

Catholic Throwback Thursday: Remembering the 1987 Beatification of Edith Stein



Edith Stein (1891-1942)

“Ave Cruz, Spec Unica” (“Hail Cross, Our Only Hope”)

It’s Catholic Throwback Thursday:

During this monumental canonization week, we are remembering another historic papal proclamation that occurred during the pontificate of new Saint John Paul II.



“Those who remain silent are responsible.”

- Edith Stein (Photo: Vatican)

Flashing back to 1987:

On this date 27 years ago, Pope St. John Paul II presided over a beatification ceremony at an open-air Mass in West Germany where he proclaimed as Blessed the Polish Carmelite nun, born Edith Stein, who was known in religious life as Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. A profound writer and philosopher, she was canonized 11 years in 1998 by Pope St. John Paul II.



Edith Stein (c.1920/ Photo)

From a prominent Jewish family in Breslau (Wroclaw), Edith stopped believing in God and practicing Judaism as a young teen. She went on to study philosophy, developing a deep interest in the Catholic Church. Edith was so deeply inspired by the autobiography and writings of St. Teresa of Avila that she had a conversion experience that led to her Baptism at age 30.

Twelve years later she entered the Carmelites, taking the name of Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

Edith and her sister Rosa were arrested along with all Dutch Jews who had become Christians.

They died at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942.

She left behind the message “Ave Cruz, Spec Unica” on a scrap of paper thrown from the train to Auschwitz. This translates: “Hail Cross, Our Only Hope.”



1987 Beatification (Photo)

Pope John Paul II on Edith Stein:

“Because she was Jewish, Edith Stein was taken with her sister Rosa and many other Catholics and Jews from the Netherlands to the concentration camp in Auschwitz, where she died with them in the gas chambers. Today we remember them all with deep respect. A few days before her deportation, the woman religious had dismissed the question about a possible rescue: ‘Do not do it! Why should I be spared? Is it not right that I should gain no advantage from my Baptism? If I cannot share the lot of my brothers and sisters, my life, in a certain sense, is destroyed.’”

Addressing young people: “Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface but go to the heart of things! And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in his good hands.”



Carmelite Nuns at the Beatification (Photo)

"A daughter of the Jewish people, rich in wisdom and courage..." - Pope John Paul II

Read more about Edith Stein's life on the Vatican website here.

Novena of the Holy Spirit
by St. Benedicta of the Cross (St. Edith Stein)

Who are you, sweet light, that fills me
And illumines the darkness of my heart?

You lead me like a mother's hand,
And should you let go of me,
I would not know how to take another step.

You are the space
That embraces my being and buries it in yourself.
Away from you it sinks into the abyss
Of nothingness, from which you raised it to the light.

You, nearer to me than I to myself
And more interior than my most interior
And still impalpable and intangible

And beyond any name:
Holy Spirit eternal love!

Are you not the sweet manna
That from the Son's heart
Overflows into my heart,
The food of angels and the blessed?
He who raised himself from death to life,
He has also awakened me to new life
From the sleep of death.
And he gives me new life from day to day,

And at some time his fullness is to stream through me,
Life of your life indeed, you yourself:
Holy Spirit eternal life!

Are you the ray
That flashes down from the eternal Judge's throne
And breaks into the night of the soul
That had never known itself?
Mercifully relentlessly
It penetrates hidden folds.
Alarmed at seeing itself,
The self makes space for holy fear,
The beginning of that wisdom
That comes from on high
And anchors us firmly in the heights,
Your action,
That creates us anew:
Holy Spirit ray that penetrates everything!

Are you the spirit's fullness and the power
By which the Lamb releases the seal
Of God's eternal decree?
Driven by you
The messengers of judgment ride through the world
And separate with a sharp sword
The kingdom of light from the kingdom of night.
Then heaven becomes new and new the earth,
And all finds its proper place
Through your breath:
Holy Spirit victorious power!

Are you the master who builds the eternal cathedral,
Which towers from the earth through the heavens?
Animated by you, the columns are raised high
And stand immovably firm.

Marked with the eternal name of God,
They stretch up to the light,
Bearing the dome,
Which crowns the holy cathedral,
Your work that encircles the world:
Holy Spirit God's molding hand!

Are you the one who created the unclouded mirror
Next to the Almighty's throne,
Like a crystal sea,
In which Divinity lovingly looks at itself?
You bend over the fairest work of your creation,
And radiantly your own gaze
Is illumined in return.
And of all creatures the pure beauty
Is joined in one in the dear form
Of the Virgin, your immaculate bride:
Holy Spirit Creator of all!

Are you the sweet song of love
And of holy awe
That eternally resounds around the triune throne,
That weds in itself the clear chimes of each and every being?
The harmony,
That joins together the members to the Head,
In which each one
Finds the mysterious meaning of his being blessed
And joyously surges forth,
Freely dissolved in your surging:
Holy Spirit eternal jubilation!



Polish saints: Saints Edith Stein and Maximilian Kolbe

She "offered herself to God as a sacrifice for genuine peace, and above all for her threatened and humiliated Jewish people." -Pope John Paul II