is His Will. May she teach us to live it — for that is the mold in which saints are fashioned.

This prayer has been written by her Daughters of Charity on the occasion of her canonization:

"Lord God, You blessed St. Elizabeth Seton with gifts of grace as wife and mother, educator and foundress, so that she might spend her life in service to your people. Through her example and prayers may we learn to express our love for You in love for our fellow men and women.

"We ask this through Our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen."

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us!

How beautiful the sound of that invocation!

'Who Is This Jesus?'

The Holy Father, in the course of the General Audience Aug. 27, addressed the large gathering in St. Peter's Square as follows:



The Holy Year is an encounter with Jesus Christ, a very special meeting. It obliges whoever celebrates it to make a radical reflection upon his own faith, upon his own belief in Christ, upon his definition, upon his reality. This is an extremely important logical process, a necessary process of thought, not merely speculative thought but a total determination of one's own life-style. It is an interior epilogue upon questions of the relationship between ourselves and Christ, a relationship to acknowledge and to perfect, as the faithful do, or a relationship to be established in a new and positive sense, as do those who, God bless them, become converted. Or again it may be taken in a negative sense with terrible existential responsibility, as those do who seek to remain indifferent, estranged, hostile to a relationship with Christ that ought to be vital and renovating, a relationship with Christ who is encountered upon the many paths ever open to the faith, or contacted at this central station of the Holy Year.

During this Jubilee season we have spoken of Christianity in general. Then we spoke of discovering anew the novelty of the Christian message, that is, of the change arising from the advent of a system of thought, of life, of communication with God and men, a system which we could summarize in the formula "kingdom of heaven" or "kingdom of God" of the Gospel message. Afterwards we looked for the source of this message and we found it in Jesus who ap-

peared in humble guise like an ordinary working-man, of Nazarean origin according to public opinion, a commonplace man in the short-sighted view of the profane observer. We have heard it repeated from so-called well-informed sources: "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?" (Mk 6, 3), as indeed he was. But this remark did not exhaust the question, because the people asked in amazement where had Jesus learned such doctrine and how had he worked miracles.

It was logical to recognize in him a prophet, a teacher. We have already mentioned the importance attached to this title of Teacher which Jesus himself indicated as the high and exclusive prerogative of the awaited Messiah, the Christ. But this same title of Teacher did not say everything about Jesus. He let it be understood that he himself was the Teacher, the Messiah, the Christ, so long awaited, so greatly exalted; so much so, indeed, that from the beginning of his entry upon the scene of his public life, the first disciples understood that Jesus was a mysterious personality.

Among these disciples, for example, was Nathanael, (also known as Bartholomew). On meeting Jesus, and seeing himself known to him with an infallible introspective look, he exclaimed: "Rabbi, (that is, Teacher), You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" (John 1, 49). The title Teacher is not enough then to define Jesus: another title complements it, that of "Son of God." This title is indeed hard to explain, but it is enough to enlarge the figure of Jesus to make him more than just a Teacher, more than a Messiah of simply human stature. In the same Gospel picture, at the mouth of the Jordan near the Dead Sea, another definition of Jesus rang out again: "Behold the Lamb of God", that is, the privileged and predestined victim of a mysterious sacrifice (John 1, 29 and 36). Curiosity and astonishment grew even though Jesus, speaking of himself, usually

described himself only as "Son of Man", another apparently simple title, but full of biblical overtones and deep significance.

To speak of Jesus as he appears in the course of the Gospel has become something very attractive, inevitable and compelling, but at the same time, difficult and ambiguous. So much so indeed; that the question: "Who is Jesus?" lent itself to the most varied answers, and even in the mind of the disciples it was not at all clear who he might be. Then it was, you remember, that Jesus, going along with the same little group of disciples towards Caesarea Philippi, in the North of Palestine near Mount Hermon, puts them a searching question: "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" After a variety of confused answers, taken from public opinion, Jesus pressed home the point of the discourse by putting the straight question to his future Apostles: "But who do you say that I am?" Then it was that Peter, enlightened by God the Father, replies, surely also in the name of the rest, and gives the famous, invincible definition of Jesus: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" (Matt 16, 16).

Sons and Brethren, we shall say no more at the moment upon the the contents and history of this revelation. You know, of course, that later on in the Gospel, especially in the narrative of the Evangelist, John, the question about the mysterious identity of Jesus, plays a major part. It is dramatized by the ruthless opposition of the Pharisees, the Scribes, the Sadducees, and by the growing interest of the people as a whole (cf. John 12, 12). Then it becomes more official and tragic precisely because the messianic and divine title of Son of God, which Jesus, Son of man, claimed for himself in his two-fold religious and political trial, will be the reason for his condemnation to the Cross, Jesus dies martyr and victim of his mysterious identity as God-Man; and through this identity of his, he will rise again on the third day and thus will be the Saviour of the world.