

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time: Walking on the Water

This morning I want to begin by telling you about the saint St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Normally, we would celebrate her feastday today, but since it falls on a Sunday this year, the Sunday takes precedence. St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross was one of the greatest minds of the first third of the Twentieth Century, only most people don't know her by that name. Most people know her by the name she had before she entered the Carmelites. Her birth name was Edith Stein.

Edith Stein was born in 1891 into a German Jewish family. She was extremely intelligent. Sadly, she gave up following her Jewish faith as a teenager and entered into a period of Agnosticism. One day in her early twenties she saw a woman loaded with shopping bags go into a Catholic Church on her way home. Edith found it interesting that a church should be open even if it was not a Sunday. She followed her in and saw the lady praying. This led Edith to consider what it must be like to have God in her life. She saw something very attractive about Catholicism. Like St. John Henry Newman, Edith was a seeker who wanted to learn about God even if this knowledge would take her down a path she had never considered or even would rather avoid. Edith was particularly taken by the accounts of the Passion of Jesus Christ. She recognized that Christ had used his cross to break open the gates of heaven. Those who wished to join him, had to carry their own crosses as Jesus directed. She decided to become Catholic. She decided that she would embrace the Cross of the Lord. About this time, she was given an autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila. She read it in one night. She then joined the Order of Discalced Carmelites and was given the name, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, or Sr. Teresa of the Blessed Cross.

Edith was brilliant. She was one of the few women to receive a Ph. D. in Germany. Her main field was philosophy where, among other areas of thought, she built on the phenomenology of John Husserl, combining it with the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. Phenomenology studied the way a person's experience affects the way it perceives something. For example, a child's concept of a mother is affected by his experience of his own mother. But, St. Thomas would add that the mother was a real person even if the child did not exist. OK, before you start throwing things at me, Edith Stein's work was built on by a certain Polish philosopher named Karol Wojtyla, later Pope St. John Paul II.

Edith taught in Freiburg University in Germany until 1932 when the Nazis took over the country and removed all Jews or former Jews from the universities. As the Nazi persecution of Jews grew, Edith's Carmelite superiors felt it would be best for her to be transferred to a house in the Netherlands. She wanted to join the suffering of her Jewish relatives, but she had to follow her superior in obedience.

The Nazis invaded Holland and demanded that all Jews wear a Star of David. The King and Queen of Holland began wearing stars themselves, as did many of the Dutch. This infuriated the Nazis. They began rounding up Jews to deport them to what they called labor camps for them to support the war, but in actuality, they were sending

them to their death in concentration camps. The Dutch bishops had a letter read in every parish condemning the Nazi persecution of Jews. This enraged the Nazis even more. They decided to hit back at Catholics by searching convents and monasteries for any religious who might have Jewish blood, even if it were distant ancestry. Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Edith Stein, and her sister Rose, who had also become Catholic and a Carmelite, were arrested and put in a boxcar of a train bound for the so-called labor camp in Auschwitz. When the train arrived there, 90% of the people were sent to the gas chambers, the other 10% were made slaves, most being worked to death within three months. The Nazis didn't even bother taking the names of those they murdered. On August 9, 1942, Edith Stein was murdered with the others who the Nazis did not want to even consider becoming work slaves.

I toured Auschwitz four years ago. It is worse than my worse imagination. I saw one of the gas chambers, and can still feel the souls of the people screaming and then gasping for air as they died. Sr. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross had earlier written that she needed to join her suffering to the Lord's. I picture her walking through the chaos of the death chamber towards the Lord.

And Jesus saw the turmoil of the sea. He saw the desperate situation of his disciples. He walked on the water to them. "If this is you, Lord, call me to come to you," Peter called. "Come," Jesus said. And Peter walked on the water towards the Lord, at least until he took his focus off of Jesus and then began to drown.

In scripture the sea often represents chaos. The beating of the waves on the ship, the turmoil of the wind, the fear of drowning, all represent a world devoid of God.

And Jesus walked on the water.

Perhaps your lives and my life have not experienced chaos, have not experienced terror. Yet. The world is imperfect. Our families are wonderful, but are made up of human beings who are imperfect. And even if we have the most perfect family this side of the Holy Family, we all still have to face the turmoil of sickness and death.

And Jesus walks on the water. He calls to each of us, "Come. Walk to me. Trust me to lead you through the chaos." Place yourselves on that boat, with the disciples, with the turmoil of life, and listen to these words of Hillsong United's *Oceans*.

*You call me out upon the waters
The great unknown
Where feet may fail
And there I find You in the mystery
In oceans deep
My faith will stand*

And I will call upon Your name

*And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours
You are mine*

*Your grace abounds in deepest waters
Your sovereign hand
Will be my guide
Where feet may fail and fear surrounds me
You've never failed
And You won't start now
So I will call upon Your name
And keep my eyes above the waves
When oceans rise
My soul will rest in Your embrace
For I am Yours
And You are mine, oh*

*Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders
Let me walk upon the waters
Wherever You would call me
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander
And my faith will be made stronger
In the presence of my Saviour*

*And I will call upon Your name
Keep my eyes above the waves
My soul will rest in Your embrace
I am Yours
And You are mine*

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Jesus calls each of us to meet him on the waters of chaos, whether that chaos is imposed on us, or is the result of our own making. He is there for us, if we only have the faith to walk to Him.

Ryan Stevenson wrote: *The amazing news of the Gospel
Is not that we can receive Jesus into our lives
But that He's already received us Into His*

My soul will rest in Your embrace
I am Yours
And You are mine.

Lord, when chaos, when turmoil enters into our lives, be it now or at the end of

our lives, give us the faith to trust in you to calm the waters and lead us home to your Father.