

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

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1891–1942 • Germany

Edith was a Jewish girl in Germany, but she had left behind her Jewish faith because she did not know if God was real. Edith longed to learn what the truth was, and so she studied philosophy under the best masters in the university. She was a prized pupil and became a philosopher herself, writing many important works.

One day, she was inside a Catholic cathedral and saw a woman slip inside from the busy marketplace and kneel in silent prayer. Edith could not take her eyes away from the woman. She had never seen someone pray to God and speak to Him so closely, as if she and God were friends. This moment touched Edith's soul and made her wonder if maybe her desire for truth was really a desire for God.

Later, she was staying the night with some friends and was looking for something to read before going to sleep. She picked at random St. Teresa de Ávila's book about the story of her life. The book was so fascinating that Edith stayed up all night reading. When she had finished, she said, "This is the truth!" She realized that her longing for truth had been a prayer to God all along.

Edith became a Catholic and at the same time felt that she was Jewish again. She knew that Jesus was also a Jew, and that He was the promise of the Jewish religion. By becoming Catholic, she received the fullness of the faith that belonged to her blood. She wanted to become a Carmelite nun, but her spiritual advisers told her to remain at the university and teach. Edith agreed and through her teaching led others to God. But she did not remain a teacher for long.

Adolf Hitler and the Nazis were rising to power in Germany, and they wanted to hunt down and kill all the Jews. Edith was no longer allowed to teach at the university because of her Jewish blood. So she entered the Carmelite order and took the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. She knew the suffering of the Cross was her destiny and the destiny of the Jewish people. Soon, the Carmelite sisters snuck Edith out of Germany to a convent in the Netherlands because her life was in danger. Edith knew that her death was approaching, and she wrote down that she would willingly die if that was God's plan, offering her life for the salvation of Germany and the peace of the world.

The Nazis took over the Netherlands and hunted down the Jews and the Jewish Catholics. Edith was arrested and taken to the fearful concentration camp, Auschwitz, where she died offering her life up to God as she had said she would.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, help me offer up the crosses in my life to God!