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LET US ASK EDITH STEIN FOR HELP

On August 9, 2017 we recall Edith Stein, the Carmelite St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, who was murdered 75 years ago in Auschwitz. St. Pope John Paul II proclaimed her as a Patroness of Europe. Not only did he want to point out that she has much to say to Europeans, but also to express his conviction that she is our advocate. In times when we experience a deep crisis in Europe and question our identity and the way we live together, we can turn to her and ask for help. Through her intercession we want to pray to God for peace in Europe.

Edith Stein was born in 1891 in Breslau, then Germany (today Wroclaw, Poland) into a Jewish merchant family. In her youth, Edith consciously rejected the faith. However, she was constantly in search of the truth about the human being. To this end she studied psychology and later philosophy and became assistant to the famous professor Edmund Husserl. She became friends with Roman Ingarden from Poland, who also studied with Husserl and later became a professor in Cracow.

Edith Stein was a German patriot. In 1915, during the First World War, she volunteered as a nurse on the front. In experiencing suffering and death she began to understand the meaning of the Christian Cross. In 1922, Edith Stein was baptized into the Catholic Church. She was a teacher and later a lecturer in Catholic teacher education. In 1933, after Hitler came to power, she could no longer lecture publicly because of her Jewish origins, and in October she entered the Carmelite convent in Cologne. From Cologne she fled to the Netherlands in 1938. After the German occupation of the Netherlands she was arrested in August 1942 in the Carmelite monastery in Echt. She was sent to Auschwitz where she was murdered in the gas chamber together with many other Jews.

Edith Stein's last lecture delivered in the winter semester of 1932/33, was about "The Structure of the Human Person." There she reflects also about the nation and belonging to the nation. In the times of national socialist propaganda this was an important topic and also concerned her personally: she was connected with the German people and also with the Jewish people, she was interested in Poland and had a lot of international contacts. Edith Stein suffered greatly from the contempt that was spoken at that time in Germany about other nations.

Here are some thoughts from her lecture:

Nation is a community of people, bigger than the family, less than humanity.

The nation's life was there before the birth of the individual and will continue after the death of the individual. Also a nation can arise and can disappear. We know nations that have emerged from other nations and those that have vanished. A person who comes from another nation and now participates in the life of the new nation and develops it, becomes a member of this national community. The nation lives by its members who make up its history and character. All members are responsible for the whole nation. Even if they are not aware of it, they can contribute to the good of the national community, for example, through the good education of their children or acting responsibly in the economic process. But there are also those who harm the good of the community, like criminals, who in this way exclude themselves from the community.

People are needed however, who consciously take responsibility for the whole, who know the treasures of their nation and draw from them, and also can look beyond the borders of the nation. In order for their conscience to make the right decisions, they must understand that

their own nation has a purpose in the plan of God, the Creator, and the Father of all, and is directed towards a goal that ultimately is the goal of all nations. It may be that someone in conscience knows that he was called by God to leave his people to serve other nations. It may also be that somebody realizes that his nation is turning away from God. Wanting to remain faithful to God, the person has to break away from the national community. There is also a life in seclusion from the world and in prayer before God, which is fruitful for humanity.

These are some of the thoughts of Edith Stein from her last lecture.

The new German government excluded Jews from the national community. Edith Stein began her prayer life in the Carmelite convent. Nine years later, she was murdered in Auschwitz.

Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, was killed because of her Jewish origin. She did not die *because of* the Christian faith, but *with* her Christian faith. At her request, she received in the convent the name Teresa Benedicta a Cruce, blessed of the Cross, and wrote to her superior that by the cross she understood the suffering of God's people which had then begun. She believed in the everlasting love of God for His people and His presence in the dark night of loneliness and death. She found this faith in the love of Christ, "poor, humiliated, crucified, abandoned on the cross even by the divine Father".

At the end of World War II there was a painful process in Europe for the new ordering of the coexistence of nations. Part of this process was the development of Christian-Jewish dialogue. For most Jews the cross is not a sign of hope but a reminder of the long history of Christian-Jewish hostility. The racist Nazi ideology was anti-Christian. However, it is painful to remember the destruction of Jews in a Europe marked by Christianity. This is a challenge to the Christian conscience. In recent years, the Catholic Church has done much to deepen its theological understanding of its relation to the Jewish people, to treat seriously the wound of the Holocaust, to confess guilt, to correct errors, and to seek reconciliation. Today we understand better how deeply our faith in God and His promises connects Christians and Jews, even though faith in Christ continues to divide us. We have learned to respect each other with our differences. Many challenges still stand before us. However, in the last decades, with the help of God, new trust has grown between Christians and Jews, which was previously thought to be impossible "after Auschwitz". It is a strengthening of our hope that reconciliation is also possible in other areas.

Today there is again war in Europe and the foundations of our coexistence are questioned. With great concern we look to the future. In this situation, we want to turn to God and ask that we better understand His will. What is our responsibility for our nation, for Europe, for our global human family?

St. Pope John Paul II wrote in 1999, "If today Edith Stein is declared a Patron saint of Europe, the banner of mutual respect, tolerance and openness should be hung on the horizon of the old continent, which will invite men and women to understand and accept each other over ethnic, cultural and religious differences, in order to build a truly fraternal community."

Let us pray on August 9, 2017, the day of commemoration of Edith Stein, St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, for peace in Europe, and ask the Patroness of Europe for her intercession.