

200th ANNIVERSARY SETON HIGH SCHOOL PRAYER SERVICE – JAN. 5, 2009

Reflection – Sister Mary Dolores

Several years ago one of Seton’s teachers asked me if Seton had a school motto. He said that he had heard that it was “Hazard Yet Forward” but was just “checking it out.” I told him that “Hazard Yet Forward” was the Seton family motto, and that I, not being a Seton alum, did not know if it was also the school motto. As Director of Student Activities at the time, I sent out a memo asking for a saying that expressed the spirit and mission of Seton High School. Well – to my complete surprise – the Setonians on staff rose up and assured me that Seton already had a motto and that indeed “Hazard Yet Forward” **was** the school motto. One class-of-1964 alum even found her Seton handbook to prove that it was indeed so! Since then I have found an alum from the class of 1946 who also says that this is the school motto. However, I do not know when, or who, suggested the Seton family motto as the Seton HS motto, nor do I know when it was no longer “taught.”

“Hazard Yet Forward” pre-supposes faith and trust – faith in God’s presence and unconditional love; faith in ourselves; faith in the strength we receive from the Eucharist and prayer; faith in our “companions on the journey” always ready to encourage and support us.

Faith is putting our relationship with Jesus into practice. Therefore, our faith cannot be just an intellectual assent, head knowledge; but must also be heart knowledge; that is, a total surrender of ourselves to God: trials and temptations, emotions and energy, joys and ambitions, our entire span of life on earth. Then life can be embraced with humor and eagerness, and “forward” becomes possible. Life then is no longer “a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.”

Elizabeth Ann Bayley Seton was a “hazard-yet-forward” woman! Her life and words are examples for us of the spirit with which we must live in this 21st century – a spirit of openness, courage, daring; a burning desire for good, for success, for service; a willingness to try the new with enthusiasm grounded in strong principles and values. Is it not exciting and humbling that three words dating from the 13th century can be so relevant today!

From her earliest childhood, Elizabeth experiences loss, disappointment, and death. She relies on her strong belief in God’s presence to sustain her so that she can continue to “go forward.” In his biography MRS. SETON, Father Dirvin says: “It was one of the wonders of Elizabeth Bayley Seton that disillusionment never made her cynical or bitter, either as a child or an adolescent or an adult, There were black moods and moments of near-despair, but she always came through them right side up.... Elizabeth never dwelt needlessly on injustice. While it saddened her, it made her wise with the wisdom of God and man. She turned from it instinctively to pursue her own glad and innocent “*thoughts of God and heaven.*” It is this “*instinct*” that forces the beholder to see the hand of God, even so early, molding a heroine.” The experience of God’s personal love and concern brings an interior peace, an interior delight. Awareness of God’s presence within her makes a mission/ makes service to others possible.

At the time of Elizabeth’s departure from Italy after the death of her husband in 1798, she prayed for the gift of faith – *but I do beg Him to give me their faith and promise Him all in return for such a gift.* Though she felt drawn to Catholicism, she knew that she would meet strong opposition from family and friends in New York. Again, Elizabeth’s “hazard-yet-forward” spirit prevailed, and she made the decision to become a Catholic. Indeed she met outright hostility and rejection. All abandoned her. She turned to God: *In my God is my refuge. In my God is the strength of my hope.*

Like Elizabeth all people must go through experiences of pain and suffering and hardships; but because they have risked all for the sake of Jesus and His people, they will begin life over and over again. And others will take the gifts and fruits of their suffering and acceptance and transform them as they meet new and different hazards. They must go forward. Only thus is the future created.

This year 2009 is a celebration of the year that Elizabeth Seton officially established the Sisters of Charity. Elizabeth pronounced vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience on March 25, 1809, in the presence of Archbishop Carroll in Baltimore. On June 20, 1809, she and the Sisters leave Baltimore for their new home in Emmitsburg. The last group of Sisters leaves Baltimore the last week of July. After taking a few days to settle in the Stone House, Monday, July 31, 1809, Elizabeth and her Sisters first begin to live their religious life together – their lives as Sisters of Charity. Many hazards have been overcome, and they continue to move forward. And the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati continue to be “hazard-yet-forward” women evidenced by the announcement in the New Years Day Cincinnati Enquirer of the opening of the new Cincinnati Cristo Rey School for the 2010 school year. This school will continue our legacy of “daring to risk a caring response” – a quote from our Sister-of-Charity constitution.

Did Elizabeth display a copy of the Seton family motto in her home? Did she “hand it down” to her children and her Sisters? Did she even know that “Hazard Yet Forward” was the Seton family motto? Or was it the tumultuous times in which she lived? She was nine years old when the British army withdrew from New York City; as a teenager she watched the former colonies struggle to form a new nation with the 1789 constitution; intellectually, too, the times were exploding with the ideas of the Enlightenment, with the philosophies of Voltaire and Rousseau. These exciting new events can be described as “hazard-yet-forward” moments. And

Elizabeth found herself caught up in all of them! Or is this the spirit she received from her relationship with Jesus – a relationship of trust, confidence, dependence; a relationship, not of intellectual knowledge but of heart-felt conviction that gave her the guidance and strength needed to be fully alive? All of these together create a spirit of risk, daring, forward-looking – all qualities implied in the Seton family motto.

The bookmark you will each receive this morning does not say “Hazard Yet Forward” but says “Legacy”. Your legacy is the spirit of a hazard-yet-forward woman.