



Ann O'Neill, victim of "incurable" illness, holds Mother Seton portrait.

■ **Editor's Note:** The first American-born person likely to be canonized a saint by the Roman Catholic Church is Elizabeth Bayley Seton. Last March the late pope, John XXIII, participated in ceremonies connected with her beatification, the next-to-last ecclesiastical step toward sainthood. Two miracles, thoroughly investigated, are required for beatification. Here, for the first time, is the personal account of one case which the Holy See has accepted as a miracle.

WHEN our family doctor came into my room at St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore, I thought I sensed something grave in his manner.

It couldn't have been about the baby I'd just delivered. It had been a normal birth, and Mary Margaret, my third daughter, was fine.

"It's Ann Theresa," I said. "She does have leukemia, doesn't she?"

The doctor nodded. "I asked your husband not to tell you during your labor. Ann has an acute case. She can go any time."

I stared at him. "I have faith in prayer. Ann will get well."

"Please don't build false hopes. I know of no case where the patient has recovered for any length of time."

I prayed all that day, and it never occurred to me that God would not answer me. Now that sounds presumptuous, and maybe it was. But I felt Ann, my eldest, must have more of life than her four years, and I was helpless except in insistent prayer. I didn't fully realize it then, but in Ann's case everybody was helpless.

When my husband Bob visited me, we talked over Ann's illness. On the previous Friday, Feb. 22, 1952, I had noticed Ann wasn't her usual playful, mischievous self. Her dark complexion had paled. She was running a fever and ugly bluish splotches mottled her neck. That evening, Bob took her to our family doctor, who was quick to advise a blood test. Ann's blood count was 43, critically low. By Sunday, she was in St. Agnes Hospital—for a "checkup" they told me. The doctor called Bob, however, with the "hopeless" diagnosis.

"There must be something we can do," Bob said. "I'll sell our house, get night work . . ."

"All the money in the world won't help Ann," the doctor said.

Bob refused to give up. Finally, the doctor said: "They are doing wonderful research at the University Hospital. Dr. Milton Sacks is world famous for his work in leukemia. I'll see if he will take Ann."

Dr. Sacks visited Ann. He confirmed the diagnosis and said he was willing to study her case. "There is no cure," he told Bob, "but perhaps we can gain a remission for a few months. I must emphasize, however, that our work is research and experimental in nature." Bob most thankfully agreed to have Ann transferred to University Hospital.

In the hospital, Ann drifted in and out of consciousness. Her body

MY DAUGHTER † † †

MOTHER SETON'S MIRACLE CHILD † † †

seemed consumed in heat, and Bob and I began sponging her with alcohol to relieve her. For five minutes we would bathe her, rest for five minutes, then sponge again. Thursday night, Ann was restless. She would toss and call out: "Mother!"

"I'm here, right here, Ann," I'd say, and she would become very still for a while. But my labor pains were beginning, and I knew I must leave her soon. I called my family to drive me to St. Agnes, then I bathed Ann for the last time. She called, "Mother!" and I pressed her hand. It was hot and moist with perspiration.

"I'll be back soon," I promised. "You will get well, Ann. We'll see to it."

I will not forget putting Ann's hand beneath the twisted sheets and walking out of that dim room.

It would be more than a week before I could return to Ann. In the meantime, Bob told me she was receiving many blood transfusions and coagulants; despite this, her blood cells kept breaking down. Nevertheless, Bob kept my spirits up. "Some of the children under Dr. Sacks' care have lived for two and a half years," he said.

"Ann will live a full life, if we pray," I said with certainty. As the days passed, I was told that Ann was making fine progress. I went to see her then, confident we had won. When I reached her bed, I gasped in shock. I wasn't looking at my Ann, the sturdy little girl playing in our yard only days before. Ann's face was puffed and chalky, and her head shook in constant palsy. She looked at me through glazed eyes half buried by swollen cheeks and said weakly:

"Don't let them hurt me anymore. Take me away."

I sat at her side. Her body was blue with bruises from transfusions and injections. "We're trying to help you. You want to get well, don't you?" But how can you explain all this to somebody so young?

With Enduring Faith, They Prayed Together

Bob and I were with Ann almost constantly the next month. When we were not caring for her, we prayed together. I still refused to believe my prayers would not be answered. God would *not* take our Ann. About a month later, Dr. Sacks told us she was not responding, however, and that we should take her home.

At home, something else happened. Raw blisters broke out on her body. She writhed in her bed, even fighting our efforts to cleanse the sores. Now she had chicken pox, though we did not learn this immediately. Dr. Sacks said later it was one of the worst cases he had seen.

Helpless, Bob and I watched Ann's suffering mount. It was Holy Week now, and I found myself reflecting on our prayers for Ann. I have always believed in prayer, and my prayers have always been answered—not always in the way I expected, not in miracles or bounteous gifts; yet every petition to God has brought a reward. Sometimes it was an understanding of why I was not granted my wish; sometimes simply the reward of