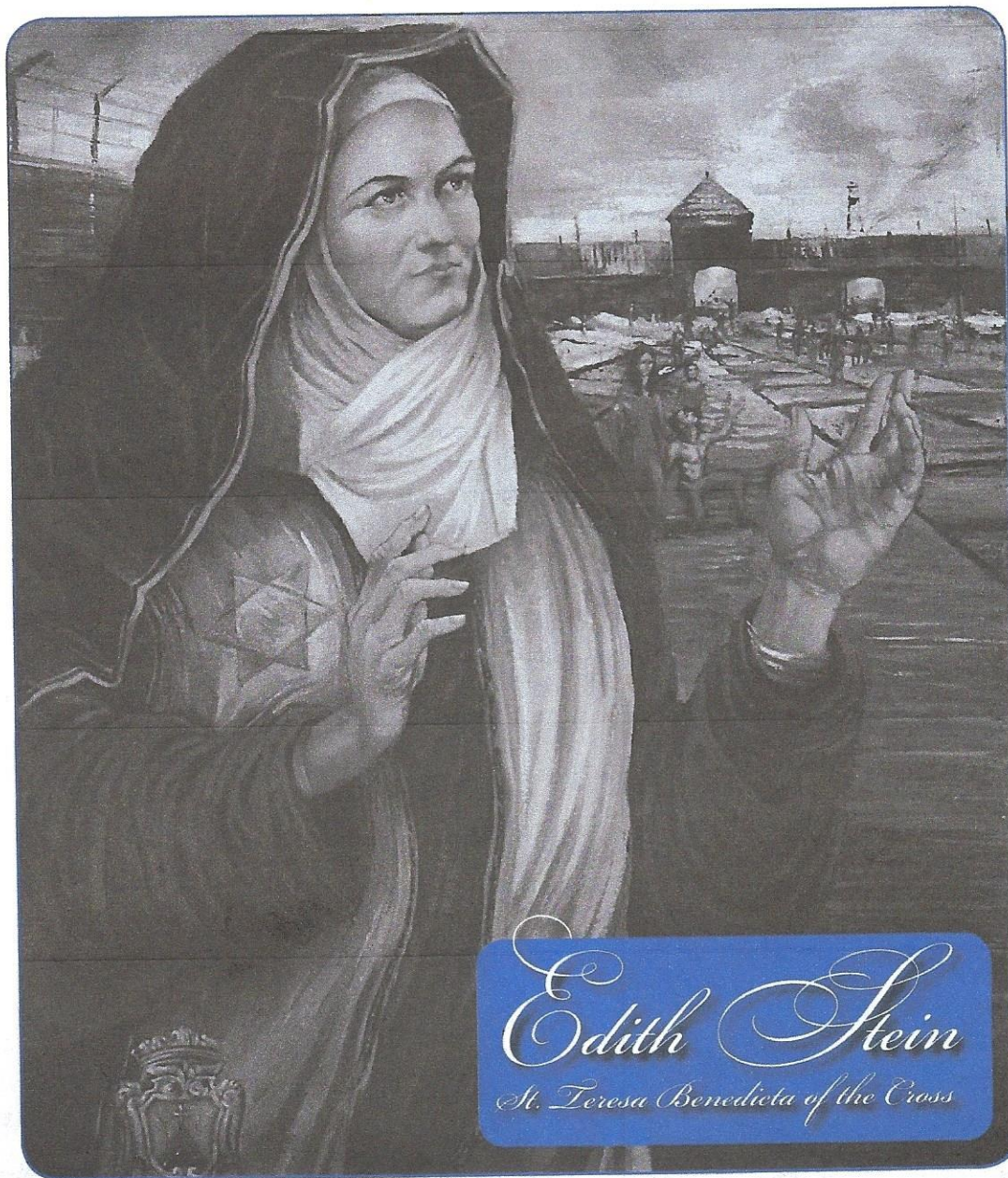


CARMEL CLARION

APRIL - JUNE 2010 † VOLUME XXVI, NO. 2



Edith Stein
St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

such force that, in spite of all my deliberations, without God's support I would not have taken one more step. But God gave me courage in spite of myself and I set out. [L, 4, 1]

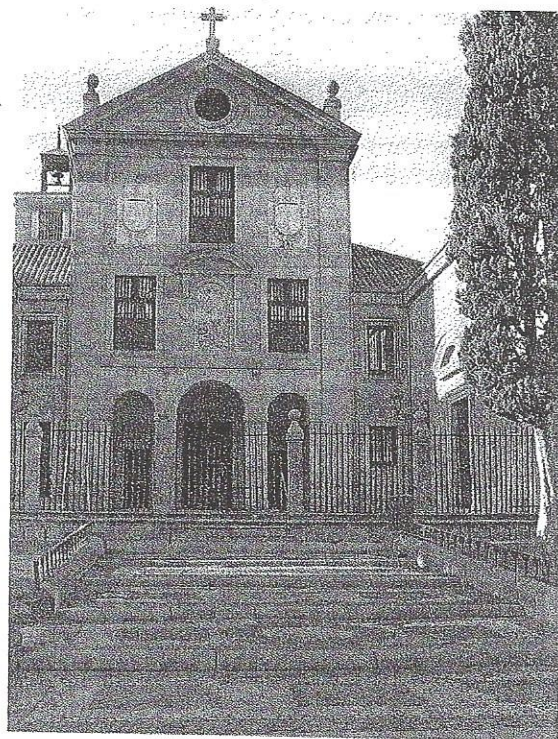
Antonio took his sister to the door of the Carmelite monastery. Then he himself went to the Dominican monastery of St. Thomas and asked for admission. This was on All Souls Day of the year 1535.

5. In the Monastery of the Incarnation: Novitiate

The house that in her childish reflections Teresa preferred over the Augustinians because a dear friend lived there (Juana Suarez, the blood sister of her teacher Maria Briceno) was the Carmelite Monastery of the Incarnation. It also had a number of other material advantages that could prejudice a receptive disposition: its magnificent location, its beautiful, spacious buildings, its expansive garden through which flowed clear streams. But these earthly motives were no longer decisive. "In spite of my preference for the monastery where my friend lived, I felt ready to enter some other one should I have had the hope of serving God better there or should it have been my father's wish. For I was seriously seeking the salvation of my soul and placed little value on quiet living" [L, 2, 2]. So it was clearly God's mysterious grace guiding her that gave her the inner certainty of where to direct her steps.

The *Order of the Most Blessed Virgin of Mount Carmel*, to which Teresa now belonged, already looked back on a long and glorious past. It revered as its founder the Prophet Elijah who led a hermit's life of prayer and fasting with his disciples in the caves of Mount Carmel. When his prayer freed the land of Israel from a drought that had lasted for years, then (according to the Order's legend) in a little cloud that signaled the saving rain, his prophetic vision recognized the image of the Virgin who would bear God, she who would bring grace.

He is said to have been the first to revere the Mother of God, and the first shrine to Mary is said to have stood on the lovely heights of Mount Carmel. During the time of the crusades, the hermits of Mount Carmel were organized as an order. At their request, Patriarch Albert of Jerusalem gave them a Rule for their Order around 1200. In solitude and silence, they were to meditate on the law of the Lord day and night, to observe strict fasts as of old, and to obtain what they needed to live by the work of their own hands, as the apostle Paul exhorted. The persecution of religious by the Moslem conquerors of the Holy Land led to the transplantation of the Order to the West. Here the destiny of other orders at the beginning of the Middle Ages befell them also. The strict discipline of old gave way to a certain mitigation. Pope Eugene IV moderated the original Rule; and the first women's monasteries of the Order were founded in the fifteenth century on the basis of these moderated regulations. They also were observed at the Monastery of the Incarnation. It had only been in existence for a few decades before Teresa entered, and one could not accuse it of abuses. The existing regulations were being followed. Nuns of



The Monastery of the Incarnation, Madrid

deep piety and of exemplary conduct lived there, but there was scarcely a trace left of the strong spirit of the original Carmel. The rich appointments of the monastery permitted a comfortable life; the old fasts and penances were for the most part abolished; there was great freedom of association with people in the world. The influx to this attractive place was so great that the monastery numbered 190 nuns in 1560. Still, the framework given it by its Constitutions continued to offer the full possibility of a true life of prayer. Teresa progressed through the school of the interior life to perfection here.

The last shadow to her happiness as a young novice vanished when Don Alonso subsequently gave his consent to her decision and, with a holy zeal, set about to challenge his young daughter in climbing the mountain of perfection, doing so in fact under her direction. She took up religious life with the same determination with which she had left her father's house, eagerly turned to prayer, the practices of obedience, and sisterly love. The reward was superabundant. If Teresa's resolute decision had been based mainly on the fear of God's judgment and on concern about her eternal salvation, these original motives soon receded in the face of God's love blazing up powerfully.

At the same time as I put on the holy habit, God showed me his preference for those who constrain themselves in his service. I also felt so happy in my new position that this blessed feeling still continues. Nothing could rob me of this delight. God changed the dryness that could bring me to doubt into love for him.

All the monastic practices were congenial to me. I often had to mop the floor in hours during which formerly I had dressed or amused myself. Just the thought of being free of all of these silly things gave me renewed joy. I did not understand the source of so much joy.

As I think about it, there is no difficulty then that I would not have the courage to overcome. I know from experience that as soon as one has firmly decided right from the beginning to pursue one's goal for the honor of God without considering the opposition of one's nature, one is soon also rewarded. In order to increase our merits, God wants the soul to undergo an indescribable anxiety before one sets to work. But the greater this anxiety, the greater, later, is the delight. [L, 4, 2]

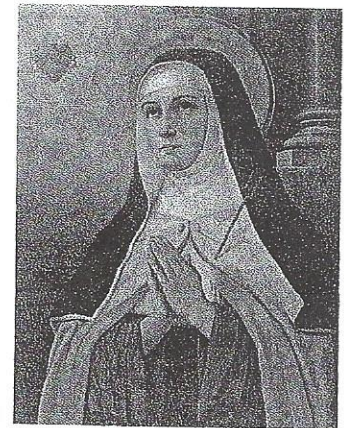
With holy joy the young novice participated in choral prayer. But the prescribed prayer times were not sufficient for her zeal. She also was happiest spending her free hours in silent contemplation before the tabernacle. It goes without saying that souls who did not like prayer as much accused her of exaggeration. But she let nothing stop her on her way. God's love gave her natural amiability and readiness to serve a new incentive and higher motivation when dealing with people. She felt that a day was lost if she did not do some work of charity. She welcomed the smallest opportunity for doing so. She took particular pleasure in caring for the sick. She enveloped with tender care a nun who was dying of a terrible disease that disgusted everyone else, and tried in every way to show that she was not at all repelled. This sick person's patience so strongly aroused her wonder that there was awakened in her a desire for similar trials.

...I asked God that, provided he were graciously to give me this patience, that he would also send me the most horrible diseases. I had the feeling of fearing none of them. I experienced such a strong desire for eternal goods that I would use any means to get them. Now I wonder at this myself, for at that time I did not yet have that love of God in me that I later found in meditative prayer. It was an inner light that let me recognize the little value of everything transitory and the immeasurable value of the eternal. [L, 5, 2]

Soon her pleas were to be heard.

6. The School of Suffering: Interior Life

Not long after her profession (November 3, 1537), heart problems sent her to the infirmary. She bore the pain, the forced idleness, the inability to participate in the religious practices, with no less patience than that of the nun who had amazed her. So she won the love of all the other sisters, even those who had formerly criticized and misinterpreted her actions. Her fond father wanted everything possible to be done and, because the doctors could not help, decided to take his daughter to a healer who was famous for her cures. Since the Monastery of the Incarnation was not enclosed, there was no hesitation about allowing her family to care for the young sister. The long trip took them first past Hortigosa. Pedro Sanchez gave Teresa a book [i.e., the *Third Spiritual Alphabet*] by Fr. [Francisco de] Osuna about the prayer of recollection, which was soon to become her guide. The travelers spent the winter at the farmhouse of Maria de Cepeda. Even though as in earlier years she was here surrounded by her loved ones, and devoted herself wholeheartedly to them, Teresa knew how to arrange the day to give herself enough time for solitary prayer; and so she remained faithful to her religious vocation outside the monastery setting. However, her illness steadily increased so that it was a relief when spring came, the time the healer of Becedas had designated for the cure. The long journey was a torment for the patient, but the cure was even worse. Instead of healing her, it only increased her suffering. In spite of all her agonizing pain, she steadfastly continued in contemplative prayer according to the directions in her spiritual guidebook, and God rewarded this courageous fidelity by even then raising her to a high level of the interior life.



In her writings, this doctor of prayer later presented the mystical life of grace in all its stages with incomparable clarity.⁵ The neophyte who was beginning, to practice prayer did not yet know what was happening in her soul. But in order to make her further development intelligible, it is necessary to say a few words here about the interior life.

Prayer is the communication of the soul with God. God is love, and love is goodness giving itself away. It is a fullness of being that does not want to remain enclosed in itself, but rather to share itself with others, to give itself to them, and to make them happy. All of creation exists thanks to this divine love spending itself. However, the highest of all creatures are those endowed with spirit, able to receive God's love with understanding and to return it freely: angels and human souls. Prayer is the highest achievement of which the human spirit is capable. But it is not merely a human achievement. Prayer is a Jacob's ladder on which the human spirit ascends to God and God's grace descends to people. The stages of prayer are distinguished according to the measure in which the natural efforts of the soul and God's grace participate. When the soul is no longer active by virtue of its own efforts, but is simply a receptacle for grace, one speaks of a mystical life of prayer.

So-called vocal prayer is designated as the lowest stage, prayer that remains within specifically designated spoken forms: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the rosary, the Divine Office. Of course, "vocal" prayer is not to be understood as simply saying words. If the mere words of a prayer alone are said without the soul's raising itself to God, this is only an

⁵ In particular in her *Life*, *Way of Perfection*, and *Interior Castle*. The references cited so far are from her *Life*. However, it is recommended that the reader who has not yet dealt with spiritual writings begin with the *Way of Perfection*. The presentation of the Our Father contained in it is a model example of contemplative prayer.

outward show and not real prayer. The designated words, however, support the spirit and prescribe to it a fixed path.

Meditative prayer is one stage higher. Here the spirit moves more freely without being bound to specific words. It immerses itself, for example, in the mystery of the birth of Jesus. The spirit's imagination [*Phantasie*] transports it to the grotto in Bethlehem, seeing the child in the manger, the holy parents, the shepherds, and the kings. The intellect ponders the greatness of divine mercy, the emotions are seized by love and thankfulness, the will decides to make itself more worthy of divine love. This is how meditative prayer involves all the soul's powers and, when practiced with faithful persistence, can gradually remake the whole person. However, the Lord has yet another way of rewarding fidelity in meditation: by elevation to a higher manner of praying.

St. Teresa calls the next stage the prayer of quiet or simplicity. Various activities are replaced by a recollection of spiritual energies. The soul is no longer in a position to reflect

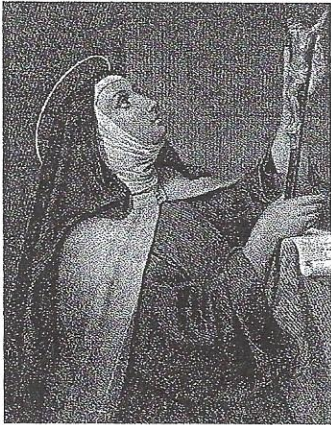
intellectually or to make definite decisions; she is completely engaged by something she cannot avoid, the presence of her God who is close to her and allows her to rest in him. While the lower prayer stages are accessible to every believer by human effort, albeit aided by the grace of God, we are now standing at the border of the mystical life of grace that cannot be entered by virtue of human energy, for here only God's special favor grants admission.

If the perception of God's presence is already something which totally captivates the soul and gives it a happiness incomparable to any earthly happiness, then this is greatly surpassed by the union with the Lord, which, at first, is usually granted to it for only a very short time.

At this stage of mystical favor many events occur that are also outwardly recognized as extraordinary: *ecstasies* and *visions*. The energy of the soul is so attracted by the supernatural influence that its lower faculties, the senses, lose their effectiveness entirely. The soul no longer sees or hears anything, the body no longer feels pain when injured, and in some cases becomes rigid like someone dead. But the soul lives an intensified life as if it were outside its body. Sometimes the Lord himself appears to it in bodily form, sometimes the Mother of God or an angel or saint. It sees these heavenly forms as if through bodily perception, or also in imagination. Or its intellect is supernaturally enlightened and gains insight into hidden truths. Such private revelations usually have the purpose of teaching souls about their own condition or that of others, of confiding God's intentions to them, and of forming them for a specific task for which God has selected them. They are seldom absent in the lives of saints, though they by no means belong to the essence of holiness. Usually they only appear during a certain phase and later vanish again.

These souls, who have been sufficiently prepared and tested by repeated transitory union with him, by extraordinary illuminations, and at the same time through suffering and various trials, the Lord wishes to bind to himself permanently. He enters into a covenant with them that is called "spiritual betrothal." He expects them to put themselves completely at his service; at the same time, he takes them into safekeeping, cares for them, and is always ready to grant their requests.

Finally, Teresa calls the highest stage of blessedness "spiritual marriage." The extraordinary



events have now stopped, but the soul is constantly united with the Lord. She enjoys his presence even in the midst of external activities without being hindered in the least.

The saint had to go through all of these stages during a development that took years before she could account for them herself and give others advice. But the beginnings were during that time of greatest *bodily* suffering:

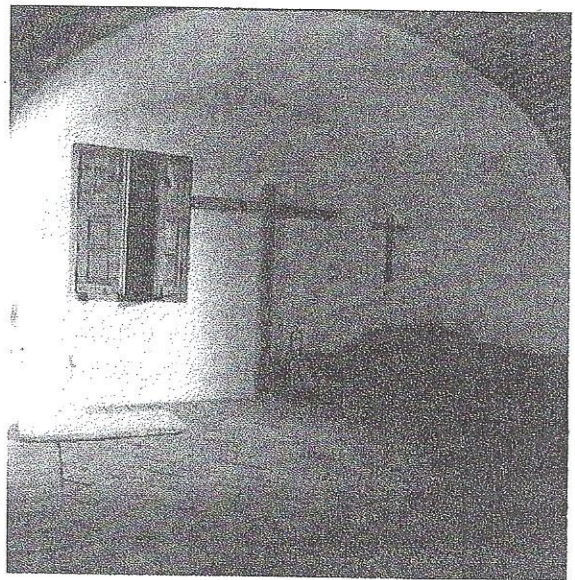
It pleased the heavenly Master to deal with me with such love that he gave me the prayer of quiet. But he often also raised me up to that of union. Unfortunately, I was unfamiliar with either kind. In fact, it would have been useful to me to recognize their value. To be sure, this union did not last long, I believe, hardly as long as one Hail Mary. But it had a great influence on me. I was not yet twenty years old and already believed that I saw the world lying conquered under my feet. I pitied all who had relationships with the world, even if the ties were permitted. I tried with all my strength to be truly present in my soul to Jesus our Lord, our highest Good, our Master. My way of praying was to think about one of the mysteries of his divine life and make a mental image of it. [L, 4, 7]

The effect of her prayer life was an ever-increasing love of God and of souls. If earlier her natural gifts had had an unusual influence on her human surroundings, her supernatural power to love now gave her an almost irresistible force. The first person to experience it was the priest to whom she confessed in Becedas. The insight he had into this pure soul, who blamed herself for innocent little slips with the most bitter regret, disturbed him so much that he himself confessed to his penitent the serious sin in which he had been living for years. Now she could not rest until he had freed himself from these disgraceful fetters. The power of her words and her intercession changed him into a contrite penitent.

After her return to the family home in Avila, the state of the patient got so much worse that there seemed no further hope for her life. Teresa was unconscious for four days. The news of her death spread through the city. Her grave was dug at the Monastery of the Incarnation. The Carmelites of Avila sang a requiem for her. Only her father and siblings continued besieging heaven, and finally she opened her eyes again. At the moment of awakening she spoke some words that implied she had seen some great things during this apparent death. During her last days she admitted that God at that time had shown her heaven and hell, besides her later work in the Order, and the saintly deaths of her father and her friend Juana Suarez, as well as her own.

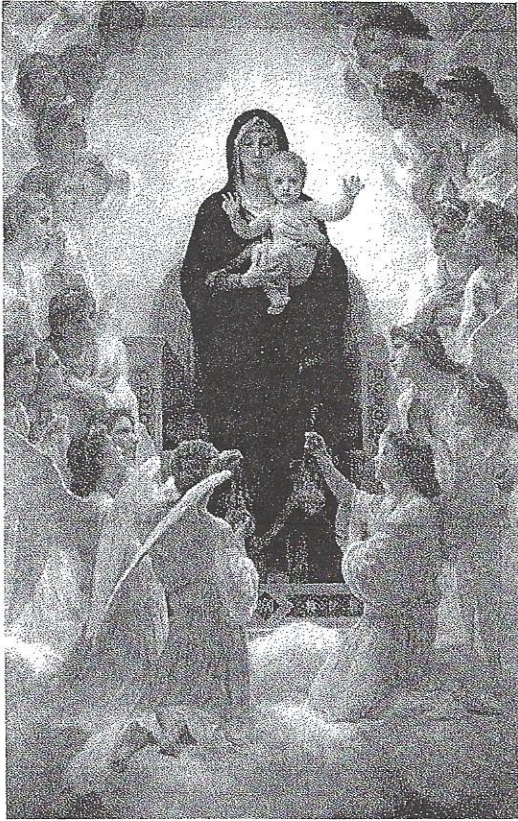
As soon as a slight improvement began, Teresa moved back to her monastery at her urgent request. But she was confined to her bed for several more years, seemed to be crippled forever, and suffered unutterable pain. She herself describes the state of her soul during this time of trial.

I bore these sufferings with great composure, in fact with joy, except at first when the pain was too severe. What followed seemed to hurt less. I was completely surrendered to the will of God even if he intended to burden me like this forever. It appeared to me that all I wanted was to get healthy so as to withdraw into solitude as my book prescribed. This was difficult in the sick



St. Teresa's cell at Avila

room... The other sisters wondered at my God-given patience. Without him I truly could not have borne so much with so much joy.



Mary Queen of Angels

Now I understood how prayer is a blessing. In the first place, it showed me what God's true love was. Next I felt new virtues developing in me that were still very weak... I never said anything bad about others. Instead, I excused those who were targets of negative gossip, for I reminded myself that I did not want to say nor even liked to hear anything that I would not have liked to hear said about myself. I remained true to this resolution. Sometimes but not often I failed to keep it. I advised the other sisters and people who visited me to do likewise. They assumed these practices. It was soon noticed. It was said that those absent had nothing to fear from me or from my parents and friends... [L, 6, 3-4]

Teresa suffered for three years without asking for recovery. We do not know why she now changed her mind. She only tells us that she decided to beseech heaven to end her suffering. With this intention, she asked that a Mass be offered and turned toward the saint in whom she had always had unlimited trust, and who owes to her zeal the increased veneration shown him. "I do not know how to think about the Queen of Angels, about all of her pains and cares with the little child Jesus without thanking St. Joseph for the dedication with which he came to the help of both of them" [L, 6, 8]. She ascribed her healing to him.

Soon he came to my rescue in very obvious ways. This most beloved father and lord of my soul quickly freed me of the weakness and suffering to which my body was consigned.... I don't recall that he ever denied me anything.

St. Joseph permitted his power and goodness to me to become evident. Through him I regained my strength. I stood up, walked, and was free of the paralysis. [see L, 6, 6-8] ❀

IN THE NEXT ISSUE – Part 2: Infidelity, Return, God Alone, New Tests, Works for the Lord, and Saint Joseph's of Avila - the First Monastery of the Reform

In Remembrance

Edna Lunney, OCDS, *Mary Theresa of the Holy Face*, who made Definitive Promise on July 16th 1988, began eternal life on January 2, 2008. She was a member of the Mary, Queen of Carmel Community in Lakeland, FL.

Maud Lucas, OCDS, who made Definitive Promise on April 14th 1996, began eternal life on April 3, 2010. She was a member of the Our Lady of the Paraclete Community in Royal Oak, MI.

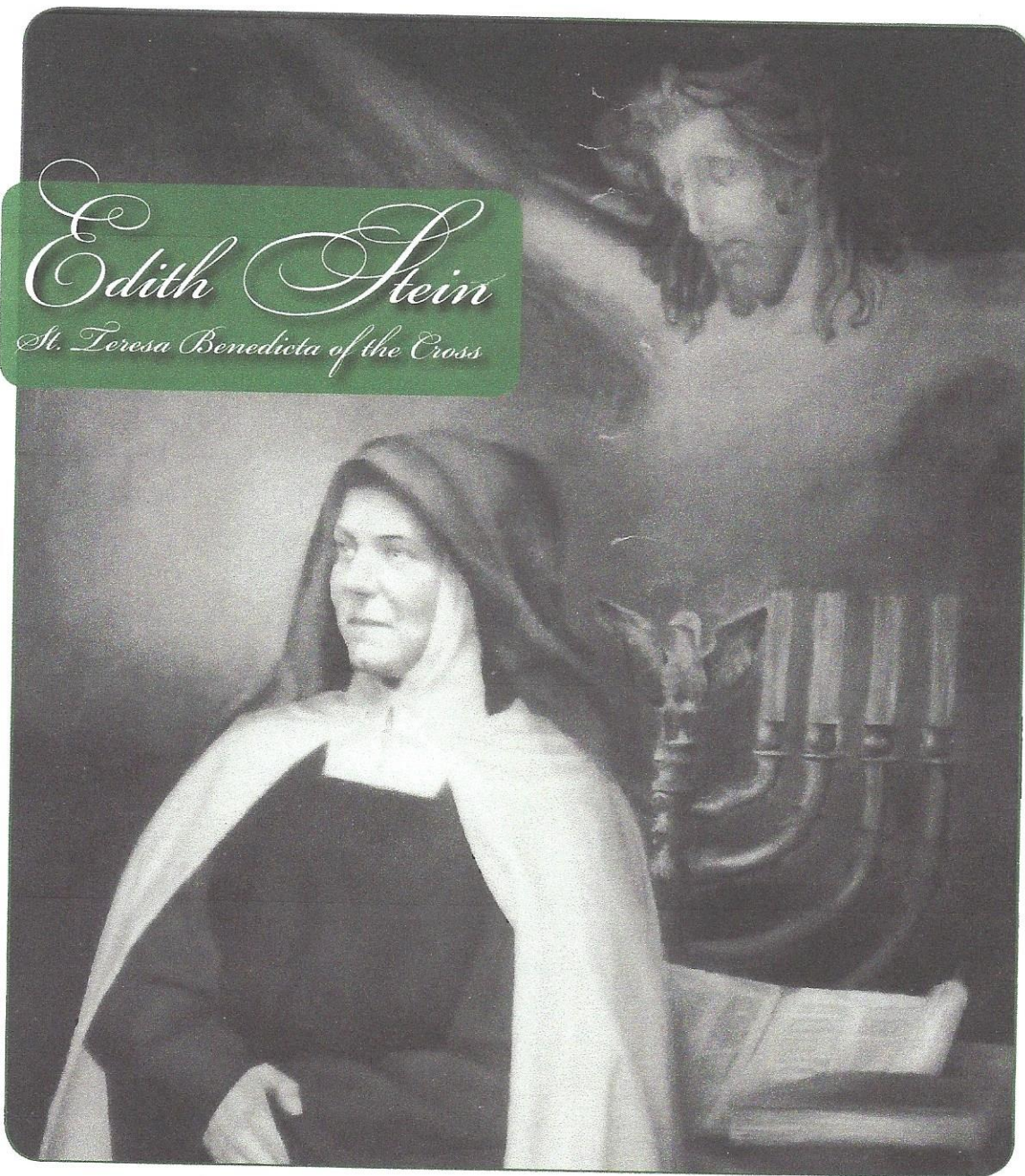
Arleen of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Gifford, OCDS, who made her Definitive Promise on September 9th 2006, began eternal life on May 24, 2010. She was a member of the Our Lady of Victory Community of Utica, NY.

EDITORIAL CORRECTION: Deacon William Jamieson, Spiritual Assistant for the St. Joseph Protector Community in Harrison Township, MI was reported as deceased in error. He is alive and well.

CARMEL CLARION

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Edith Stein
St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross



Love for Love:

The Life and Works of St. Teresa of Jesus

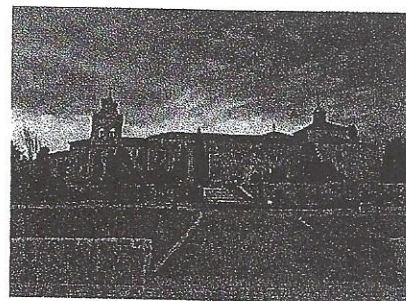
By St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein)

Part 2 in a 3 Part Series

7. Infidelity

Teresa's generous heart was certainly determined to dedicate the life that had been given to her anew entirely to the service of her beloved Lord. She had no idea that her recovery was to result in dangers, and that when she left the solitary sickroom, there was to be an end for a long time to her excursions among the heights—in fact, that she was to lose again all that she had gained. "My great misfortune was that I found myself in a monastery without an enclosure. Doubtless, the dear nuns could be pleased with the freedom and remain innocent... But I, weakness itself, would have found it the way to hell had not God with particular grace saved me from this danger" [L, 7, 3].

It was understandable that relatives and friends joyfully welcomed her whose life had been restored, that she was often called into the speakroom, that her loveliness, her animated spirit, her exceptional conversational ability delighted these visitors and drew them to come again and again. All research has concluded that Teresa's association with people in the world, on which she herself looked back with the most bitter repentance for her entire life, was entirely pure and in no way a relapse into worldly frivolity. She had a healthy influence on her visitors and during this time also spoke about nothing more eagerly than divine things. Nevertheless, her remorse is understandable because association with people diverted her from association with God. She lost the taste for prayer, and once she had gone this far, she no longer even thought herself worthy of such a grace.



Monastery of the Incarnation

Under the pretext of humility, I was afraid of prayer and meditation. I said to myself that, as the most imperfect of persons, it was better for me to do what everyone else was doing and to limit myself to the prescribed verbal prayers. In my condition, which was more suited to the company of the devil, I did not want to pursue so much intimacy with God. I was also afraid of deceiving the whole world. [L, 7, 1]

During this time Teresa impressed the other sisters as a thoroughly first-rate nun.

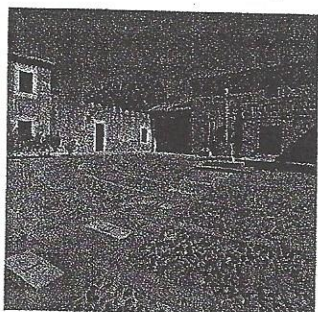
In spite of my youth and many relationships to the world, people saw how I sought solitude for reading and for prayer. I often spoke of God. I was fond of having the image of the Savior painted in various places. I had a special place to pray and carefully decorated it with all that could stimulate devotion. I never spread malicious gossip. [L, 7, 2]

And all that took place "without appearing at all calculating; for I really hated pretense, empty honor, and I believe—God be praised! — that I never thus offended him. As soon as self-love stirred in my heart I was so remorseful that the devil lost and I won..." [see L, 7, 1]. But the Lord wanted more from her.

One day while I was talking with someone with whom I had recently become acquainted, God gave me to understand that such acquaintances were not suitable for me and illumined me in my darkness. Our Savior Jesus Christ appeared to me as sad and serious and declared how much I was distressing him. I saw him only with the eyes of my soul, but much more clearly than if I

could have seen him with the eyes in my body. His image impressed itself into my spirit so deeply that even now, after more than twenty-six years, it is not erased. Seized by anxiety and confusion, I no longer wanted to receive this person. But to my detriment then, I did not know that the soul can see without the mediation of physical eyes. The devil used my ignorance to tell me this was impossible. He told me that the vision was a delusion, a machination of the devil.... But deep in my heart I still had a secret feeling that what I had seen came from God. But since this did not correspond to my inclinations, I tried to deceive myself. I did not dare to speak with someone about it.... People told me that it was not bad to welcome this person; associating with her would never hurt me, but would be an honor for me. Finally, I gave in. [L, 7, 6-7]

Her father's attitude was a serious warning. He had been allowing his child to lead him on the path of interior prayer and remained faithful to it. Teresa's upright nature could not permit her to leave him under the delusion that she was faithful too.



Courtyard with the Seven Chambers

I confessed to him, though without indicating the deeper reason, that I had stopped praying. I used only my health as a pretext. Actually, even though I had recovered from the serious illness, I still had to suffer a great deal. But this was not enough to justify myself. One does not need physical strength for prayer, but only love and steadfastness. My father, who loved me tenderly and was deceived by me, believed everything and pitied me. Since he had already progressed far toward perfection, he no longer spent as much time with me. After a short dialogue, he left me with the remark that lengthy lingering is time lost. But I who was losing time in an entirely different way did not see with as sharp an eye. [L, 7, 11-13]

Teresa spent at least one year, possibly longer, in this way. She did not feel at all good about it, and was constantly in great spiritual unrest. Yet again and again she permitted herself to be held back by a false humility. "I do not know how I was able to stand such a state of affairs. Perhaps what kept me going was the hope of taking up praying again. For I still had in my heart the will to return to it again. I was only waiting until I got better. Oh, onto how wicked a path did this insane hope lead me!" [L, 19, 11].

8. Return

Teresa was to find deliverance at the deathbed of her father. Upon the news of his serious illness, she was permitted to go to him and be at his side during his last days.

With him I lost all my happiness and joy. Yet I had the strength to conceal my pain from him. I remained quiet until his death, even though I felt that someone was tearing a piece from my heart as I watched such a precious life being slowly extinguished. But God gave him such a holy death that I cannot thank him enough. It was deeply moving to see the supernatural joy of this good father; to listen to the advice that he gave us after receiving Extreme Unction. He made us promise to commend him to God and to plead for his mercy, to fulfill our duties faithfully, and always to remember how quickly the things of this world pass and perish. With tear-filled eyes,

- 1 [In fact, recent studies have shown that Teresa was of Jewish ancestry; see Teofanes Egido, "The Historical Setting of St. Teresa's Life," *Carmelite Studies* 1 (1980): 122-182. Throughout this essay, Edith Stein writes in light of the historical data available to her at the time. Some minor corrections (of dates, etc.) have been inserted into the text of this translation, but the basic presentation remains as she wrote it.—Tr.]
- 2 [According to recent research, the dedication of the chapel of the Monastery of the Incarnation took place in the same year (1515) as Teresa's birth, but not on the same day; see Efrén de la Madre de Dios and Otger Steggink, *Tiempo y Vida de Santa Teresa*, 2d ed. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1977), pp. 22-25, 90.—Tr.]
- 3 [Throughout this essay, to help preserve its original flavor, citations of St. Teresa's works have been translated directly from the comparatively free German translation that Edith Stein used. In addition, for the convenience of the reader, we have inserted cross-references (in brackets) to the ICS translations of the same texts, whenever these could be located. The latter may be found in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, vols. 1-3 (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1976-1985). The following system of abbreviations is used: F = Book of Foundations; L = Book of Her Life; C = Interior Castle; W = Way of Perfection; ST = Spiritual Testimonies. Ordinarily, the two numbers following the initial letter indicate chapter and section, respectively; for the Interior Castle, however, the first number indicates the "dwelling place." Thus, "C, 1, 2, 3" refers to the third section of the second chapter in the first "dwelling places" of the Interior Castle.—Tr.]

he told us about his pain at not having served God the Lord better and during his last moment rued not having entered the strictest order.

He suffered a great deal, mainly with a piercing pain in his shoulders that gave him not a moment's peace. I remembered his devotion to the mystery of the cross-bearing Savior and told him that God surely wanted to let him feel something of the pain that he himself bore at that time of suffering. This thought gave him such comfort that there no longer came the slightest complaint from his lips. He lay unconscious for three days. However, to our great surprise, on the day of his death God returned him to consciousness and he remained conscious to the end.

In the middle of the creed, which he himself was praying with a clear voice, he gently gave up his spirit. At the same time his features became supernaturally beautiful. He seemed to be resting in the peace of the angels. It seemed to me that he indeed became their brother at the moment of his death because of the purity of his soul and conscience. His confessor (from the order of St. Dominic) told us that he believed that our father had gone straight to heaven. [L, 7, 14-17]

This Dominican, Fr. Vicente Barron, made a deep impression on Teresa by the way in which he assisted the dying man. She asked if she could confess to him and gave him complete insight into the state of her soul. Contrary to all others before whom she had up to then accused herself, he recognized at once what she needed and advised her to take up prayer again. "I obeyed and since then I have never given it up again" [L, 7, 17].

But what followed now was not an undisturbed peace but rather years of great spiritual struggles.

This life that I was leading was very difficult because, in the light of prayer, I saw my errors newly illuminated. On the one hand, God called me; on the other, the world flattered me. Oh, my God, how could I describe all that your compassion did for me during those years or this battle that your love waged against my ingratitude! How am I to find the words to enumerate all the graces that you showered on me? At the moment I was offending you the most you suddenly led my spirit by means of deep rest to the enjoyment of your blessings and your consolations. O my redeemer! It is really true that you knew me. You knew how to punish me in the tenderest and severest way in that you rewarded my errors with good deeds.... My character made me suffer a great deal more when I received blessings after my failures instead of punishment— In an affliction I would at least have recognized a justified punishment. I would have seen this as a way of doing penance for my many sins. But to find myself showered by new favors, after so shamefully misusing the many already received, was a much greater agony for me. I firmly believe that only those who have some knowledge of and love for God can understand this.... [L, 7, 17-19]



Alonso Sánchez de Cepeda

Most souls favored by such graces experience that the interior life usually takes this course. God first draws them to himself by letting them enjoy the supernatural happiness of his beneficent presence, but then tests their fidelity by taking all joys away from them and letting them languish in dryness.

For three years I was oh so often concerned less with God and good thoughts than with the desire for seeing the end of the hour of prayer. I listened for the bell to finally ring. I would have preferred the most severe penances to the agony of being recollected at the feet of the Savior. The battle I had to endure with the devil and my wicked inclinations to make myself go to the oratory is indescribable. As soon as I entered, a deadly sadness came over me, and it took all my courage to conquer myself and give myself to prayer. Finally, God sent me help. And even if I had to force myself, I more often enjoyed consolations than on the days when I was in a better mood. [L, 8,7]

4 According to the saint. Fourteen in the latest research. [Ed.]

The saint endured these struggles for fourteen years without ever wavering in her faithfulness. Holy Week of the year 1554 brought her release.

One day as I entered the oratory I saw before me an image of the Savior that someone had placed there for an upcoming feast day.

This image showed our divine Master covered with wounds and with such a peaceful expression that I was moved by it. More than before I apprehended what the Savior had suffered for us. At the same time I experienced my own lack of thankfulness so bitterly that it seemed my heart would break. I fell at the feet of my divine Master and through a stream of tears pleaded with him to give me the strength not to offend him any more. I called on the presence of the holy Magdalene whom I already loved fervently and whose conversion I revered. She came to my help. Without trusting my good intentions, I put my whole trust in God. If I still remember this correctly, I said to him I would not get up until he had heard my plea and I knew for certain that he wanted to grant it. For on that day true life began for me and I never stopped improving. [L, 9, 1-2]

Soon afterward this operation of grace was reinforced by a second similar one.

Someone gave me the Confessions of St. Augustine. God granted this, for I never thought of requesting it nor had I ever read it. I had hardly opened this book than I thought that I saw myself in it. With all my strength I commended myself to this great saint.... I had always loved him very much, first because the monastery in which I had been raised followed his rule, and secondly because he was a poor sinner for a long time. I believed that, because God had forgiven him everything, I could also receive my forgiveness....

I cannot describe what happened in my heart when I read the description of his conversion and followed him into the garden where he heard the voice of heaven. It seemed to me as if God were speaking to me. Overcome by regret, I remained dissolved in my tears for a long time. The Lord be eternally praised. He led me from death to life again. My renewed strength made me recognize that he had heard my call and that my tears led him to have mercy on me. [L, 9, 7-9]

9. God Alone

Teresa had completed the fortieth year of her life when the Lord rewarded her faithful perseverance and drew her to himself anew, this time forever. According to a comparison that she herself used in her *Life* to portray the various ways of praying, in her view she had up to now operated in her prayer life like a gardener who draws up the water for his garden from a deep well with a great deal of effort. She was most fond of conceiving of the Lord with the help of the imagination [Phantasie] — she especially enjoyed seeking him out at the Mount of Olives—and had tried to stay close to him. Now God came to meet her. Like the gardener who has a sufficient supply of water to let it stream forth, she could rest from her efforts. Intellect and memory could cease their activity. In this prayer of quiet, “the will alone is active and, without knowing how, it delivers itself to God like a prisoner for him to chain to himself through his love.”

The soul that surrenders to the divine attraction by this way of praying is raised above its own suffering and receives some knowledge of heavenly glory. It grows, draws near to God, and so becomes stronger. It loses its pleasure in earthly things. Why? It clearly sees that it could not for even a moment enjoy this supernatural joy on earth, that no kingdoms, no realms, no honor, no joys can offer it for even a moment this true happiness that is absolutely the only thing that can satisfy....

Since it has known nothing to surpass this joy, it cherishes no other wish. With complete justification it will say along with St. Peter, “Lord, let us make our home here.” [L, 15, 1]



God Alone