

# WITNESS TO FREEDOM

## ST. TERESA BENEDICTA OF THE CROSS

*"Those who seek the truth  
are seeking God,  
whether they know it or not."*

Convert. Philosopher. Martyr. Edith Stein – or, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross – embodies catholicity in the fullest sense. She sought the truth, spoke up against anti-Semitism, and achieved success as a philosopher despite the setbacks she faced as a Jewish woman. She is witness to freedom in many ways.

Stein was raised in a Jewish household by her devout mother. Her father died when she was young. As she grew older, she drifted away from Jewish practice and eventually came to consider herself an atheist.

As one of the exceptional students who surrounded Edmund Husserl, the great phenomenologist, Stein was at the vanguard of philosophy. Her work touches on metaphysics, political philosophy, and psychology. Her devotion to reason, wherever reason might lead, helped keep her open to religion and the truth of God. Indeed, Pope St. John Paul II identifies her as an exemplary philosopher in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*. Stein found the truth in St. Teresa of Avila's autobiography, and she went on to join the Discalced Carmelites. After her conversion, she worked to bring phenomenology into dialogue with the scholasticism of St. Thomas Aquinas.

During the rise of Nazism, Stein spoke up. She wrote to Pope Pius XI asking the Church to speak up on behalf of persecuted Jews, and she wrote her autobiography, *Life in a Jewish Family*, "as a way to combat racial hatred." The Nazis captured Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross in 1942 and took her to Auschwitz, where she died in the gas chamber shortly after arrival.



Edith Stein at age 40 (1931); photo from the Archivum Carmelitanum Edith Stein, Cologne, Germany; published with permission of ICS Publications, Washington, D.C.

Stein was captured primarily because she was Jewish, and the Catholic Church considers her a Christian martyr, because she bore witness to her faith in Jesus before her executioners. She reminds us that we stand in solidarity with victims of anti-Semitism and all racist ideologies, for they are utterly opposed to the truth that there is one humanity, which comes from one God and is ordered to communion with that one God. And she inspires us to honor the intellectual vocation to seek the truth with love and devotion.

**St. Edith Stein, Patroness of Europe, pray for us!**



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