

# Talking to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton about the start of the new school year

The school year is about to begin, so I have taken the week off to spend with our sons. I thought it would be good for all of us to have a week together before school starts, especially since they are changing schools this fall.



Last week I told the boys that today would be our pilgrimage day—that we would pick a destination and go pray for a great school year. The rest of the week they have input into where we go and what we do, but today they were along for the ride.

We woke up to a rainy morning, and I wondered whether we should skip our pilgrimage. But I really want to start the school year off right, so we packed a bag of juice boxes and snacks, climbed into the car, and headed off to the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Md.

While the boys played cards in the backseat, I told them about my last trip to that shrine. I went with my mother after Christmas in 2008, just days before John and I were matched with our older son.

I remember that trip vividly and how we prayed for the child we hadn't met yet. In a way, I told the boys, we prayed for both of them, even though we didn't know who they were. They liked that idea. We talked about becoming a saint, and how St. Elizabeth Ann Seton was the first American-born saint—and she lived right here in Maryland.



At the shrine, the boys ran to the door, and we found our way to the gift shop. I had told them we would select small rosaries for their backpacks, and they had a wonderful time shopping their way around the store. I loved the questions and conversations they had as we looked at rosaries and medals and statues. The boys picked out a few special

religious items, and then at the last moment each asked to buy a Jacob's ladder.

The gift shop trip was a tremendous success, but finally I pulled them away to go to the basilica.

We lit a candle and prayed for our family, for our boys' teachers, for the friends they will make, and for a wonderful school year. I had told them about St. Elizabeth Ann Seton and how she was a mother and a teacher and formed a group of religious sisters. We read bits and pieces about her life in the exhibits at the shrine. If any saint could intercede for us for the school year, she could.

As I watched our energetic (but respectful) boys exploring the chapel, I wondered what St. Elizabeth Ann Seton thought of us. But I imagine she's seen spirited boys who are enjoying their last few days of summer.

On our way out, we stopped in the back of the church to fill a bottle with holy water, which we will use to bless the boys on their first day, if we remember.

It would have been lovely to stay for Mass or to make a full day of exploring the grounds. But sometimes an appetizer is better than a full meal, especially when your children are 7 and 9 and itching to go to the next thing. So we headed out and stopped in Westminster to play laser tag and ride in bumper cars and burn off some energy on our way home.

What will this new school year bring? Only God knows, of course. But we've entrusted this year to Him and we're asking our friend St. Elizabeth Ann Seton to intercede for us along the way.



## **A Prayer to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton at the Start of a School Year**

*St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, you were a teacher who helped your students grow in their love for Jesus every day. Please ask Him to watch over our children as they begin their studies this year, to give their teachers the wisdom, strength, and patience they need in their classrooms, and to help us—their parents—to know how to support them as they become the people God wants them to be. Amen.*