

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Aug 9th 2014

Today is the feast of St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, canonized in 1998. She was born Edith Stein, Jewish, in Germany and a noted philosopher. As a young person, she fell away from Judaism and became an atheist for several years. She was converted to Catholicism as a result of reading the works of St. Teresa of Avila and later became a Carmelite. In 1933, when the Nazis began to terrorize the Jews in earnest, her religious community arranged for her to transfer to a convent in the Netherlands where, you may recall, the people took an active role in protecting the Jews among them.

Eventually, the Dutch Church condemned the Nazi actions against the Jews; in retaliation, the Germans stepped up their arrests of Jew-Catholics. Sr. Benedicta and her sister, Rosa, who had left Germany with her, were subsequently taken to Auschwitz and sent to the gas chambers.

“Things were in God’s plan which I had not planned at all. I am coming to the living faith and conviction that—from God’s point of view—there is not chance and that the whole of my life, down to every detail has been mapped out in God’s divine providence and makes complete and perfect sense in God’s all-seeing eyes.” St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. This quotation demonstrates an attitude that we can hope she was able to sustain during the days of imprisonment and eventual death.

Another something that captured my interest as I read about Sr. Teresa for this reflection: Before she could be canonized, the Church authorities had to decide why she had been killed. If it were only because she was Jewish, she would not be considered. They finally agreed that she was killed in response to the Church’s condemnation of Nazi acts and thus was indeed martyred for her Catholicism, together with her ethnic background.

Had they not, we would not have her who offers a great example to all of us of the qualities of faith and trust that we would like to possess.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus indicts the apostles for their inability to cure the lunatic. Not enough faith, he tells them with a final huge challenge: If their faith and trust were to increase, then “Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Now that’s something to mull over and pray with during these easy days of summer.

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