

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jan 4th 2014

Memorial of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton

When I was a young girl my mother had a book cataloguing orders of nuns. I was fascinated by the photos of the variety of elaborate habits the nuns were wearing. And I was amazed that my mother could identify a particular order of nuns by glancing at the picture of the habit. I now know that my mother and I were both engaging from our experience. Mine was from small town South Dakota where a handful of Presentation sisters worked in our parish and taught religion classes. And my mother's perspective was from her childhood and young adult hood in Brooklyn, New York where nuns were a significant part of her life through school, hospitals, parishes, neighborhoods, family members and community.

As an adult I know now that it is more than a habit that differentiated the orders of nuns. Of course all are bound by a deep devotion to Jesus Christ. But while one order may focus on education another may devote their lives to praying for others.

Today is the feast day of St Elizabeth Ann Seton foundress of the Sisters of Charity. Her life is a fascinating story of privilege and destitution, abundance and loss. Elizabeth Ann Seton was a prayerful and resourceful woman who founded the first Catholic school in the United States.

Today I pray in gratitude for the legacy of Elizabeth Ann Seton and for all religious women in our church. I pray for women religious who have directly impacted my life. Just a year ago I was a pilgrim in Northeast India where several communities of sisters extended joyful, graceful hospitality to me as I was observing the amazing work they do. And here at home I pray for sisters who are part of my parish community, who create opportunities for retreats, who stand in solidarity with the poor, who are committed to education, who advocate for those in prison, who bring Catholic social teaching to life.

Elizabeth Ann Seton's wisdom becomes my prayer today. She said: "What was the first rule of our dear Savior's life? You know if was to do his Father's will. Well, then, the first purpose of our daily work is to do the will of God; secondly, to do it in the manner he wills; and thirdly, to do it because it is his will. We know certainly that our God calls us to a holy life. We know that he gives us every grace, every abundant grace; and though we are so weak of ourselves, this grace is able to carry us through every obstacle and difficulty."

Mary Lee Brock