Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Give them something to eat yourselves” (Mark 6:37).

1 John 4:7-10; Mark 6:34-44

Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton

Correction: *St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac founded the Daughters of Charity in Paris in 1633. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton founded the Sisters of Charity in 1809 in Emmitsburg, MD. She modeled her community on the spirit and Rule of the Daughters and translated the life of St. Louise de Marillac from French into English. She died in 1821, and in 1850 the Sisters of Charity in Emmitsburg joined the Daughters of Charity. For a more complete biography of Mother Seton, see the Wikipedia article online or visit the site of the National Shrine of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg. Contact the bookstore at the Shrine about a recent and well documented life of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton by Catherine O'Donnell. My thanks to Sister Mary Xavier McKenna D.C. for her guidance in correcting today’s Pencil Preaching column.* Pat Marrin

Today’s Gospel of the miracle of the loaves and fishes is also a story about the disciples learning to trust Jesus and to imitate his compassion whenever faced with need. Matthew describes in detail their frustration at being faced with such an overwhelming crowd. They first tell Jesus to dismiss them to the nearby towns. They even calculate the cost of buying enough food to satisfy so many. We can only imagine their reaction when Jesus responds. “Give them something yourselves.” He

then asks them what resources they have. It is almost laughable, but they report back that five loaves and two fish will be dinner for over five thousand hungry guests.

We know the rest of the story. Saints are those who allow the needs of others to move them to compassion. Helpless to meet the needs themselves, they have only God and what few resources are at hand. Providence looks for willing hearts like these and then the miracles happen.

Today we remember St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (1774-1821), whose response to the educational needs of children defined her brief life. Born before the American revolution, a wife and mother, widow, convert and lay woman, she helped lay the foundation of Catholic education in America. She was also the foundress of the first U.S. congregation of religious women, the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, and proto foundress of six religious communities of women. Canonized in 1975, she became the first native-born American saint. How did she accomplish so much in her brief 46-year life?

Mother Seton accomplished her mission because her heart was focused entirely on her relationship with Jesus. This source and center enabled her influence to grow long after her death. Her vocation as an educator revealed this same pattern. To give a child a deep formation from the start is to point them to a life of expanding human potential and, even more, a destiny with God, the source of Life itself.

We often know only in hindsight how individuals like Mother Seton, Dorothy Day, and tomorrow’s Saint John Neumann began by saying yes to small challenges that blossomed into large responsibilities that consumed their lives serving others. That same invitation awaits each of us, and if we say yes, the rest of the story will be both our commitment to God and God’s commitment to us to give us the vision and energy we need to build the Beloved Community in our lives and beyond Our small gifts will be multiplied to make a big difference in the lives of countless others.

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