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Decision Making Then and Now

BY

MARYANNA COYLE, S.C.

The planning committee for this symposium provided a clue to their expectations regarding this presentation in the questions they posed. What methods did Elizabeth and the young community use to make decisions? What influenced decisions regarding the life and mission of the community for Elizabeth and her companions? What insights does this give us? One does not find the answer to these questions by simply reviewing records about specific decisions. Rather, it is necessary to explore the formation of Elizabeth Ann Seton, because the patterns of her own life significantly influenced the shaping of the Emmitsburg community, its faith, life, and spirit.

The most valuable sources revealing Elizabeth's life journey that molded her faith, her relationships, and her spirituality, are Elizabeth's own words, found in her journals, and her correspondence. In reflecting on her writings as well as on several authors' biographical sketches, I discover five recurring patterns. These characteristics lived out in another century and another culture, have relevance to us in both our personal and communal process for decision-making. From her writings I hope to probe with you why these patterns might effectively inform and shape our own journey, our relationships, and our leadership style. The patterns woven intricately into the tapestry of Elizabeth Seton's life can be named as: a contemplative spirit, a discerning heart, a compassionate presence, faithful service, and a courageous vision.

Her Contemplative Spirit

What is revealed early in Elizabeth's childhood was a contemplative spirit. Her hunger for the solitude of contemplation, her nourishment and refuge in it, her strength and fidelity to it, seems to epitomize her being. Her innate longing and searching for God is recorded in her memories of her eighth year in New Rochelle. Mother Seton wrote:

I always loved to walk and pray alone, admiration of the clouds.
Delight to gaze at them; always with the look for my mother and

little Kitty in heaven. Delight to sit alone by the water-side, wandering hours on the shore, singing and gathering shells.¹

At this early age, a sense of awareness of the transcendental, as well as a glimpse of her loneliness, indicates the direction of her contemplative spirit. Contemplation was consistently her source of hope and consolation. In her *Italian Journal*, written while in the Lazaretto in 1803, she recalls such consolation at fourteen years of age when her father was in England. She describes wandering alone into the woods and finding that special setting where she could appreciate the world of nature and experience a deep awareness of God's presence in her life. She wrote:

The air still, a clear blue vault above, the numberless sounds of spring melody and joy, the sweet clovers and wild flowers I had got by the way, and a heart as innocent as a human heart could be, filled with ever enthusiastic love of God and admiration of his works. Still I can feel every sensation that passed through my soul. I thought at that time, my father did not care for me. Well, God was my Father, my all. I prayed, sang hymns, and laughed, talking to myself of how far He could place me above all sorrow. Then I lay still to enjoy the heavenly peace that came over my soul, and I am sure, in the two hours so enjoyed, grew ten years in my spiritual life.²

At the age of twenty-nine, Elizabeth so vividly describes this singular event, and so clearly reveals her contemplative spirit, that sings and laughs and talks to herself, finding God's presence surrounding and embracing her. In her recollection, she directly alludes to her cognizance of growth in the spiritual life, and places deep value on the formative periods of solitude.

Her writings also express a contemplative spirit that sustained and uplifted both William and Anna, during their confinement in the Lazaretto:

With God as our portion, there is no prison in high walls and bolts, no sorrow in the soul though beset with present cares and gloomy prospects. For this freedom I can never be sufficiently thankful, as in my William's case, it keeps alive what in his weak state of body

¹ Ellin M. Kelly, *Numerous Choirs: A Chronicle of Elizabeth Bayley Seton and her Spiritual Daughters, 1: The Seton Years, 1774–1821* (Evansville: Mater Dei Provincialate, 1981), 18.

² *Ibid.*, 30.

would naturally fail. Often when he hears me repeat the psalms of triumph in God, and read Saint Paul's faith in Christ with my whole soul, it so enlivens his spirit that he makes them also his own, and all our sorrows are turned into joy... While I live, while I have my being in time and through eternity, let me sing praise to my God.³

Had not Elizabeth's life pattern of a contemplative spirit, rooted in her confidence that God was her portion, been her source of energy, how could she have so courageously endured the abandonment, the suffering and William's death? This pattern was such a fabric of her being, that it engendered hope, resignation and anticipation in her dying husband.

In tracing both the pattern and development of this contemplative spirit in Elizabeth Seton, I reflect on Pamela Hayes' insights in *The Heart is a Sacred Space, A Reflection for 2000 a.d.* Hayes describes contemplation as "taking a long and penetrating look at the sacred space where God is, until we really see...As the Spirit moves within us, contemplation gradually becomes more and more the silence that echoes the word, and the stillness that reflects the presence of God."⁴

Throughout her life, Elizabeth constantly took this "long and penetrating look at the sacred space where God is." In her looking, she discovered her faith. In her seeing, she chose conversion. In her discerning, she embraced her call. Elizabeth Seton found her solace and her strength in the solitude and stillness of contemplation. The fruits of her contemplation are found in her notes on the Spiritual Life.

Your first step in this heavenly way is to contract a habit of the presence of God and the spirit of recollection. Let divine love cast out fear; fear nothing so much as not to love enough. When your exterior duties oblige you to break silence, keep your interior silence by remembering that you are under the eye of God, that He sees you, and judges what you are doing.⁵

Of particular note are the words that Mother Seton underlined in her writing: "fear nothing so much as not to love enough." Such emphasis underscores Elizabeth's consuming awareness of God's love that overflowed into all her life and actions.

³ Ibid., 70.

⁴ Pamela Hayes, *The Heart is a Sacred Space: A Reflection for 2000 a.d.* (England: Slough, 1995), 27.

⁵ Archives, Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati, *Mother Seton Notebook*, 52.

In reflecting on Elizabeth's orientation toward contemplation, we might discover our own. Her personality and her life circumstances were influencing factors. Throughout her life, a sensitivity to God's presence in all the circumstances of life, sustained her and strengthened her faith. Her personality reveals a child, a young mother, a widow and a religious who needed the solitude and detachment of contemplation; whose soul was nourished by a constant attention to the sacred space where God is.

Elizabeth's pattern of contemplation engages theological reflection. The influence of the events and people in her life, framed in her attentiveness to God working in her life, led to decisive choices and full cooperation with grace.

In her moments of contemplation, we glimpse Elizabeth's closeness to God and her trust in God's guiding hand. Although her natural inclination appears to be toward solitude and reflection, she knew that her life was not to be lived as a hermit in the desert. This struggle for balance is reflected in her counsel to one of her sisters who had the same inclination. "The only fear I have is that you will let the old string pull too hard for solitude and silence." She reminded Cecilia O'Conway that "this is not a country, my dear one, for Solitude and Silence, but of warfare and crucifixion."⁶

In writing about the order of the day for her small community, Mother Seton noted the times set aside for prayer and solitude. She recognized its necessity for both strength and guidance of her sisters as they endured the hardships of poverty and struggle in forming both their community and their ministry.

A Discerning Heart

In his Book, *Listening to the Music of the Spirit*, David Lonsdale describes discernment as, "making choices within the context of a living relationship and continuing dialogue with God."⁷

Mother Seton totally entrusted herself to God with confidence, and allowed God to bring to fulfillment all that He had called her to be. Her cooperation with such grace shapes her relationship with God and the direction of her life. The concrete expression of her continuing dialogue with God occurs in her journey to the Catholic faith. Her journey was one of searching, prayer and counsel. Her fidelity in

⁶ Annabelle M. Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton: 1774-1821* (New York: Scribner, 1988), 271.

⁷ David Lonsdale, S.J., *Listening to the Music of the Spirit* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1994), 34.



Mother Elizabeth Seton. Filicchi portrait.

Canonized 14 September 1975

Courtesy Archives of Saint Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland

reading Scripture, her ability to weigh the harsh criticisms of those opposed to her conversion, and her seeking through dialogue, the true faith, illustrates a discerning heart.

In the discerning period before embracing the Catholic faith, Elizabeth was torn by the persistence of Mr. Hobart, a curate at Trinity Church, and the struggles of her heart. Her letter to Philip Filicchi reveals her feelings and her effort to be light-hearted, yet determined.

They had told me from the beginning that my strong belief in your doctrine must be a temptation, and as I know the old gentleman, (Satan) would naturally trouble a heart so eagerly seeking the will of God, I resolved to double my own weapons against him — humility, prayer, and fasting...For two months I have stood between the two ways, looking steadily upwards but fearing to proceed....⁸

⁸ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, Vol. 1, 88.

Supportive counsel was offered by Father John Cheverus who wrote to Elizabeth in March of 1805, "I believe you are already a good Catholic...I would therefore advise you joining the Catholic Church as soon as possible, and when doubts arise, say only, 'I believe, O Lord, help thou my unbelief.'"⁹

That Elizabeth valued Father Cheverus' counsel is evident in her letter to him, dated 2 April 1805:

I would beg of you advice and counsel how to preserve my inestimable blessing. True, there are many good books, but directions personally addressed from a revered source, most forcibly inspires. For instance, many years, I have preferred those chapters you appoint in Saint John, but from your direction, make it a rule to read them constantly...The Following of Christ has been my consolation through the severest struggles of my life...¹⁰

In a very direct way, Elizabeth acknowledges that her discernment has been furthered and enlightened by the personal direction from another. This attribute is manifested frequently in her correspondence with significant relationships in her life.

The balance Elizabeth brings to her discernment, nurtured by her contemplative spirit is expressed in Mother Seton's Notes:

There are three rules by which we discover what passion prevails in us! What is it that troubles our peace? What most commonly occupies our mind and thoughts? What comforts and consoles us in our troubles?¹¹

As Elizabeth expands these thoughts, she speaks of one particular passion with the strongest root — "the eagerness to follow our first impressions without awaiting the orders of faith, grace, or reason." She suggests a way to overcome this impulse — "we must check ourselves even in things of duty, going peacefully about them, and deferring when possible what we desire most to hasten."¹²

This advice indicates the learnings in Elizabeth Seton's own life. She displayed strong emotions, deep and sensitive feelings. Her struggles uncover the shadow side in her personality and inclinations.

⁹ Melville, *Elizabeth Bayley Seton*, 137.

¹⁰ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, Vol. 1, 92.

¹¹ Mother Seton's Notebook, 157.

¹² *Ibid.*, 160.

Only a woman who felt so deeply could be moved to such strong feelings of abandonment and even the contemplation of suicide. Only a mother who has embraced her children in death could experience the deep depression that was Elizabeth's after the death of her daughter. Her strength was always in her deep trust in God's will in her life.

The questions posed by Mother Seton are relevant to us because they focus on the disposition that we bring to discernment. Purity of intention, inner peace, a contemplative heart, freed Mother Seton in all her choices. This freedom resounds in her own words, "I look neither behind me nor before, but straight upwards without thinking of human calculations."¹³

Elizabeth Seton's wisdom, as well as her spiritual maturity, is apparent in her writings and instructions to her sisters. Just as relevant today are the dispositions that she encouraged within her small community — reliance on God's goodness, open search for God's will, and dialogue with others. These dispositions time and again, enabled Mother Seton to put aside her emotional response and not only to be resigned, but to actively embrace those directions that required submission and resignation.

Discernment embodied in Elizabeth's life, what Lonsdale describes as its ultimate meaning — "placing ourselves as unreservedly as possible in God's hands, asking God to shape our lives through our decisions and thus allowing God to bring to fulfillment the creative work that God has already begun in us."¹⁴

A Compassionate Presence

Matthew Fox, in his book, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*, presents Thomas Merton's description of compassion as "the keen awareness of the interdependence of all living things which are part of one another, and involved in one another."¹⁵ From her solitary wanderings among nature to her interactions with a diversity of people, Elizabeth Seton displayed this keen awareness and involvement.

Why this pattern of compassion is predominant in Elizabeth's life is readily understood when one considers that "the Hebrew word for compassion is derived from the word for womb. 'Womb love, mother love, creative love are all parts of the power we know as compas-

¹³ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁴ Lonsdale, *Listening to the Music of the Spirit*, 34.

¹⁵ Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* (San Francisco: Harper And Row, 1988), 50.

sion."¹⁶ These loves molded the heart of Elizabeth and influenced her generous embrace of life-long friendships.

A compassionate presence shaped the multiple relationships in Elizabeth's life. From earliest childhood she reached out to others as companion and minister. She took pleasure in imitating her own father's concern and care for the poor. In the extended family she acquired with her father's second marriage she exhibited this presence. In fact, her ability to journey with others in their searchings and struggles, appears to have deepened her consciousness of God's presence and God's gifts in her life.

She shared Rebecca's and Harriet Seton's faith struggle. She was a constant correspondent pouring out her heart and offering friendship and solace. Faithful companions on her life journey included Julia Scott, Antonio Filicchi, her spiritual guides, Reverend Cheverus, Reverend Bruté, and Archbishop Carroll.

How Elizabeth valued her soul mates is shown in her own words to Julia Scott: "You are my first, last and most faithful friend, my friend who has borne so many years with all my negligence and who so unchangeable through so many changes."¹⁷

Julia Scott's fidelity to Elizabeth, her prompt response to so many needs, and her on-going concern for Elizabeth's children, was rewarded by Elizabeth's lifelong devotion. She gifted Julia with these words that reveal how she cherished their relationship. "Of the many attachments I have had, you are the only one on earth whom my heart turns to in simple, unsurpassed warmth of confiding love...."¹⁸

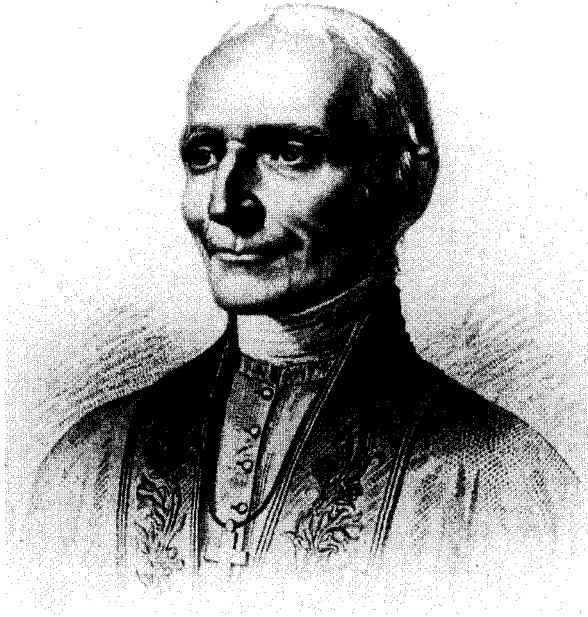
Perhaps the many separations in her own life, increased Elizabeth's need to form strong linkages with her soul mates. She kept in touch, received and offered advice. Elizabeth learned early how to express and share her deepest feelings and her faith life. She listened well and responded with directness, affirmation, and consolation.

Mother Seton frequently reminded her Sisters of their responsibility inherent in the name of charity, for attending to both the physical and spiritual poverty of God's people.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁷ Kelly, *Numerous Choirs*, 148.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 114.



Reverend Simon Bruté, S.S.

Courtesy Archives of Saint Joseph's Provincial House, Emmitsburg, Maryland

We must display for them the tender compassion of Thy goodness, be the ministers of Thy providence for the relief of their miseries, a relief which disposes so well, every heart to Thy better service.¹⁹

Father Bruté, Mother Seton's spiritual director, considered this goal to be central to the very existence of the community.

What does this compassionate presence have to do with the way in which Mother Seton's community made decisions? Sharing in each others' joys and sorrows, struggling with sickness and death, bonded these women and nurtured them. Knowing each other's heart, gave them courage to face the struggles of beginnings and endings, and to make the hard sacrifices because of the vision they shared.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

Listen to Elizabeth's words to her friend, Catherine Duplex (Due) and see in them the expression of a compassionate presence and support in community:

You must be a witness to believe that from Monday to Saturday, all is quiet, no violation of each other's tranquillity, each helping the other with a look of good will that must be seen to be believed.²⁰

As daughter, wife, mother, widow, friend, foundress, Elizabeth Seton's capacity for compassion, and her enduring fidelity to family and friends are a model that was praised by Cardinal Bernardin at the time of her canonization:

She was a wife and mother, a religious sister and educator, a woman who faced crisis and setbacks which she surmounted by love, devotion and openness to the grace of God. In proclaiming her a saint, the Church invites us to respond like her to the challenges in our own life.²¹

Faithful Service

Prophetic were the words Father Matignon wrote to Elizabeth Seton as she considered moving to Canada in order to support her family, "You are destined, I think for some great good in the United States and here you should remain in preference to any other location."²²

This spiritual guide recognized in Elizabeth her deep desire to be religious in service to God's people. Her own upbringing, not always by choice, gave her ample experience in service. Elizabeth herself noted how she enjoyed being with the elderly and also attending to her stepmother's children. Her own father, Dr. Richard Bayley, to whom Elizabeth was very devoted, modeled this concern for the poor in his own service.

As a young woman, Elizabeth was one of the charter members of the Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, the earliest such voluntary association of women in the country. Elizabeth

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

²¹ Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., *The Soul of Elizabeth Seton* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), 8.

²² Joseph I. Dirvin, C.M., *Mrs. Seton* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1962), 199.

noted that "her Widows Society made her delight in the continual contrast of all my blessings with the miseries I saw, yet always resigning them."²³ Little did anyone realize that Elizabeth herself would be among the group being served within the next decade.

The heart of service for Elizabeth was "love of God."²⁴ A love that overflowed in service to others, especially the poor. In her own formative years, and those of her young community, the importance of prayer to nourish one for service, was primary. She told her sisters: "we have to sanctify ourselves for others."

Deeply attuned to both the spiritual and material poverty of God's people Elizabeth counseled her Sisters of their responsibility: "Our name devotes us to their service in any manner we could serve them... we must bring to them the knowledge of and the practice of Thy holy religion, to the habits of a good life."²⁵

So filled was Elizabeth with this spirit of zeal and service that she courageously admonished her pastor about his poor homily. She probably felt more righteous than humble as she reported to Bruté:

Gave our Reverend Hickey a scolding he will remember. The congregation so crowded yesterday, and so many strangers — to whom he gave a sermon so evidently lazy; and answered this morning: 'I did not trouble myself about it, Ma'am.' Oh sir, that awakens my anger. Do you remember a priest holds the honor of God on his lips? Do you not trouble to spread His fire He wishes so much enkindled? If you will not study and prepare while young, what when you are old? There is a mother's lesson.²⁶

In considering the women who were attracted to Elizabeth Seton's founding community, we discover that they possessed similar characteristics. Widows with children, like Rose White, young women seeking a life of prayer and service, as was Cecilia O'Conway. Young women who lived in the area such as Catherine Mullen of Baltimore and Sally Thompson of Emmitsburg, were also among the earliest members.

Undoubtedly they were drawn to this community by the influence of certain clergy and also by the purpose of the foundation.

²³ Quoted in Ellin Kelly and Annabelle Melville, eds., "Dear Remembrances," *Elizabeth Seton Selected Writings* (Paulist Press: New York, 1987), 346.

²⁴ Kelly and Melville, "The Sisters of Charity Meditate on the Service of God," *Selected Writings*, 326.

²⁵ Dirvin, *The Soul of Elizabeth Seton*, 130.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

Mother Seton knew of the French community of Saint Vincent de Paul and made reference to them in the practice of retaining the family name as well as “the rule of our community which amounts only to that regularity necessary for order and no more.”

In pursuit of this faithful service Mother Seton relied on friends for support and financial assistance. In particular, Samuel Cooper became the primary benefactor with the condition that the foundation be made at Emmitsburg. He predicted that from here it would extend throughout the United States.

Applicable to our mission in charity today are the reflections from Mother Seton’s retreat writings:

The service of God consists in the exercise of faith, hope, and charity. Do we give God the service of Faith, in applying to our spiritual duties? Do we look at the trials He sends us with the eyes of our faith? Do we serve God in Hope, looking to His promises, confiding His love; seeking His kingdom and leaving the rest to Him? Does our charity extend to all; is our love for all in our Jesus; is our whole heart truly His...does the life of Jesus animate us? Do we indeed give Him the true service of the heart without which whatever else we give has no value?²⁷

The community’s answer to those questions can be measured by the unanimous consent they gave to taking on their first mission outside Emmitsburg. “The Sisters unanimously agreed that no personal inconvenience should prevent Sisters of Charity doing what duty and charity required.”²⁸

A Courageous Vision

Above all else, good leaders are visionaries. They see beyond what is to what might be, could be, ought to be. They imagine the possibilities, recognize the potential. But more than that, they inspire others to dream along with them. Together the leader and their colleagues shape their individual hopes and aspirations into a single vision for tomorrow. With the dream defined, the leader reinforces it again and again, urging and stimulating everyone to sustain the effort until the dream becomes a reality.²⁹

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁸ Mother Seton’s Notebook, 104.

²⁹ Joseph Champlin, *The Visionary Leader* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 37.

Elizabeth Seton had a clear vision. From her earliest years, it is apparent that her ultimate vision was of eternity. From longing to be with her mother and her sister Kitty in heaven, to her frequent reflections on eternity in her writings, Elizabeth lived her life in anticipation of eternity. Indeed, this longing for eternity was intensified by her desire to be reunited with her loved ones. She saw the relationships begun in life being perfected in eternity.

With courage aptly describes the way in which Elizabeth fulfilled her vision. Time and again she faced personal loss with indomitable courage. She seemed always to find deep within herself that strength, nourished by her deep faith, to move forward and overcome crucial obstacles. Her writings disclose that this courage was not always her immediate or natural response. Yet her vision was strong and enduring. It enabled her to resist temptations and distractions. She had the courage to change and to act upon her heart's prompting. She listened to the spirit inviting her to respond to God's grace. With conviction she prayed:

O whatever is your good pleasure, Your blessed will be done. Let me have only one wish to please you — but one fear — that of offending you, never forgetting the comparison of my own unworthiness with your goodness. Let my soul wait with patience and glorify You for your patience with me.³⁰

In choosing the Catholic faith, Elizabeth responded to call. The deep faith of the Filicchi family enkindled her own. In turn, she witnessed to her convictions and aspirations through courageous acceptance of rejection.

In 1807, Archbishop Carroll made note of her circumstances in his letter to Elizabeth:

Though you are persecuted for obeying the dictates of your conscience and are not allowed to speak with freedom to persons dear and closely allied to you, yet your example and patient...joyful suffering must produce and (have) already worked their effect on the consciences of those who place a higher value on their salvation than on earthly things.³¹

³⁰ Mother Seton's Notebook, 86.

³¹ Dirvin, *The Soul of Elizabeth Seton*, 109.

Time and again, the strength of Elizabeth Seton's vision was tested. She remained undaunted in her convictions, about her faith, about her community and its identity. Conviction about a vision often requires speaking justly. Two events in the founding years of the Emmitsburg Sisters of Charity illustrate this steadfast courage. Both events involve the clergy and the appropriate autonomy of this struggling community.

The community urged Mother Seton to write to Bishop Carroll after Father Dubourg forbade any sister corresponding with Father Babade, who had served as confessor and confidant for Mother Seton and others. Although Father Dubourg had been appointed as the Superior of the small community, Mother Seton felt strongly that it was inappropriate for him to direct the internal order of the community. Her feelings are strongly expressed in the letter to Bishop Carroll in 1809:

As you are truly our Father, it cannot be right to conceal from you that both myself and Sisters have been greatly chagrined by a letter received from our Superior — which required of me not only to give up a correspondence with the person in whom I have the most confidence and to whom I am indebted for my greatest spiritual advantage....³²

Elizabeth goes on to say that although she could have suffered this decision in silence but the "other sisters could not bear it in the same way, and the idea, so difficult to conceal, that our Superior has been acting like a tyrant...has been the source of a thousand temptations...."³³

The greatest threat to the direction of the Emmitsburg community came from the appointment of Father John Baptist David as the second superior after Father Dubourg resigned in "a huff."

Accounts of the relationship between Mother Seton and Father David are quite direct in identifying the dictatorial approach of Father David and Mother Seton's oppression. In desperation and in defense of her community, she poured out her feelings to Bishop Carroll: "Circumstances have all so combined as to create in my mind, a confusion and want of confidence in my superior which is indescribable..."³⁴

³² Dirvin, *Mrs. Seton*, 253.

³³ *Ibid.*, 254.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.



Commemorative medals issued for the canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton.
UPI/Corbis-Bettmann Archive

The conflict continued with assumed plans that Father David was already identifying Rose White to be the administrator of the Emmitsburg community, replacing Mother Seton. In Joseph Dirvin's work, *Mrs. Seton*, it is noted that:

Although she was never to abandon her struggle with David, when she thought he was wrong, which was most of the time — she never acted out of pride but in the defense of the rights of the community, and while she called on Carroll again and again to sustain her, she did not leave her post.³⁵

The journey of Elizabeth Seton's life is one of vision, a vision of conversion and ability to venture into the unknown. In every event of her life, Elizabeth tested the validity of that vision. Her own prophetic words to her dear friend, Antonio, "It is expected that I will be the mother of many daughters" have been re-claimed and perpetuated throughout succeeding generations.³⁶ This humble woman, devoted wife, mother, and religious had the contemplative spirit that continually took a long and penetrating look at the sacred space where God is. This faith-filled woman discerned God's call and allowed it to blossom in her life. With compassion and charity she served God and her Sisters. With courageous vision she risked the unknown, and inspired others to dream with her. With perseverance and her eyes always focused on eternity, she sustained the vision and it has become our reality.

³⁵ Ibid., 271.

³⁶ Elizabeth Seton to Cecilia Seton, 6th October 1808, Archives of Saint Joseph's Provincial House 1-3-3-8: 153.

A Model for Our Times...

First and Foremost a Loving Parent

The situation I am in, as I have told you before, is all I could ever imagine in the world. It is one most congenial with my disposition, sentiments, and views of peace, (happiness, you know, there is not). I am enjoying the liberty of solitude, country life, and plenty of every good which I think essential to our natural wants, with every advantage of mental enjoyment.

The thought of living out of our Valley would seem impossible, if I belonged only to myself and did not have my five children's welfare to consider, but the dear ones have their first claim on me as their sole parent. This must ever remain inviolate. Consequently, if at any period, the duties I am engaged in with the Sisters of Charity should interfere with those I owe to my children, I have solemnly engaged with our good Bishop John Carroll, as well as my own conscience, to give the darlings their rights, and to prefer their advantage in everything.

(Elizabeth Seton to Juliana Sitegreaves Scott, 20 July 1810, ASJPH 1-3-3-6:83.)