

## **The Science of the Cross**

Edith comments on John choosing his name “of the Cross”. The change of title expressed the distinguishing mark of his life, to live the life of the Cross in Discalced Carmel. Participating in the life of the Cross defines what her Carmelite life is. Edith sees in this what it means to be Carmelite.

“Of the Cross”, like John of the Cross, she saw the depth of meaning in the Cross. When we speak of the Science of the Cross it is not a theory, something defines, neither is it a structure of ideas.

“What we are dealing with is a well-recognised truth, a theology of the Cross, a real living truth”, something which we recognise from experience, not something told to us. What is theology? It literally means the study of God. Edith views it as being our understanding and experience of God which is real.

The Cross makes God real. In the Cross we meet with, encounter the truth of the reality of God. The Cross is a theology revealing who God is, as it is expressed in the Gospel of St John.

Real, living, effective, it changes us. It is buried in the soul like a seed that grows in us, deep within each one of us. The most profound truth of revelation of God is not “out there”, from somewhere else, but within the person, like a seed taking root and growing.

It makes a distinct impression on the soul, what it does and what it omits; the attitudes and kind of person one is comes from this.

Another dimension is shown in what a person does and is, from that deepest place within the soul. “In this sense I speak of a science of the Saints, from this a perspective of life arises. Strength comes from the experience of the Cross in that deep place within”. A perspective of life rises from there and the image one has of God comes from deep within.

The Science of the Cross rooted in her has grown and it is where her way of seeing God and the world comes from; by becoming more and more childlike,

to wonder and grow. One's understanding of the world finds expression in a mode of thinking.

### **Edith's identity**

In Carmel she discovers her identity and becomes her true self.

What makes Edith who she is? St. John Paul II declared her to be Co-Patroness of Europe on 1 October 1999, just one year after her canonization, together with St Catherine of Siena and St Bridget of Sweden, in his Apostolic Letter *Spes Aedificandi*. She lived a life that touches almost all the influences that shaped Europe in the 20th Century. We see the work of the Holy Spirit in this.

The political situation cast a darker and darker shadow over her. Initially there were just a few hints of prejudice towards her as a professor in an academic environment, more a fact that she was a woman than a Jew. Later her Judaism became an issue. No one would consider having a Jewish teacher on their faculty. The antisemitism grows and develops.

Edith's becoming Catholic was not a leaving Judaism. Her appreciation of being Jewish grows and develops, even when she is in danger, she doesn't hide who she is. She tries to understand it more deeply.

### **The Holy Spirit**

Edith doesn't fit into a neat narrative. It is more complex. Respecting Edith, her time, context and those around her who often saw things so differently to her. There was the pain and suffering of her family, their confusion and questions. Into all this comes the Holy Spirit, the life of God coming into our world, into human experience and history.

Why do we need Edith Stein? She bears witness to the life of God in the complex history in which we live, the key issues in which she found herself. The revelation and work of God. The deeper her prayer life became the more engaged with society and understanding she became. She learns through life that our understanding of life cannot be confined to academic learning. She studied history, psychology, philosophy, languages in order to understand the world view of others.

All this understanding is limited without a relationship with God, the events of salvation history imprinted within the depths of the person. This is where the deepest understanding comes from.

Edith is a young woman who wants to know the truth and who desires to learn. This only comes about when she discovers the presence of God.

Hers was a deeply personal journey, a work of the Holy Spirit deep within her person.

### **Self-revelation through poetry**

Edith wrote a lot, but she remains difficult to get to know. Her siblings gave her the childhood nickname “Sealed with the Seven Seals” as she was so secretive. When her Spiritual Director died (in the confessional!), she went straight to his office and located a file which had all the letters which she had written to him. She took the file and burnt all the letters, ensuring that this part of her life remained secret.

Edith defines prayer as “looking up into the face of the Eternal”. To stand before the face of God – this is the content of our lives. To live, looking into the face of God, simply to be in God's presence. By the Eternal, she means everything. She has a broad perspective.

Edith has a profound understanding of what this life means. She sees the great need and value of it.

Her greatest contribution she can make to the world, to her nation. Most people wouldn't understand what this means, in this she is alone. Edith has been alone throughout her life.

Despite a vast circle of friends, she's always a loner, even in Carmel with its intense community life she is still a loner. It is her reality. Edith lived from a place deep within, somewhere that no-one else can reach. The more alive and free one is, the more life is lived from this place in the soul. It helped her to face the challenges before her. Edith lived less than nine years in Carmel in Cologne and in Echt.

She may have been a teacher, Doctor, philosopher, but first and foremost she was a Carmelite.

