

# **40th Anniversary of St Elizabeth Ann Seton- Crofton**

## **I. Introduction**

A. I am delighted to return to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish to join in celebrating your 40th anniversary. I also join you in expressing our common debt of thanks to your pastor, Fr. Sparklin, for his devoted service to this parish ... thank you, Fr. Paul! Let's also thank Sister Katharine for her service as Pastoral Associate. Dear parishioners, I also want to thank you for building up this community of faith and for sharing in the Church's mission to spread the Gospel. So too we remember Father Ed Connolly who served as Pastor of this parish for more than 25 years. I am sure there are more than a few "charter members" here this morning. We are all very grateful to you; we are standing on your shoulders!

B. Today we remember our patron, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, America's first saint. Born into a prominent family, she was a devoted wife and mother. After the death of her husband, she entered the Catholic Church and founded the first Catholic school in the United States, on Paca St., in Baltimore. During that time, she heard the call to religious life, and counseled by our Nation's first Archbishop, John Carroll, she founded the Daughters of Charity in Emmitsburg. Elizabeth Seton belonged to a great generation of leaders in the early 19th century who, in spite of many obstacles, firmly planted the Faith in the United States. We are certainly standing on her shoulders, and I know that her example and prayers will continue to bless and strengthen this parish family now and for years to come.

## **II. The Wedding Feast of Cana**

A. Forty years ago, when Father Spillane came here from Our Lady of the Fields with instructions to begin a new parish family, he wasn't necessarily thinking about today's Gospel, the wedding feast of Cana. More likely, he faced challenges like those that St. Elizabeth Ann Seton had faced. Like her, he had to begin from scratch: making contact with a core group of parishioners; finding a temporary worship site;

building a church; setting the parish on a firm and lasting foundation. No, he probably wasn't thinking about the wedding feast of Cana. However, today's Gospel account of that wedding feast does give us a lot of insight into the mission of this parish. I don't know how many weddings are celebrated here every year, but, in a sense, every Mass is like a wedding feast between God and his people. So stay with me, dear friends, as I try to explain the meaning of today's Scriptures!

B. In fact, the wedding feast of Cana was included in John's Gospel to help us see how God deeply had loved his people throughout the history of salvation. The Old Testament prophets saw the relationship of God to his chosen people as a marriage in which God is the groom and his people are the bride. Don't we see this in today's reading from the prophet Isaiah? Isaiah foretells the day when the people of Israel will be restored and made glorious: "No more shall people call you 'Forsaken,' or your land 'Desolate,' but you shall be called 'My Delight' and your land 'Espoused' - for the Lord delights in you and makes your land his spouse." So the covenant, the solemn pact between God & his people, is no ordinary contract. Rather it is a marriage covenant that includes God's promises to his people and the promise of his people to be faithful and receptive to his will. Isaiah looks toward a time when, in spite of human frailty, God's promises to his people will be fulfilled.

C. In the Gospel, the time of fulfillment, the hour of Jesus, was at hand. To see this, let us focus on the special guests at the wedding feast of Cana. First is the Mother of Jesus; then there's Jesus himself; then there are the apostles. It was Mary who noticed the dilemma of the young couple: they were about to run out of wine on their wedding feast - an acute embarrassment. Mary springs into action and intercedes with her Son who, as yet, had not performed any miracles and was only beginning his public ministry. There follows an exchange between Jesus and his Mother.... She says: "They have no wine!" He says: "How does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come."

D. In those few words we begin to see that the Mother of Jesus is also his disciple - indeed, the disciple who will share most fully in Jesus' mission—all the way to Calvary. With confidence in her Son, she instructs the servers, "Do whatever he tells you." In turn, Jesus tells the servers to fill six large jars and to bring them to the headwaiter. At that moment water becomes a most exquisite wine, a new and

miraculous wine, signaling the coming of God's Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ. For her part, Mary, in pleading for the newly married couple, sums up in herself the longings of the people of Israel. So also Mary personifies the Church as she continues to intercede for us and shows us how to be disciples who trust in God's promises, followers of Jesus who are open and receptive to God's will. Mary instructs us, as once she instructed the waiters, "Do whatever he tells you!" The Apostles, who were also at the wedding feast, had their eyes opened. St. John tells us that 'Jesus disciples began to believe in Him.'

### **III. Applying This Gospel Event to Parish Life**

A. What, then, does this Gospel episode have to do with the life of your parish? Let me return to what I said a few moments ago: Every Eucharistic celebration is like a wedding feast in which Christ the Bridegroom pours out his life, gives himself in love to his beloved Bride, his Church, of which we are members. No longer is water turned into wine; rather, wine becomes the Blood of Christ, the Blood of the New Covenant, poured out for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Mother of Jesus is with us at every Mass and she is praying for us lest we run out of wine – the Good Wine of the Gospel, the Good Wine that is the Blood of Christ, the Good Wine that enables us to believe and to live as the Lord's true followers and active members of his Church reaching out to those in need.

B. The II Vatican Council called the liturgy "the source and summit" of the Christian life. All that this parish does, every ministry, every gift, every manifestation of the Spirit—flows from this wedding feast between Christ and his People the Church. In today's second reading, St. Paul refers the varied gifts God gives his people – gifts so very evident in the many ministries of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish. These varied gifts work together to build up this parish as a community of faith, worship, and service – deeply in love with the Lord, reaching out to the wider community, serving as a sign of God's Kingdom in our midst. As we celebrate this anniversary, I want to thank all of you who generously give of yourselves to the life and ministry of this parish.

C. Finally, on this Sunday when the Wedding Feast of Cana is proclaimed, it is good

to remember that many in this parish are called to the vocation of marriage. In beginning his ministry at a wedding feast, Jesus confirms your vocation which he made into an effective sign of his own presence in our midst. There is no doubt that marriage and family constitute a challenging vocation. Not unlike the couple at Cana, married couples today face many pressures. How important that you continue to invite Jesus to your homes and firmly root your homes in the wedding feast that is the Eucharist! And how important that you turn to Mary in your needs! The Christian home, we are told, is to be like a domestic church, where Christ's self-giving love must be evident in the relationship of spouses and children. May our homes be places of faith and prayer, virtue, and generosity to those in need!

## **IV. Conclusion**

A. So let me wish you a very happy anniversary, thank you for your faith, generosity, and service, and ask that God bless this wonderful parish and those who lead it now and for many years to come, ad multos annos!

B. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, pray for us!