



Cardinal Czerny: Edith Stein, a woman of truth and love

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09 August 2022 - This 9 August marks the 80th anniversary of the death of Edith Stein, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who was killed at Auschwitz in 1942. In his homily during Holy Mass in the Carmelite Monastery in Auschwitz, Cardinal Michael Czerny SJ, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development reflects on her remarkable story.

In his homily during Holy Mass in the Carmelite Monastery in Auschwitz, Cardinal Czerny drew parallels between his own family origins and those of Edith Stein, saying that with this background, he was very honoured and deeply moved to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the saint's "birth to heaven."

"With Edith Stein, I share Jewish origins, the Catholic faith, a vocation to religious life, and several coincidences with my maternal grandmother, Anna Hayek née Löw (1893-1945). They were about the same age and came to a similar end," he said.

Lest we forget

The cardinal noted that this anniversary occurs "within this year's special circumstances that invite and urge us to remember."

He was referring to the war in Ukraine and "too many cruel wars dragging on in various parts of the world."

"The suffering imposed on the Ukrainian and Russian populations, the ever more numerous refugees and victims, oblige us to remember the Holocaust. The Holocaust must help us to seriously question the path taken by humanity since the end of the World War II, nearly eight decades ago," he said.

For this reason," the Cardinal went on to say, quoting Psalm 118, "in order to scrutinise the past, so that we can better understand the present and commit ourselves to the future, we need to illuminate it with the Word of God, a lamp for our steps and a light for our path."

Splendour of truth

During his homily, the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development described Edith Stein as a woman whose search for the truth characterized her whole existence.

"Edith Stein exemplifies how a life spent in love can be a slow journey of opening up, of being transformed into the Son Made Man. The beautiful expression of Veritatis Splendor (Splendour of Truth) can be applied to her pilgrimage as a woman, a philosopher, a pedagogue, a contemplative, a Saint."

She was a woman, he said, who understood that "God is always "beyond": beyond all reasoning, beyond all phenomena, beyond all human activity."

Following her baptism in 1922, Edith Stein combined teaching with study and writing. These years, noted Cardinal Czerny, “led her to seek a harmonious balance between faith and philosophy, and this blossomed into a sense of mission in her vocation as a teacher: to lead her students to the truth. Not only theoretical truth, but also absolute and living truth: God.”

The Cardinal also recalled the Saint’s letter to the aging Pope Pius XI “urging him to break his silence and speak out against all expressions of antisemitism.”

Crossing the threshold

On the afternoon of 2 August 1942, two Gestapo agents knocked on the door of the Carmelite monastery in Echt to apprehend Edith Stein, also known, as Sister Teresa Benedicta, together with her sister Rosa. Her fate was sealed when she was taken to the Westerbork sorting camp in the north of Holland, and then deported with many others to the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

On 9 August, Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross died in the gas chambers of the camp.

Cardinal Czerny described how “she crossed the threshold and encountered the Bridegroom face-to-face, fulfilling the nuptial pact with the crucified Christ for which, as a wise virgin preserving the oil of love for God, she had prepared herself.”

Recalling the experiences of his own family, the cardinal spoke of his own grandmother Anna and how both their lives came to a similar end.

“So Auschwitz links the witness and relics of St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross with my grandmother’s story and spirit, wherever her remains may lie. For me it is very moving to celebrate Edith Stein’s 80th anniversary and, at the same time and place, the 77th of Anna Löw, to mourn my grandmother and honour her, to think of her reunited with all our family and also with St Teresa Benedicta.”

Fratelli tutti

Concluding his homily, Cardinal Czerny remembered both Edith and Anna with the six million others, who are mourned and who will never be forgotten.

“Through their intercession, we pray for peace in Ukraine and throughout the world, “Never again one against the other, never, never again!... never again war, never again war!” And may those whose personal and family histories are both Jewish and Christian, contribute to the necessary dialogue between our faiths so as to live as fratelli tutti, siblings all, in our common home.”

Source: [Vatican News](#), August 9, 2022.