

As a contemplative nun, she continued to write; although her works were not permitted for publication by the Nazis. She also joined the other sisters in writing poems and plays; a common pastime for Carmelite sisters for hundreds of years. In her continued and deepening appreciation for art, she saw God as the Divine Artist who collaborates with humanity.

When she suffered a broken wrist and foot, she was sent to the local hospital and there received a visit from her older sister Rosa, who had decided to convert to Catholicism. Rosa was baptized in the hospital chapel and became a Carmelite tertiary, living the sisters' spirituality while being able to help care for their needs outside the convent walls.

When Jewish persecution increased, Sister Teresa Benedicta realized that her presence was a danger to her community's safety. She requested and received permission to transfer to a foreign monastery.

On the night of New Year's Eve 1938, she secretly crossed the border into Holland. At the Carmelite convent of Echt, she wrote *The Science of the Cross*, in which she said; "To suffer and to be happy although suffering, to have one's feet on the earth, to walk on the dirty and rough paths of this earth and yet to be enthroned with Christ at the Father's right hand, to laugh and cry with the children of this world and ceaselessly sing the praises of God with the choirs of angels—this is the life of the Christian until the morning of eternity breaks forth."

After Dutch bishops issued a letter against recent antisemitic activity, the Nazis arrested all Jews who had converted to Christianity. Sister Teresa Benedicta and sister Rosa, who was also at the Echt Carmel, were stuffed into suffocated box cars on August 2, 1942. "Come, Rosa," she encouraged her sister, "We are going for our people!" They were imprisoned at Amersfoort and Westerbork before being deported to Auschwitz. One official was so impressed by Sister Teresa Benedicta's demeanor that he offered her a way to escape, but she said, "If somebody intervened at this point and took away my chance to share in the fate of my brothers and sisters, that would be utter annihilation." She died in the Auschwitz gas chambers on August 9, 1942.

Socials with the Saints

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Sources include: ENDOW's *Edith Stein: Seeker of Truth* and "Finding Peace Amid the Storms of Life"
(presentation by Devanie Marie Cooper)



St. Edith Stein

Teresa Blessed by the Cross

Born: 12 Oct 1891 in Breslau, Germany

Died: 9 Aug, 1942 at Auschwitz

Feast Day: August 9

Canonized: 11 Oct 1998 by Pope John Paul II

Edith Stein was the youngest of seven surviving children to Siegfried and Auguste Stein, born on the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). Her father died of heatstroke when she was an infant, leaving the family lumber business to her mother, who would diligently manage it into old age.

Edith's mother had a great impact on the family. A devout Jew, she cultivated a love for the arts within their home. Young Edith became an instant fan of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach. While she also devoured books and wrote poetry, the theater piqued her imagination.

Jumping from kindergarten to primary school midway through the year, Edith rose to the top of her class, demonstrating a remarkable intellect. At age 14, she decided to take a break from school. She went to stay with her pregnant sister Else and brother-in-law, assisting them with daily needs and enjoying books in-between chores. The young couple did not practice Judaism. This is when Edith made a decision to stop practicing religion, as well. She would live as an atheist for the next ten years of her life.

For a time, encountering the problems of the world, she experienced depression. She later reflected, "I had lost all confidence in the persons with whom I associated daily; I went about as one unbearably burdened; and I was beyond finding enjoyment in anything at all." What saved her was a ticket to a music festival featuring the works of her favorite, Bach. There, she heard a Christian hymn that declared, *And though this world with devils filled / Should threaten to undo us / We will not fear, / [...] truth will triumph through us*. She found solace and healing in the thought of trusting those closest to her, with whom she could overcome any evil.

By the time she reached college age, she decided to re-enter school. Prussian universities had only recently begun admitting women, as academia were thought to be highly impractical for women. She passed entrance exams,

impressing the examiners, and decided to study psychology. Ever her cheerleader, Edith's mother encouraged her to pursue her passion.

In her *philosophical* studies, she came across a new movement focused on examining universal human experiences, called phenomenology. This new methodology had been launched by Edmund Husserl, himself a Jewish convert to Christianity. Edith first applied it by studying human passions, which she argued ultimately reveal our internal set of values.

Again she fell into depression, this time causing sleeplessness, inability to rest during the day, and trouble concentrating. "Little by little I worked myself into a state of veritable despair," she said. "I could no longer cross the street without wishing I would be run over by some vehicle."

World War I interrupted this internal crisis. She volunteered with the Red Cross as a field nurse, which strengthened her sense of empathy. After her service, a shortage of men led to open teaching positions at her former high school. She taught Latin while earning her doctorate in philosophy.

Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, hired Dr. Stein as his teaching assistant. However, she found the position unfulfilling; she wasn't treated as his collaborator. She resigned. "Now I am free..." she reflected, though "I am not exactly happy." For years, she worked to become a professor, but couldn't overcome prejudice against females for such a position.

In the midst of her studies, Edith's search for truth led her to encounter Christianity – on excursions, and in the community. After one of her dear friends in academia died in the War, Edith was asked to help sort his papers. She dreaded the task, but was amazed and inspired by his widow Anna, who drew grace and strength from living the Cross of Christ. Then, while Edith was vacationing at a resort in 1921, she began reading a book from the library; the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. Upon finishing, she said aloud, "This is the truth." She began attending daily Mass while helping her expectant sister Erna. Edith entered the Catholic Church on the following New Year's Day.

Afterward, she taught at a Dominican teacher's college, forming young women intellectually and spiritually. She was also known for her wit and good humor, and she maintained friendships which she'd formed at the school for the remainder of her life. Dr. Stein traveled around Europe, teaching and presenting lectures on women and women's issues.

She seemed to be generous with her earnings, as a peer teacher recalled that before Christmas, "There was a surprise for everyone in anyway connected with her, all beautifully wrapped up. And what big parcels found their way secretly to the poor in the town!"

In her professional work, Stein presented women and men as different in strengths and natures, yet complementary. "Every profession in which a woman's soul comes into its own and which can be formed by woman's soul is an authentic woman's profession," she wrote. From traditionally accepted roles to more progressive roles in politics, medicine, and education, Stein saw women transforming society by "acknowledg[ing] the person, because they see persons with their hearts. They see them independently of various ideological or political systems. They see others in their greatness and their limitations; they try to go out to them and help them." (John Paul II, *Letter to Women*)

Stein became a major force in the German neo-Scholastic movement, and is to thank for the German translations of Cardinal Newman's *Letters and Journals* and *The Idea of the University*, as well as St. Thomas Aquinas' *Disputed Questions on Truth*.

In 1932 she became a lecturer in Münster, but antisemitic legislation passed by the Nazi government forced her to resign the following year. She wrote a letter to the Pope, addressing the Church's silence on the so-called Christian government's stance. Although it is unknown whether he saw her letter, Pope Pius XI issued a German-language encyclical condemning "the so-called myth of race and blood" preached by the German government, idolization of the State, and antisemitism.

Edith maintained a regular practice of prayer each day, and made an annual Holy Week pilgrimage to a German Benedictine abbey, where the superior became her spiritual director.

After losing her teaching position due to anti-Semitism, she entered religious life with the Carmelites in 1933. In April 1934, she received the habit and the religious name of Teresia Benedicta a Cruce (Teresa, Blessed by the Cross). Sadly, her mother cut off communication with Edith for some time. On Easter Sunday 1935, she professed her vows. After writing home about the event, she was surprised to receive a few well wishes from her mother.

Sister Teresa Benedicta developed a deeper interior life at Carmel. She reflected that "human beings are called upon to live in their inmost region," requiring an "extraordinary awakening" amidst life's sensory distractions.