St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
January 4
Born just two years before the American Revolution, Elizabeth suffered her first
great sorrow at the age of three, when her mother passed away. Her father
married again, and the wealthy New York City couple raised Elizabeth as a pious
Episcopalian (a type of Protestant). She had a deep love for the Scriptures, and
her stepmother would take her to perform charitable tasks for the poor.

When she was nineteen, Elizabeth married the rich and handsome William
Seton. They had a happy marriage with five children. Their family grew larger
when William’s father died, and they took in William’s six youngest siblings.
Tragically, William developed tuberculosis, a deadly illness. He and Elizabeth
traveled to Italy for his health, but William soon passed away. They had been
married for just under ten years.

In her sorrow, Elizabeth offered everything to the will of God. William’s
business friends in Italy were incredibly kind, and through them she learned
about the Catholic Faith. She converted to Catholicism because she believed
in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and because she took comfort in
knowing that the Blessed Virgin Mary was her mother in Heaven.

When she returned home, her family rejected her because she was Catholic.
The laws limiting the rights of Catholics in America had only just been lifted, and
Catholics were still not accepted in society. Elizabeth attempted to start a school
for young girls to support herself and her children, but parents removed their
children from the school when they discovered that Elizabeth was Catholic. So,
she accepted the invitation from the Sulpician Fathers, a French order of priests,
to start a school for girls in Maryland. This was the first free American Catholic
parish school.

Because Elizabeth wished to dedicate her life to the service of God, Elizabeth
took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience and started the first American
religious order for women, the Sisters of Charity of St. Joseph. The sisters made
special allowances for Elizabeth to continue caring for her children, and they
voted her to be their mother superior. From then on, Elizabeth was known as
Mother Seton.

Elizabeth suffered further sorrow when two of her daughters passed away,
but she continued to live a life of humility and charity until she died at forty-six
years of age. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, bless all those in Catholic education!