

Dear Friends in Christ: May the peace, joy and hope of Jesus be with you all!



One of the more inspiring parts of our Catholic faith, I believe, is our doctrine of “the communion of saints.” The Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church (YOUCAT) notes that it “is made up of all [people] who have placed their hope in Christ and belong to him through Baptism, whether they have already died or are still alive. Because in Christ we are in one Body; we live in a communion that encompasses heaven and earth.”

I have noted in the past of my devotion to St. Thérèse of Lisieux, Bl. Charles de Foucauld, St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, and St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, AKA Edith Stein. Daily I ask for their assistance. Friday, Aug. 9, is the Feast day of Edith Stein, marking the day that she and her sister, Rosa, were murdered in one of the gas chambers of Auschwitz in 1942.

I first came in contact with her through a work I discovered at the Trappist Abbey of Our Lady of Guadalupe book store in Carlton, Oregon in the late 1980’s. I remember reading **Martyrs of Our Time** by William Purcell then for the first time while on retreat. I couldn’t put the book down as Purcell’s writing continually engaged me about all those he mentioned. One of the persons chronicled was this Catholic convert from Judaism who had an incredible story and history as a scholar of philosophy in Germany prior to WW II. She early on abandoned her Jewish faith and professed atheism as a teen. In her college years she graduated magna cum laude. In her scholarship and teaching she found herself increasingly mixing with Catholic scholars.

On one summer night, she read the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, and was virtually converted on the spot in the summer of 1921 and was baptized in January of 1922. She taught in a Dominican nun’s school from 1923-31, later lecturing in Münster in Northern Germany at a Catholic Institute. Antisemitic legislation forced her to resign her teaching. She then entered the Discalced Carmelite convent in Cologne in 1933. Later, to put off Nazi threats, she and her sister Rosa, a Carmelite extern, were moved to the convent in Echt, in the Netherlands. But she couldn’t escape the Nazis.

What moved me incredibly is that she was given the opportunity to escape from the convent in Holland but strongly refused the opportunity. She felt still quite bonded with her Jewish sisters and brothers and like so many others were shipped in a boxcar to Auschwitz where she was martyred.

The former editor of St. Anthony Messenger, John Feister, notes that “Stein wrote in a letter that she often was asked to lecture on complicated topics, ‘but I always come down to my one topic: how important it is to learn to live at God’s hands’” (*The Life and Legacy of Edith Stein* - Franciscan Media).

Edith’s witness in the midst of incredible stress has inspired me ever since. I find myself sometimes battling and am tempted to lose heart in the midst of challenges or problems I can’t seem to control. I always ask for her intercession. I’m not even remotely close to Edith’s integrity nor holiness but I always ask for her help. All of us hope to better “live at God’s hands,” as she wrote so many years ago. I pray that her life inspires you as she has my own.

In God’s great love, hope, and mercy,

Deacon Jim