

Charity Alive

Commemorative Issue **October 2025**

A Living Memory 50 Years later

By Sister Maryann Seton Lopiccolo



In an Italian-accented English statement, Pope Paul VI declared, “Elizabeth-a Seton-a is a Saint-a”! The crowds cheered and applauded this moment in history when our Elizabeth, our Mother Seton was lifted to the world acclaim as “Saint.”

Some tears of joy, hugs of happiness and a shared ownership and pride bubbled among so many Sisters and Daughters of Charity filling the ranks in St. Peter’s Square that sunny Sunday morning! What a gift to be there among them at this moment.

Memories such as these are not stored in the mind any longer. They continue to live in the deepest part of the soul as a “once in a lifetime” experience that continues to be life-changing and challenging. It’s as if our inner “DNA” of Charity is energized again and again as we live our lives of Charity in so many different ways, just as Elizabeth did.

My love and admiration for Elizabeth Seton is no secret. Upon returning from Rome, my heart was full and sought words to look more deeply into the heart of our new Saint.



Reflections on a Canonization 1975

By Sister Maryann Seton Lopiccolo

What does it mean to be a Saint?
Who can earn such a title?

What is the make-up of a person who is proclaimed a Beloved of God and model for all humankind?

Perhaps it is someone whose love for God so permeates her being that every fiber of her life vibrates and sings out the great joy of knowing she is Beloved.

One who leads a simple life, uncluttered with things of lifeless value; one whose thrust in life is to become—never to be finished; one who holds fast to the touch and presence of her Beloved—she has the makings of a Saint.

With a simple heart, open and trusting, believing in God's loving touch and wisdom, she ventures forth to follow her God. Forsaking all else, leaving nests of security and human stability, she enters new paths to true freedom, with no other reason than "God loves me and leads me safely on."

Becoming supple and weak, bending low and crying for help, she is strengthened to meet her Beloved in her daily encounters.



Rome, 1975

Photo © Sisters of Charity of New York



S. Katie O'Toole

She proclaims God's love
by her gentle song, her
loving glance, her humble
way.

She believes in God's
love, calls forth this love
in others and fills the
emptiness of others with an
overflowing richness which
is hers but to pass on.

She calls us together,
touches our heartstrings
with the music of her life.



**She teaches us to love
God more than life itself; to trust
God with open hands, through
all our birth-pains, deathblows,
agonizing confusion and
comforting joys.**

For her to live is to love God. There is
nothing else so important, nothing more
life-giving.

**To us, she is Mother, Sister, Friend
and Guide. Our lives are touched by
her presence and spirit.**

We rejoice!

”
*Be attentive to the
voice of grace.”*

— ELIZABETH ANN SETON



Commemorating 50 years of Sainthood

By Sister Joan Dawber

We arrived in Emmitsburg on a beautiful September day. The sky was cloudless and that magnificent blue that takes your breath away. This was the first time the CLT had travelled to attend a celebration together.

And what a wonderful celebration!

The first two days were “*A Celebration of Legacy*” only for the representatives of the Sisters of Charity Federation communities and the Seton Shrine Nation Leaders’ Council.

We began on Friday evening with a Candlelight Concert on the beautiful historic shrine grounds. This was an instrumental concert featuring music of the 1970s. The trees and pathways were filled with lights and candles creating an intimate atmosphere with strains of stringed music.

There was much to take in on Saturday morning, the Shrine was open early especially for us. We were invited to view the 50th Anniversary special exhibit “*One of Us: The Making of an American Saint.*” The area was transformed into the 1975 period living room with the canonization being streamed on an old TV



S. Joan Dawber carries our banner during the entrance procession at the Vincentian Family Mass

console. S. Sheilagh and I were surprised to learn Elizabeth’s cause for canonization had begun at the end of the 1800’s and in fact took many years until President Roosevelt who had an interest in the first American’s cause for sainthood. He had a word in the right quarters, which seemed to move the cause forward quite quickly from then onward.

The Vincentian Family Mass in the Basilica was a wonderful celebration of the Federation and friends. I was privileged to carry our banner at the beginning of the entrance procession.

It was moving to see so many banners approaching the main altar representing the congregations of the Federation.



The mass celebrated was the votive mass of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton which was used at the canonization Mass in 1975. The principal celebrant was Fr. Tomaž Mavrič, C.M.

The Sisters choir was uplifting, gathering us and holding us together.

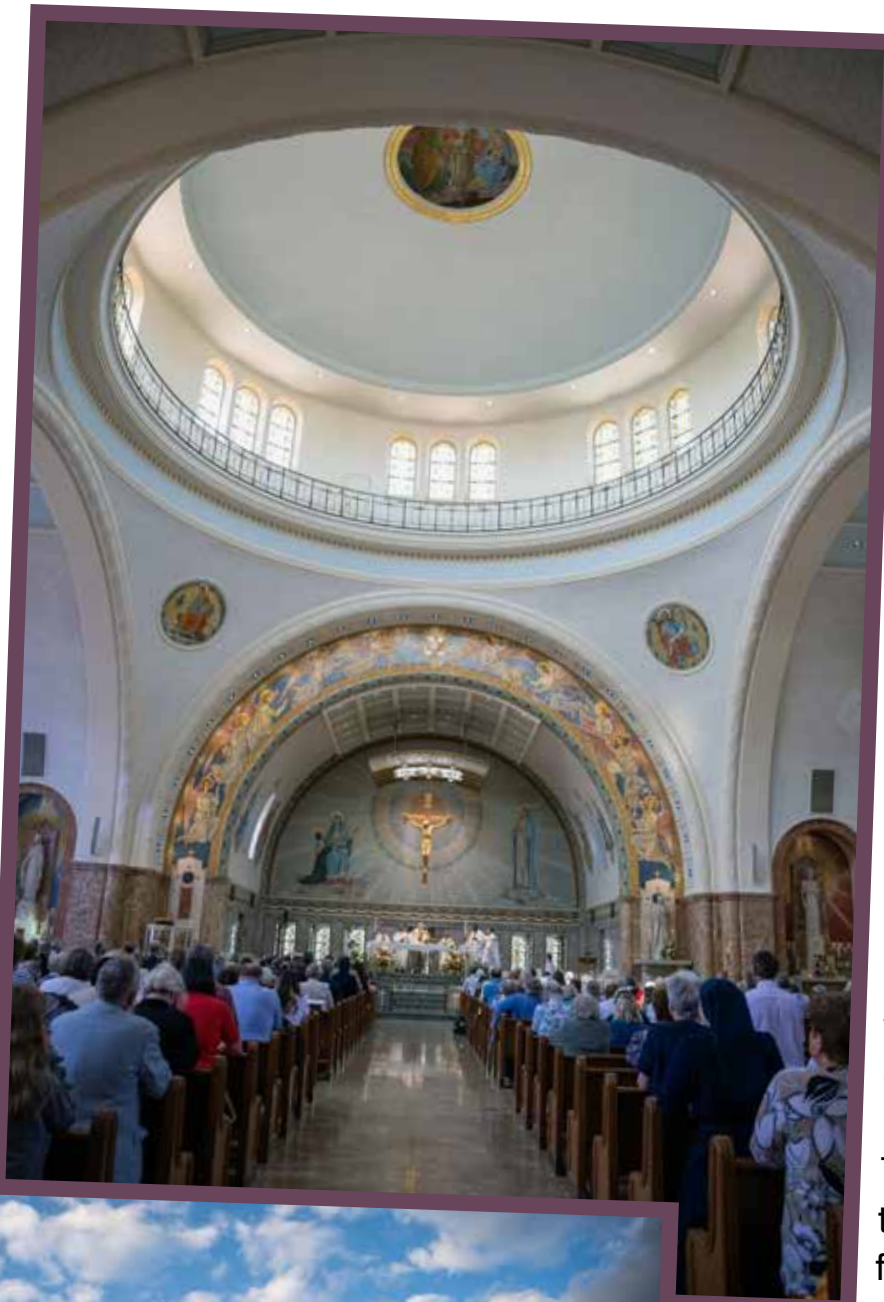
Luncheon followed with keynote speaker Kathleen Cummings, nationally recognized as an expert on Pope Francis and Catholicism. She is the author of the book *"A Saint of Our Own."* Her presentation was lively and full of enthusiasm. It was easy to tell she loves Elizabeth. Her remarks were interesting with more detailed information than we had known.

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"Cheerfulness prepares a glorious mind for all the noblest acts."

— ELIZABETH ANN SETON





The “*Celebration of Legacy*” days came to an end with a dinner hosted by the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg.

The third day, “A Day of Joy,” was open to the public and began with a triumphant 50th Anniversary celebration mass with Archbishop William E. Lori. As we arrived at the Basilica it became evident there would be hundreds of people attending this mass, and indeed there were.

It was a formal and yet glorious celebration of our dear Elizabeth Ann Seton.

It was very moving and we were so aware that these days were one of the highlights of our team’s term in office.

The celebration continued throughout the day with live music, food trucks with Italian ices, burgers, tacos, coffee, etc. There were talks and tours and activities for the many children and families.

As the sun began to set we left this beautiful shrine and the many people and families were still enjoying the day.

As we traveled back to our hotel we were filled with the joy of the day, chatting and sharing the different experiences we had each encountered during these days.



Holy Year, 1975

by Sister Cecilia Hudec

It was Holy Year, 1975 and Elizabeth Seton, our foundress, was being canonized on September 14th.

I went to Rome with 39 other pilgrims from Western Canada who were as excited as I was. We left our pensione early to get front row seats. We sat in the seventh row at the foot of the stairs leading to St Peter's Basilica. The Square was packed as we looked around before the Mass started. Americans and Canadians, Sisters and lay people, priests and bishops in droves travelled across the ocean to celebrate this momentous event.

Elizabeth Seton was ours!

I will never forget the words of Pope Paul VI, "*I proclaim Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton a Saint of the Holy Catholic Church!*" Shivers still go up my spine as I remember that moment with great joy.

The beautiful banner of Elizabeth hung above the altar as we prayed to our Saint for the needs of the world and for the Church of the United States of America and Canada.

We have felt her presence with us in countless ways during these 50 years.

She is with us on the journey living our mission to our last breath.



September 14 - Homily at Wellesley Mass

by Sister Judith Park

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross and in every Catholic church around the world—in every language—those who gather for Mass this day will hear the words from St. John's Gospel:

God so loved the world ... God so loved the world...

And ... we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton, our foundress as Sisters of Charity.

In 1975 on this very day, Pope Paul VI urged the faithful gathered in Rome to preserve her amazing heritage.

Sisters Betsy Groome and Maureen Murphy were in Rome on that joyous day—singing in the choir.

Elizabeth Ann Seton ... this lively, sociable, faith-filled, well-educated New Yorker born in 1774 is well known to us—as a wife and mother of 5, a widow, a friend to the poor, convert to Catholicism, foundress of the Sisters of Charity, first American born saint and educator responsible for the parochial school system in the US.

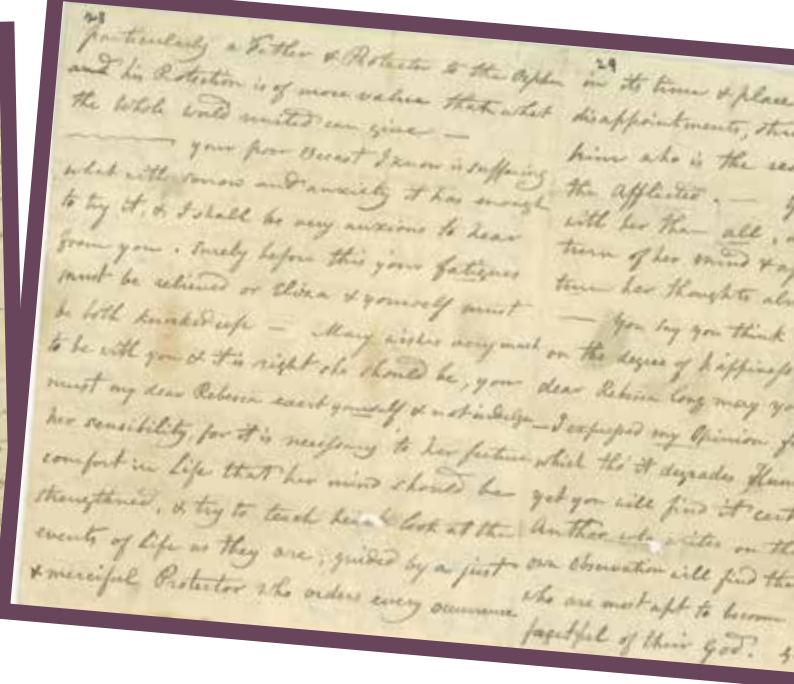
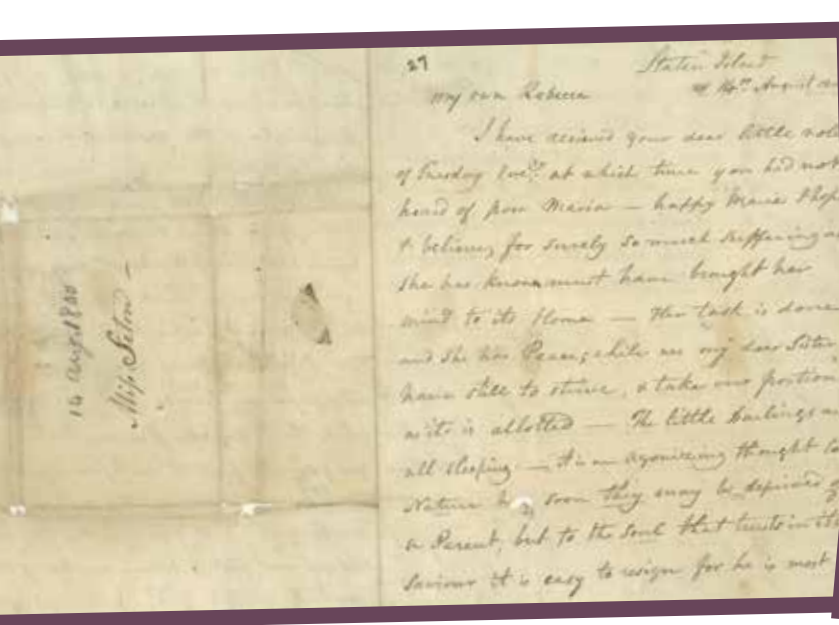


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Mass during the 50th anniversary celebration of the 1975 canonization
©Seton Shrine

She accomplished a great deal in her 46 years of life.



Most of all, she left a loving footprint on the American landscape.

Elizabeth Ann Seton was a prolific writer—literally thousands of her letters are available to us—as well as her meditations and numerous writings on her journey in faith.

She wrote a great deal about suffering and grace.

One of those reflections is entitled: *Meditations on the Communion of the Cross*. And on this feast—it is fitting to hear from her what she had to say in her own words about her relationship with the cross. Her words penned long ago can help us live our lives in real time today.

Betsy Bayley (as she called herself as a young girl) became Mrs. Seton, her marriage to William Seton was a happy one—then she became known as Mother Seton. She was no stranger to suffering. Early losses particularly the death of her mother at three years of age created

a deep well of loneliness in her. And nothing on earth can prepare a parent for the death of a child. There is no more devastating loss. Elizabeth's oldest daughter Anina died of tuberculosis at the age of 19 and her youngest daughter Rebecca died at 14 of tuberculosis ... as did her husband William Seton after 10 years of marriage.

She was utterly bereft after these 3 crushing losses in her life. And to make matters worse, William's shipping business failed sending them quickly into bankruptcy then poverty.

In her writings we read that she believed that suffering opens up a space in us "that prepares us for the deepest reception of grace."

She never asked, "Why me"? That is not to be found in her writing.

She knew that suffering was inevitable but finding meaning in it, reaching out beyond it to others was a choice and a mission.

We have all heard the saying—God never

gives us anything we can't handle. I don't think Elizabeth would have said that.

Elizabeth in her wisdom wrote: "we are never strong enough to bear our cross; it is the cross that carries us."

How well she knew that suffering brings us—hurtles us—to a place we do not want to go ... but she believed with her whole being that God visits us there.

She writes "Jesus comes to find us wherever we are."

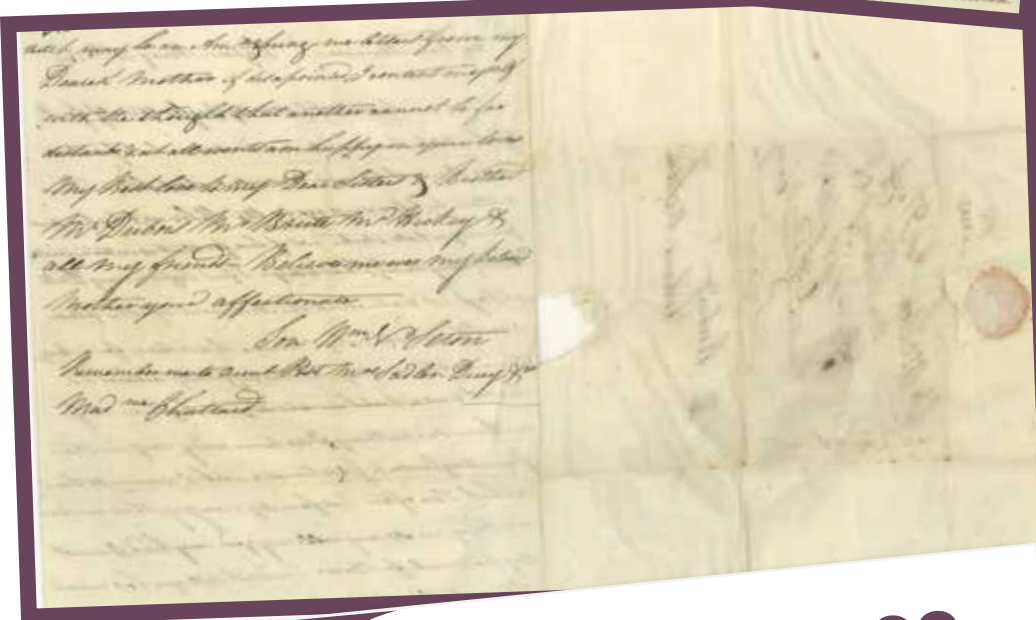
And when we are experiencing profound suffering, we need to be found.

The question arises though: What was at the heart of her ability to stay anchored in her life and reach out to others? I believe we find the answer tucked in the middle of volumes of her writing—we find it in one sentence:

"Our god loves us—that is our comfort"

When we know that—we can do anything.

Elizabeth's life was not all suffering—she loved being a mother and wrote of the joy she experienced in her children. "My family is my world" she wrote.



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*Our God loves us—
that is our comfort.*

— ELIZABETH ANN SETON





She was humble in that way.

To her Sisters of Charity she left a legacy of work with the poor—a love of the Eucharist and many writings calling us to be discerning women of prayer and disciples in mission.

Her writings of long ago are very flowery but also very strong and can find place within our lives today.

An example of that:

About 25 years ago, Sister Maureen Pitts and I went to Emmitsburg, Maryland, where Mother Seton lived with her fledgling community of Sisters of Charity. We made a private retreat using a book called *A Retreat with Elizabeth Seton: Meeting Our Grace* by Judith Metz, SC.

This book included Scripture and many of her writings. We would meet at night to talk about her words. We talked a lot about the line:

"In every circumstance, be careful to meet your grace."

Grace is God's love swirling around us and in us. Grace is God's favor.

And like a mother she worried about each of them—her girls Anna Maria, Catherine, Rebecca and her two "saucy" boys as she called them—William and Richard. Early on she cautioned them not to even think about joining the Navy ... of course—they both joined the Navy.

She was a present moment person—physically and emotionally available to what was occurring in her life as it happened. She was at home with the human condition—with her emotions and fears.

She felt deeply and experienced times of depression—which was another suffering—but she leaned on others just as they leaned on her. She had wonderful friends who got her through.

A couple of years later I went to Halifax to spend the weekend with Maureen—she was dying of Leukemia. When it was time for me to go back to New York we sat in the back of the chapel in our Motherhouse—knowing this was our last time together.

We sat in silence for a while. Then, when it was time to go I said:

“Maureen—meet your grace.” She took a breath in, nodded ... and said: “Yes, yes.”

So today we remember—there is the cross, there is grace and there is the legacy of our Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton whose words prompt us to pay attention to the graces given and who even to this day counts on us ... to leave a loving footprint on the landscape of this world—the world that God so loved, so loved that he sent his only Son—that we might have eternal life.



“

*In every circumstance,
be careful to meet your grace.*

— ELIZABETH ANN SETON



Celebrating a 50th Anniversary

by Sister Donna Geernaert

Elizabeth Ann Seton is a Saint!

These words, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on September 14, 1975, brought a successful conclusion to the canonization process initiated by Cardinal Gibbons in 1882. At the Elizabeth Seton Shrine in Emmitsburg, MD, the 50th anniversary of the event was marked with a gala weekend celebration. Activities began on the evening of September 12 with a candlelight concert on the Shrine grounds.

Saturday focused on the Vincentian family with Mass celebrated by Rev. Tomaž Mavrič, CM, a keynote address on the canonization process, the announcement of plans to establish an endowment to ensure the future of the Shrine, and supper hosted by the Daughters of Charity.

On Sunday, the actual date of the canonization, Archbishop William Lori presided at the anniversary liturgy with a congregation of 1800 in attendance. Celebrations continued throughout the day with live music, presentations in the historic homes, and talks on saintly Americans currently in the [canonization process](#).

Why is it important to identify (canonize) and celebrate the saints among us?



Sister Donna Geernaert
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Essentially, the life of a recognized Saint reminds and inspires all of us to become the saints we are called to be.

The life of St. Elizabeth Seton spans the full spectrum of human experience. She was a New York socialite, a devoted wife, a dedicated volunteer, the mother of five children, a convert, an educator and friend of the poor. She knew the joys and challenges of married life, the problems of raising children, the weight of financial worry, and the deaths of her husband, two of her daughters, and many close friends.

She faced each day with the eyes of faith, and learned to express her love for God in active service for others. Seeking always to encounter God in the grace of the moment, she lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary manner.

Elizabeth was a natural leader, forging a new way to live the Gospel as it had not yet been lived in North America. Yet she was also a follower; she took up the then-200-year-old charism of St. Vincent and St. Louise to serve Christ in the poor of her day.

Like her, we are called to be both leaders and followers. Like her, we are guided by the wisdom of our predecessors in our call to live the Gospel in a time unlike any other.

Like her, we seek to be both creative and faithful.

To mark the 50th anniversary of St. Elizabeth Seton's canonization, the Shrine has developed a number of new exhibits



Sister Donna Geernaert and Rev. Tomaž Mavrič, CM
©Seton Shrine

which highlight her life as one of us and, in light of the universal call to holiness, invite visitors to consider the possibility that they may become the next American saint.

Among the new exhibits, is a panel displaying photos of various saints in the making and a few strategically placed mirrors inviting visitors to see themselves as potential saints. Something to think about next time you look in the mirror?

Prayer for Canadian Thanksgiving

by Sister Mary Lynn Flett

Creator of all,
on this Thanksgiving Day
we lift our hearts in gratitude.

We thank you for the beauty of Canada—
for mountains and prairies, lakes and
forests, for northern lights and changing
seasons, all signs of your wonder and
care.

We give thanks for the freedoms we enjoy,
for the peace of this land, and for the
chance to live and worship in safety.

We are grateful for the richness of our
diversity—for the many cultures and
peoples who make their home here,
for newcomers who bring fresh hopes
and dreams, and for Indigenous Peoples,
whose wisdom and care for the land
continue to guide and inspire us.

We thank you for the abundance of our
natural resources, for harvests that feed
us, waters that sustain us, and hands that
work to provide for all.

Bless us, O God, that our gratitude may
move us to care—for the earth, for one
another, and for those who long for
welcome, peace, and justice.

May we live as thankful people,
sharing generously as you have so
generously blessed us.



Amen

From the Archives

by Mary Flynn, Congregational Archivist

On January 10th, 1975, Superior General Sister Katherine O'Toole sent out a memo to the Provincial Superiors asking them to preserve any records relating to the upcoming canonization of Elizabeth Ann Seton, foundress of the community.

She states, "Because the Canonization of Elizabeth Seton is an historic event in the life of the congregation and should be preserved as such, I ask that any pertinent materials: congratulatory messages, press releases, public relations output, newspaper articles and/or pictures, official liturgies, church and civic celebrations, etc.;" be sent to the Secretary General.

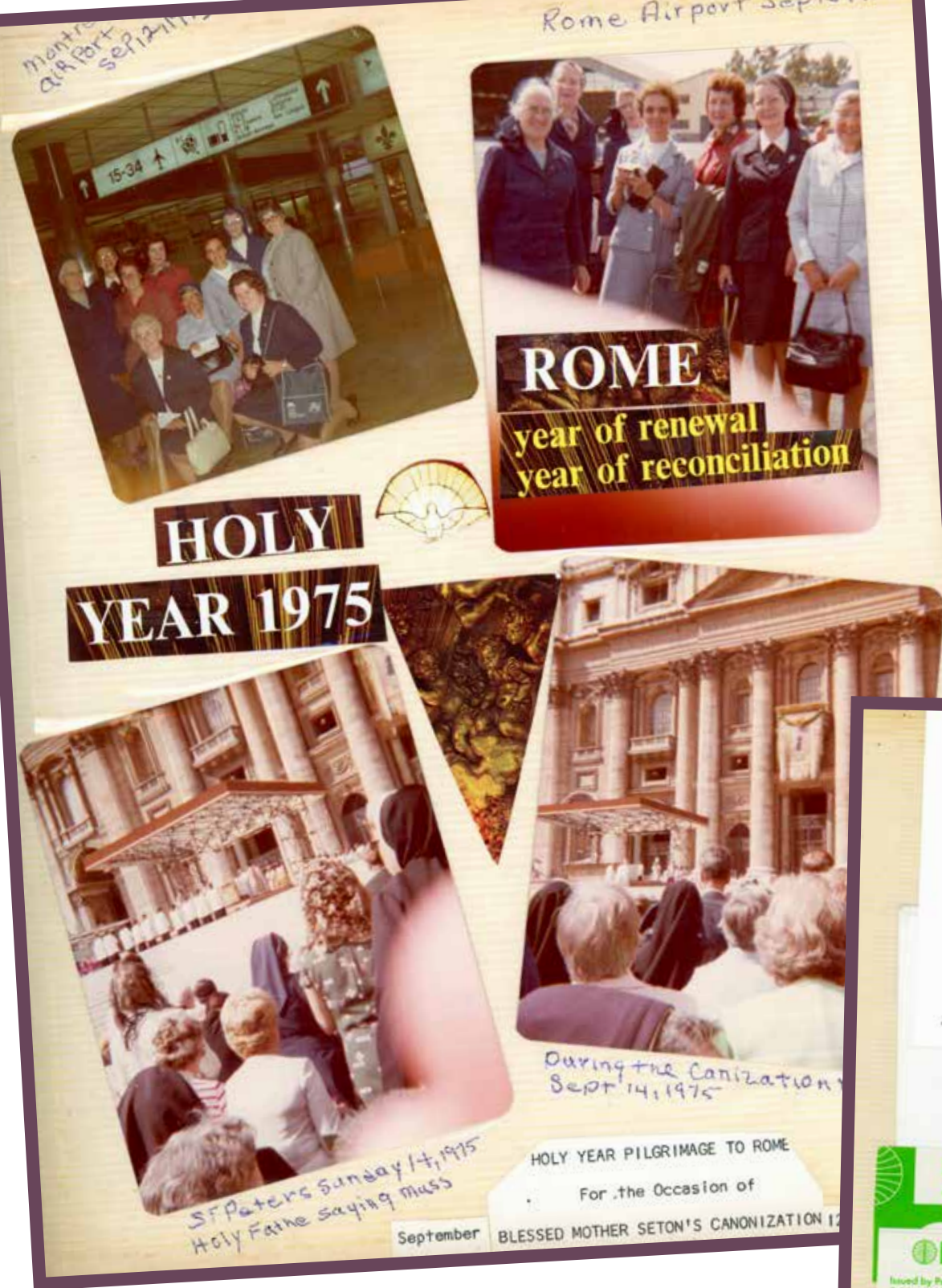
She continues, "I bring this to your attention and urge your cooperation so that materials from each province will be available to present a total picture to any who in future look back at this event."

This type of request is music to an archivist's ears. Thanks to the efforts of those across the congregation that sent in materials, we have folders documenting the care and preparation that went into the celebrations in Rome and at home, from printed materials to photographs, films, and even paper plates.



A paper plate from the canonization of Elizabeth Seton.

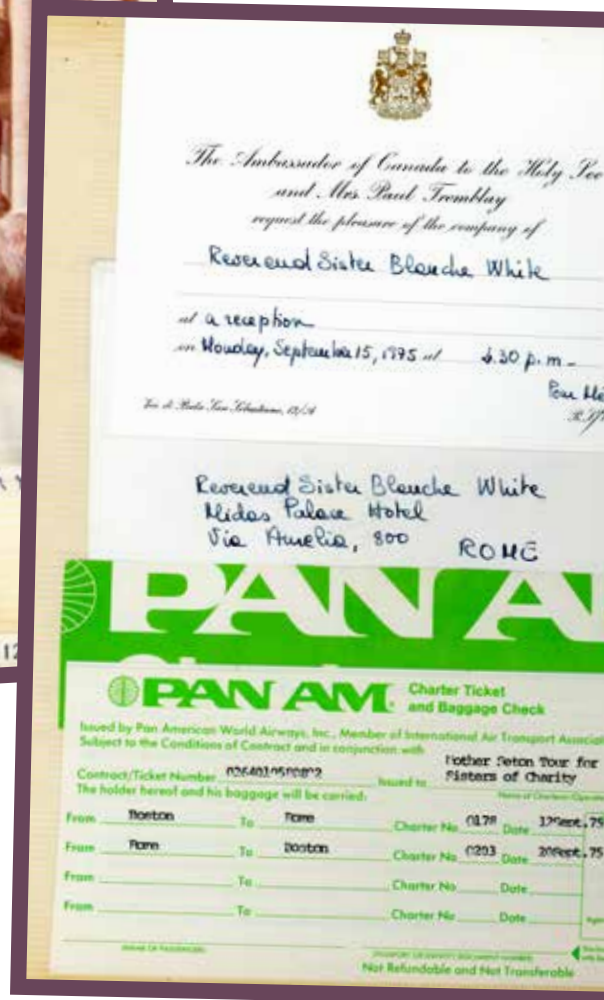
Here we are, 50 years after the canonization, with reason to look back, celebrate, and share records from that momentous occasion.

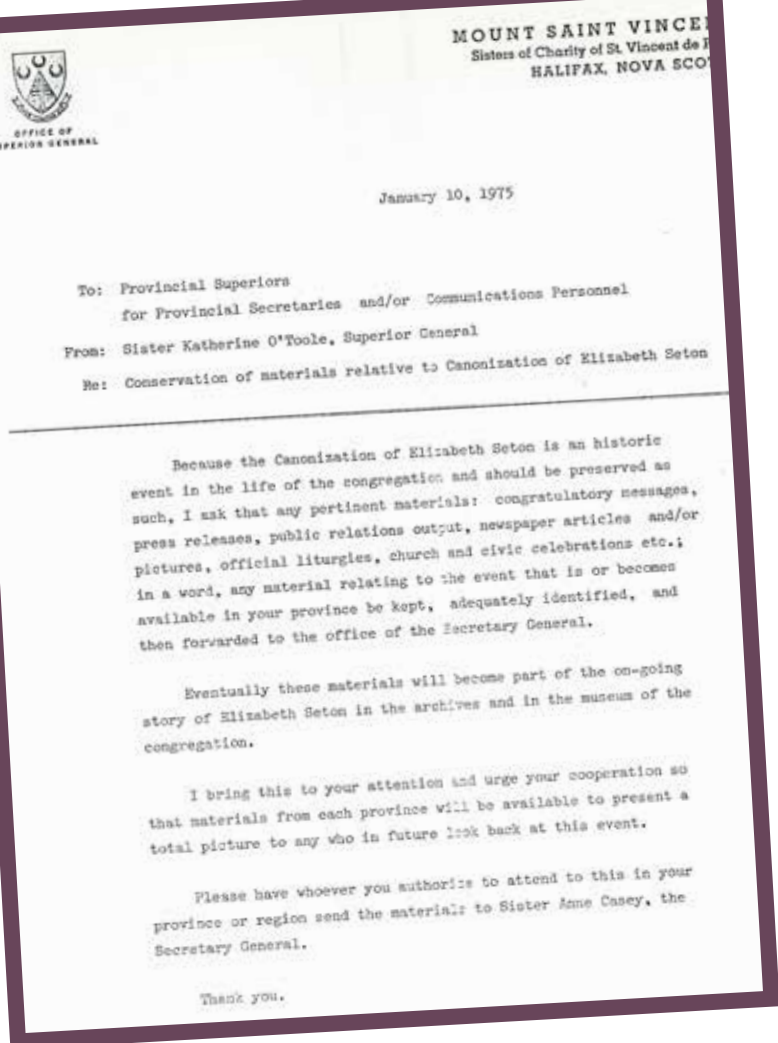


Pages from S. Blanche White's scrapbook from her pilgrimage to Rome for the canonization, September 12-20, 1975.

Sisters of Charity – Halifax Congregational Archives photo album #24.

For Sister Blanche White, one of the Sisters who was able to attend the canonization ceremony in Rome in person, every bit of the experience is documented in a scrapbook. She kept her airplane ticket, pictures of the canonization mass, and even an olive leaf plucked off of a tree in Italy.





Sister Katherine O'Toole, Superior General, thanks Sister Mary Madeleine Geiger for her work planning the October 4th, 1975 mass and celebration at St. Mary's Basilica in Halifax, NS.

Among the many folders of correspondence were S. Katherine O'Toole's letters of thanks. She wrote to dozens of people, inside and outside of the congregation, to express her gratitude for their contributions, from serving on planning committees, setting up chairs for an open house at the Motherhouse, to arranging flowers in the chapel, or allowing guests to park nearby for the special mass at St. Mary's Basilica.

To share just one example, in the scanned letter Sister Katherine O'Toole, thanks Sister Mary Madeleine Geiger for her work planning the October 4th, 1975 mass and celebration at St. Mary's Basilica in Halifax.

Sister Madeleine was working at the Motherhouse in the Congregational Administration at the time. "You were good to carry the banner," Sister Katherine writes, "especially when you could see nothing but floor as you went up the aisle. Even that little task contributed to the beauty of the whole ceremony."

Large banners were a staple of many of the celebrations across the provinces of the congregation. In Quebec City, a mass was held at St. Patrick's Church on October 3rd, 1975.

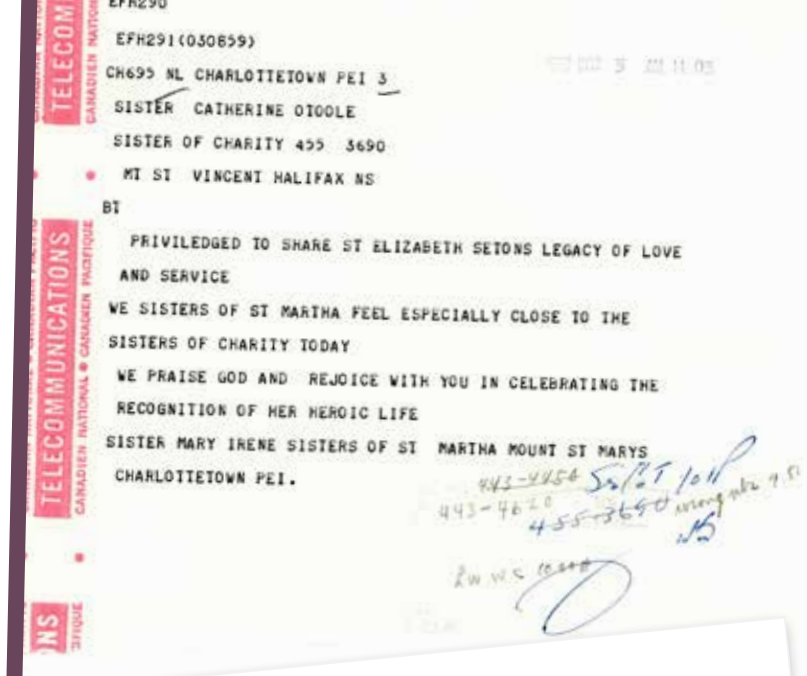


Mass celebrating the canonization of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Patrick's Church in Quebec City, QC, October 3, 1975. Sisters of Charity – Halifax Congregational Archives photo album #15.

As requested, congratulatory messages were saved, including those from lay friends of the congregation, local politicians, and other communities of Catholic women religious. The Sisters of St. Martha of Prince Edward Island sent a telegram saying that they were privileged “to share St. Elizabeth Seton’s legacy of love and service.

We Sisters of St. Martha feel especially close to the Sisters of Charity today. We praise God and rejoice with you in celebrating the recognition of her heroic life.”

The 50th anniversary of the canonization has been a wonderful opportunity to do just that—celebrate the recognition of the heroic life of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.



”
*We are never strong enough
to bear our cross; it is the
cross that carries us.*

— ELIZABETH ANN SETON



Charity Alive witnesses to the life and mission of the Sisters of Charity - Halifax, which is to make the love of God visible in today's world.

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