January 4th: Memorial of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, Religious

Gospel text (*Lk* 10:38-42): Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha, burdened with much serving, came to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me.” The Lord said to her in reply, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her.”

“Only one thing is needed”

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Today, we celebrate the feast-day of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, wife, mother, educator, foundress of the Sisters of Charity, and initiator of the parochial school system in the United States, the system whereby a parish provides total education for its children. Although St. Elizabeth Ann Seton worked relentlessly establishing Catholic schools throughout the United States, her main focus and that of her congregation was the interior life. She took seriously the message of the Lord in today's Gospel: “Mary has chosen the better part” (Lk 10:42). The union with the Lord found in contemplation, as exemplified by the Mary of Bethany, is far more important that the continual activity displayed by her sister Martha. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton encouraged the Sisters of Charity to treasure the interior life. She wrote, “An interior life means the continuation of the Savior's life within us”, and is “the sweet land of promise”. It was clear to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, that, “only one thing is needed” (Lk 10:42), in life. That “one thing” was to be in the presence of the Lord.

This nun of the first days of the American Republic teaches modern, overly busy man that nothing worthwhile can be accomplished unless it is done in union with the Lord. The time that is spent in prayer is integral to the ability to serve the Presence of Lord in others. For it is the Presence of the Lord within His people that attracts others to Christ.

Does a priest or religious wish to be successful in ministry? Does a layman or laywomen desire to promote Jesus Christ? Do we Christians want to attract others to the Lord? Then we must savor the Presence of Lord within ourselves. We must develop the interior life. That is the “one thing that matters”.