

**Franciscan Missionary Union**  
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Dear friend of the missions!

August can go very quickly and before you know it, it will be September and things will get more serious and intense for most everybody. SO: take it easy! Do restful things and prayerful things. It will help renew you. This month has some wonderful feasts. The feast of the Transfiguration is on August 6. For the Franciscans, there are four feasts that we observe in a special way: August 2 is the Feast of Our Lady of the Angels and the Portiuncola pardon; St. Dominic on August 8; St. Clare on August 11, and August 15 is the birthday of St. Anthony. The Solemnity of the Assumption is August 15. The solemnity is celebrated even though it is Sunday. There is a wonderful tradition on this feast of Mary: blessing flowers, herbs and spices on that day. This custom was a way of celebrating that Mary is the first fruits of the harvest of salvation. The octave of the Assumption (Aug 22) is the Feast of the Queenship of Mary, though this year it is not observed because it is a Sunday. Perhaps, on August 23, the feast of St. Rose of Lima, you could pray especially for our mission in Peru. Please continue to pray for peace and the victims of war and violence, especially in this month that we remember the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All the friars are very grateful for your generosity and prayers. You really do have a profound influence on the lives of many people. We always remember you and your intentions. God bless you!

**St. Edith Stein**  
***St. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross***

Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

On August 9, 1942, Sister. Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, a Carmelite nun, was executed with a crowd of women and children in the gas chambers of Auschwitz. She was the victim of Nazi cruelty that was directed especially to Jewish people. There was no reason to spare any Jewish person, no change of name, religion or anything else could save people from that cruelty. The Nazis thought they were achieving a final solution. The stupidity of every group that persecutes is that they think that death solves their problems. It never does. Torture and death never obliterates the “problem.” It gives special life, dignity and power to the victims. Such has been the case with all those who have suffered persecution at the hands of people whose lives are driven by hate. Sister Theresa, this remarkable woman who was born into a Jewish family, grew up to be recognized as a great scholar, heard the voice of Jesus invite her to “follow me,” became a great disciple of Theresa of Avila and John of the Cross and in all of this, for sure, a great Jewish saint, like Mary, Elizabeth, Martha and Mary. Her feast is August 9, the day she was martyred.

**Life.** Edith Stein was born in Germany, on October 12, 1891 into a family of seven children. It was the Jewish Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Two years later, her father died and her mother was left to care for the family and carry on the family business. Her family life was a joyful experience and one where she learned easily from the rest of the children and from her mother. Most biographies identify Edith as a bright, clear-headed, intelligent and disciplined person. She had a thirst for knowledge and, from the very first time she entered school, she surpassed most of her classmates. In 1910, she entered university and decided to study philosophy. She followed the course through to the doctoral level at a time when people did not normally welcome women in that field or at that level of study. Edith identified the pursuit of truth as her passion and knew philosophy would help her in that search. She became a disciple of the great phenomenologist, Edmund Husserl. He encouraged her, and she earned her doctorate in 1916. In her lifetime she was never really able to hold a university position because either she was a woman or she was Jewish (there always seemed to be a reason to discriminate). But she never ceased to continue her scholarly research and writing. Many of her writings were never published until after her death.

On January 1, 1922, she was baptized. She had become acquainted with Christ through her friends, her research and her prayer. She came to recognize that the truth she pursued was truly a person: Jesus Christ. Germany was a difficult time then, the economy was failing, the competing ideologies of fascism and communism were challenging values, antisemitism and other problems. Edith wrote and lectured especially about the contributions of women to society and thought. In Speyer, the Dominicans Sisters hired her as a professor. She became a real asset to that school and continued her scholarly work. She studied and translated works of Cardinal Newman and St. Thomas Aquinas into German. These two authors became interesting influences on her thought.

In October, 1933, she left her family (but always kept them and her ancestors deep in her heart) and became a postulant of the Carmelite Nuns in Cologne. She was clothed in the habit of Carmel on April 13, 1934, in the second week of Easter. She took the name Theresa Benedicta of the Cross. In the convent, she was encouraged to keep up her research and writing, including both philosophy and spirituality. One of the her projects that was very important to her was a study on St. John of the Cross called the “Science of the Cross.” She asked to move to a Carmel in Holland to protect the nuns in Cologne from harassment by the Nazis because she was Jewish. She was not safe there for long. She and her sister, who had joined her at the Carmel, were arrested with other Jews. She never forgot her people, she felt she could do more for her brothers and sisters in prayer and study, and in the end joined them in death and the experience of God’s leading them to the true land of promise fulfilled..

**Thought.** Evagrius of Pontus wrote once that a theologian is a person who prays, and a person who prays

is a theologian. Perhaps Dr. Stein's pursuit of the truth was really a theological pursuit as much as a philosophical pursuit, truly a spiritual journey. In the end, everything brought her to a deep relationship with that Truth who is Jesus Christ. Out of her life of prayer and study, she was able to communicate both in scholarly writing and in poetry. She has written a lot of beautiful works, there is only room to reflect on a few. Hopefully they will encourage you to read more from her. This first quote, I am sure, is something that is not only a result of her embrace of Christ, but rooted in the biblical affirmation of human dignity: *The true Christian is not obliged to renounce the things of this world or to lessen his natural abilities. On the contrary, inasmuch as he incorporates them into his normal life in a disciplined manner, he develops and perfects them; he thereby ennobles the natural life itself, supplying efficacious values to it not only of the spiritual and divine world, but also of the material and earthly world.* [Problems of Women's Education, 1932].

She spent some time translating letters of Cardinal Newman. I am sure she was influenced by him when she wrote this: *The concept which assumes that everything in the Church is irrevocably set for all times appears to me to be a false one. It would be naive to disregard that the Church has a history. The Church is a human institution and like all things human was destined to change and evolve. Likewise, its development takes place often in forms of struggles. Most of the definitions of dogmas are conclusive results of preceding intellectual conflicts lasting decades even centuries. The same is true of ecclesiastical law, liturgical forms, especially all objective forms reflecting our spiritual life.* The following quote is an insight similar to the one that inspired Blessed John XXIII to convoke Vatican II: *The imperturbability of the Church resides in her ability to harmonize the unconditional preservation of the eternal truths with an unmatched elasticity of adjustment to the circumstances and challenges of changing times.*

She shared what she discovered in her contemplative experience—insight good for contemplatives and any other Christian: *We can consider the Savior's great commandment of love, which he says includes the whole Law and the Prophets as the law of the New Covenant. Perfect love of God and of neighbor can certainly be a subject worthy of an entire lifetime of meditation. But, we understand the Law of the New Covenant even better to be the Lord himself, since he in fact lived as an example for us of the life we should live. We thus fulfill our Rule when we hold the image of the Lord continually before our eyes in order to make ourselves like him. We can never finish studying the Gospels* [On the History and Spirit of Carmel].

As we strive to receive a little guidance from this remarkable saint, this last word may be the best advice for trying for a life of prayer: *The motive, principle and end of a religious life is to make an absolute gift of self to God in a self-forgetting love; to end one own life in order to make room for God's life* [The Ethos of Women's Professions, 1930].

## Reflection Questions

1. How flexible are you as a Catholic? Do you appreciate how the Church continues to try to proclaim the Gospel to every age and in doing so adapts to be able to speak to the times?
2. How good are you at making room for God's life?
3. How well have you come Jesus who is the Truth? Do you know this Truth not only with your head but with your heart?
4. How successful are you at living according to the Law of the New Covenant: Jesus?

**"It is I. Do not be afraid."**

**Fierce are the waves, Lord, rough the seas,  
And dark, so dark, the night.  
I beg of you to grant me, please,  
On lonely vigil, light.**

**Then steer your ship with steady arm,  
Trust me, and rest your soul.  
Your little boat I'll keep from harm,  
I'll guide it toward its goal.**

**Be firm of purpose as you keep  
The compass e'er in view.  
Through stormy night you'll cross the deep,  
'twill help you to steer true.**

**The needle trembles faintly, then  
Holds steady and prevails;  
It points your way and guides you when  
I, God, direct your sails.**

**Be therefore steadfast, calm and true,  
Your God is at your side.  
Through storm and night He'll see you through  
With conscience as your guide.**

—This is a prayer/poem of Sr. Theresa that can be sung to O God our Help in Ages Past. Perhaps it can be sung on her feast day

**Please pray for our missionaries on their birthdays:**

**Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil): August 8  
Fr. David Hyman, O.F.M.. (Home Missions): August 22**

**May God give them many years of health, peace and energy!**

**Also remember our missionaries and former missionaries who are ill:**

**Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)  
Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Ignatius McGeady, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)  
Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)  
Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)**

**May God grant them health and peace!**