

EDITH STEIN

Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

Memorial Day August 9th

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Edith Stein, saintly Carmelite, profound philosopher and brilliant writer, had a great influence on the women of her time, and is having a growing influence in the intellectual and philosophical circles of today's Germany and of the whole world. She is an inspiration to all Christians whose heritage is the Cross, and her life was offered for her own Jewish people in their sufferings and persecutions.



Born on October 12, 1891, of Jewish parents, Siegfried Stein and Auguste Courant, in Breslau, Germany, Edith Stein from her earliest years showed a great aptitude for learning, and by the time of the outbreak of World War I, she had studied philology and philosophy at the universities of Breslau and Goettingen.

After the war, she resumed her higher studies at the University of Freiburg and was awarded her doctorate in philosophy *Suma Cum Laude*. She later became the assistant and collaborator of Professor Husserl, the famous founder of phenomenology, who greatly appreciated her brilliant mind.

In the midst of all her studies, Edith Stein was searching not only for the truth, but for Truth itself and she found both in the Catholic Church, after reading the

autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila. She was baptized on New Year's Day, 1922.

After her conversion, Edith spent her days teaching, lecturing, writing and translating, and she soon became known as a celebrated philosopher and author, but her own great longing was for the solitude and contemplation of Carmel, in which she could offer herself to God for her people. It was not until the Nazi persecution of the Jews brought her public activities and her influence in the Catholic world to a sudden close that her Benedictine spiritual director gave his approval to her entering the Discalced Carmelite Nuns' cloistered community at Cologne-Lindenthal on 14 October 1933. The following April, Edith received the Habit of Carmel and the religious name of "Teresa Benedicta ac Cruce," and on Easter Sunday, 21 April 1935, she made her Profession of Vows.

When the Jewish persecution increased in violence and fanaticism, Sister Teresa Benedicta soon realized the danger that her presence was to the Cologne Carmel, and she asked and received permission to transfer to a foreign monastery. On the night of 31 December 1938, she secretly crossed the border into Holland where she was warmly received in the Carmel of Echt. There she wrote her last work, *The Science of the Cross*.

Her own Cross was just ahead of her, for the Nazis had invaded neutral Holland, and when the Dutch bishops issued a pastoral letter protesting the deportation of the Jews and the expulsion of Jewish children from the Catholic school system, the Nazis arrested all Catholics of Jewish extraction in Holland. Edith was taken from the Echt Carmel on 2 August 1942, and transported by cattle train to the death camp of Auschwitz, the conditions in the box cars being so inhuman that many died or went insane on the four day trip. She died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz on 9 August 1942.

We no longer seek her on earth, but with God Who accepted her sacrifice and will give its fruit to the people

for whom she prayed, suffered, and died. In her own words: "Once can only learn the science of the Cross by feeling the Cross in one's own person." We can say that in the fullest sense of the word, Sister Teresa was "Benedicta a Cruce" -- blessed by the Cross.

Pope John Paul II beatified Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross on 1 May 1987, and canonizes her on 11 October 1998.

"God is there in these moments of rest and can give us in a single instant exactly what we need. Then the rest of the day can take its course, under the same effort and strain, perhaps, but in peace. And when night comes, and you look back over the day and see how fragmentary everything has been, and how much you planned that has gone undone, and all the reasons you have to be embarrassed and ashamed: just take everything exactly as it is, put it in God's hands and leave it with Him. Then you will be able to rest in Him -- really rest -- and start the next day as a new life."

"O my God, fill my soul with holy joy, courage and strength to serve You. Enkindle Your love in me and then walk with me along the next stretch of road before me. I do not see very far ahead, but when I have arrived where the horizon now closes down, a new prospect will open before me, and I shall meet it with peace.

"Learn from St. Thérèse to depend on God alone and serve Him with a wholly pure and detached heart. Then, like her, you will be able to say 'I do not regret that I have given myself up to Love'."