

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: August 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

German Jewish philosopher and convert, Carmelite nun and martyr at Auschwitz, co-patroness of Europe.

Feast day	August 9
Born	October 12, 1891, Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland)
Died	August 9, 1942, Auschwitz-Birkenau (occupied Poland)
Canonized	October 11, 1998, by Pope John Paul II
Era	20th century
Patron saint of	Europe

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Edith Stein

Carmel Maria vom Frieden in Cologne, Home of Edith Stein

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LIFE

Saint Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross)

Saint Edith Stein was a German philosopher born into a Jewish family, who became an atheist in her youth, then a Catholic and a Carmelite nun under the name Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. A student and assistant of the philosopher Edmund Husserl, she sought the truth with demanding rigor until she found it in Christ. Arrested in the Netherlands by the Nazis in 1942 because she was Jewish, she died at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, the day on which her feast is kept. Pope John Paul II canonized her in 1998 and proclaimed her co-patroness of Europe in 1999.

Who was Saint Edith Stein?

Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891, in Breslau, then a German city and today Wrocław in Poland. It was the day of Yom Kippur, the great Jewish Day of Atonement, a coincidence to which her mother attached great importance. She was the youngest of eleven children. Her father, a timber merchant, died before she was two; her mother, Auguste, a woman of faith and strong character, took over the business and raised the family alone.

A brilliant student, Edith stopped praying at about fifteen and called herself an atheist. She studied in Breslau, then joined the circle of Edmund Husserl in Göttingen. Husserl was the founder of phenomenology, a method that seeks to describe exactly what presents itself to consciousness.

She followed her teacher to Freiburg im Breisgau, defended a doctoral thesis on empathy there in 1916, and became his assistant. Despite her work, the doors of the university stayed closed to her: at the time, a woman could not obtain a professorship.

Key dates in the life of Edith Stein

- **October 12, 1891**: Born in Breslau into an observant Jewish family.
- **1913**: Studies philosophy in Göttingen under Edmund Husserl.
- **1915**: Volunteer nurse in a military hospital during the First World War.
- **1916**: Doctorate in Freiburg im Breisgau; she becomes Husserl's assistant.
- **Summer 1921**: Reads the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila.
- **January 1, 1922**: Baptized at Bergzabern, in the Palatinate.
- **1923-1931**: Teaches at the Dominican sisters' school in Speyer.
- **1932-1933**: Lecturer at the Institute of Pedagogy in Münster, until she is excluded by the antisemitic laws.
- **October 14, 1933**: Enters the Carmel of Cologne.
- **April 1934**: Receives the habit with the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.
- **December 31, 1938**: Leaves for the Carmel of Echt, in the Netherlands.
- **August 2, 1942**: Arrested with her sister Rosa.
- **August 9, 1942**: Dies in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.
- **May 1, 1987**: Beatified in Cologne by John Paul II.
- **October 11, 1998**: Canonized in Rome.
- **October 1, 1999**: Proclaimed co-patroness of Europe.

A philosopher in search of the truth

For Edith Stein, the search for truth was already, without her knowing it, a search for God. Several encounters prepared her. In the philosopher Max Scheler she discovered a way of thinking open to Christianity. In 1917, the death at the front of Adolf Reinach, a philosopher friend, led her to visit his widow, Anna. Edith expected to find her in despair, and instead discovered a woman upheld by faith in the cross of Christ. She later said that this was her first encounter with the cross.

In the summer of 1921, at the home of her friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius, she took at random from the bookshelf the *Life* of Saint Teresa of Avila. She read it in one night. By morning she was convinced she had found the truth. She bought a catechism and a missal, asked for baptism and received it on January 1, 1922.

For her mother, who did not understand this choice, it was a deep sorrow. Yet Edith continued to go with her to the synagogue when she visited her.



Edith Stein around 1920, at the time of her conversion.

Teacher and lecturer

For eight years, Edith Stein taught German and history at the Dominican sisters' school in Speyer. She lived very simply there, prayed at length and translated works by John Henry Newman and Saint Thomas Aquinas, seeking to bring phenomenology into dialogue with Thomist thought. She made

frequent retreats at the Benedictine abbey of Beuron. She also gave many lectures, in Germany and abroad, on the vocation and education of women, a subject to which she gave much thought.

In 1933, the Nazis' rise to power ended her teaching in Münster. She wrote to Pope Pius XI to alert him to the persecution of the Jews in Germany. She also understood that the time had come to fulfill a long-held desire: to enter Carmel.

A Carmelite, all the way to Auschwitz

On October 14, 1933, at forty-two, Edith entered the Carmel of Cologne. She took the name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, expressing her debt to Saint Teresa, to Saint Benedict and above all her union with the mystery of the cross. Her superiors asked her to continue her intellectual work, and she completed a major book, *Finite and Eternal Being*.

At the end of 1938, after Kristallnacht, her presence had become a danger to her community, and she left for the Carmel of Echt, in the Netherlands, where her sister Rosa, also a convert, joined her.

On July 26, 1942, the Dutch bishops had a letter read in the churches protesting the deportation of the Jews. In reprisal, the occupying forces arrested Catholics of Jewish origin on August 2. Edith and Rosa were taken away, moved to the Westerbork camp, then deported to Auschwitz, where they died on August 9, 1942. Edith was then working on a book about Saint John of the Cross, *The Science of the Cross*, which remained unfinished. The Church venerates her as a martyr.

Why is Saint Edith Stein the patron saint of Europe?

On October 1, 1999, John Paul II proclaimed her co-patroness of Europe, together with Saint Bridget of Sweden and Saint Catherine of Siena. In her, the great wounds and riches of the continent meet: German culture and Jewish roots, philosophy and faith, the horror of the Shoah and the offering of a life. Her feast on August 9 is celebrated with the rank of a feast in the dioceses of Europe.

She unites in herself what many think cannot be reconciled: the rigor of reason and the surrender of faith, fidelity to the Jewish people from whom she came and belonging to Christ. She is prayed to for researchers and students, for women engaged in intellectual life, for Europe and for friendship between Jews and Christians.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Edith Stein in art

- **The brown Carmelite habit** with white mantle and black veil.
- **The cross**, which she holds or contemplates, recalling her religious name.
- **A book**, a sign of her life as a philosopher and writer.
- **The Star of David** or barbed wire, in some modern images, recalling her Jewish origins and her death at Auschwitz.

To pray with her, read the prayer to Saint Edith Stein, or follow the novena to Saint Edith Stein from July 31 to August 8, the eve of her feast.

Where to pray to Saint Edith Stein

- **Cologne** (Germany): the Carmel of Maria vom Frieden, heir to the community where she became a Carmelite.
- **Echt** (Netherlands): the Carmel where she lived from 1939 until her arrest.
- **Wrocław** (Poland): her family home, now a place of memory and encounter.

- **Oświęcim** (Poland): the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial and the nearby Carmel, places of prayer for the victims.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Edith Stein, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross

Saint Edith Stein wrote a great deal, but her texts date from the 20th century, so we quote here only two very short sayings reported by witnesses, which sum up her journey. They are followed by an original prayer to Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

Two sayings of Edith Stein

The first dates from the summer of 1921. Edith had just read, in one night, the *Life* of Saint Teresa of Avila. According to her biographers, she closed the book saying:

> *"This is the truth."*

Source: saying reported by her first biographers, notably Sister Teresia Renata Posselt, prioress of the Carmel of Cologne, in the biography she published after the war.

The second was spoken on August 2, 1942, at the Carmel of Echt, when the German police came to arrest her together with her distraught sister Rosa. Witnesses reported that Edith took her by the hand, saying:

> *"Come, we are going for our people."*

Source: testimonies gathered after the war and cited in the documentation for her beatification ("Komm, wir gehen für unser Volk").



Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross at prayer.

Prayer to Saint Edith Stein

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, you sought the truth with all the strength of your mind, and recognized it in Jesus Christ: pray for me.

When I doubt, keep me honest in my search. When I find, give me the courage to draw the consequences, even if it costs me and those I love do not understand me.

You remained a daughter of the Jewish people while becoming a disciple of Christ: teach us respect and friendship between Jews and Christians. You offered your life in the night of Auschwitz: help me carry my cross without rebellion and without despair, united to the cross of the Lord.

I entrust to you Europe, its peoples and its leaders, those who study and those who teach. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for me, in the hour of trial, the grace to go with Christ for those he has entrusted to me. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross is celebrated on August 9, the anniversary of her death at Auschwitz. As co-patroness of Europe, she is honored that day with the rank of a feast in the dioceses of Europe. You can also pray to her on October 12, the anniversary of her birth, or on January 27, International Holocaust Remembrance Day. This prayer is especially fitting:

- for students, researchers and teachers, before an exam or a demanding piece of work;
- for a friend or relative searching for meaning or for faith;

- for converts and those preparing for baptism;
- for peace, and against every form of antisemitism and hatred.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Edith Stein, and discover the life of Saint Edith Stein.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Edith Stein

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life of Saint Edith Stein, Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast, begin on July 31; it then ends on August 8, and the next day, August 9, the Church remembers her death at Auschwitz.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The suggested act helps you carry the prayer into your day. The meditations follow the known stages of her life, without quoting her writings at length.

This novena can be prayed for a student or researcher, for someone searching for faith, for a convert preparing for baptism, for Europe and for peace, or for friendship between Jews and Christians. It can also accompany a time of suffering that seems to have no meaning.



Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, statue or window.

Day 1: Born on a day of atonement

Edith was born on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement. All her life she remained attached to the people of Israel, her people, from whom Christ himself came.

Prayer: God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I give you thanks for the Jewish people, whom you chose first.

Today: Read a psalm, thinking of the Jewish believers who also pray it today.

Day 2: Searching without cheating

As a young student, Edith called herself an atheist, but she never stopped seeking the truth honestly. For her, that search was already a prayer that did not know its own name.

Prayer: Lord, keep me honest in my questions, and do not let my heart settle for half-truths.

Today: Pray for someone who is searching for the meaning of life.

Day 3: Serving the wounded

In 1915, Edith interrupted her studies to care for soldiers in a military hospital. The highest thinking did not excuse her from serving. Intelligence and charity belong together.

Prayer: Lord, may my intelligence never draw me away from those who suffer.

Today: Do something concrete for a sick or elderly person.

Day 4: Encountering the cross

After a friend was killed at the front, Edith visited his widow and discovered a woman upheld by faith. For the first time she saw the strength of the cross of Christ, not as an idea, but in a living person.

Prayer: Crucified Christ, be the strength of those who mourn and of those who comfort them.

Today: Write a note to someone who is grieving.

Day 5: "This is the truth"

One summer night in 1921, reading Saint Teresa of Avila overwhelmed Edith. By morning she knew she had found what she was looking for. She asked for baptism without delay. Truth, once found, asks for a response that engages the whole of life.

Prayer: Lord, when you make yourself known, let me answer you without delay.

Today: Reread a page by a saint who has touched you.

Day 6: Teaching

In Speyer, Edith taught young women and trained future teachers. She thought deeply about the vocation of women in the family, in society and in the Church, convinced that each person has a unique gift to offer.

Prayer: Lord, bless teachers and educators. Give them patience, skill and kindness.

Today: Thank a teacher who made a difference in your life.

Day 7: Entering Carmel

In 1933, rejected by the society of her own country, Edith entered the Carmel of Cologne. This was not an escape: she wanted to stand before God on behalf of everyone, in prayer. In the silence of the cloister, she carried the anguish of her people and of the whole world.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to pray not only for myself, but for the whole world.

Today: Spend twenty minutes in silent prayer.

Day 8: For her people

On August 2, 1942, Edith was arrested with her sister Rosa. She took her by the hand: "Come, we are going for our people." She accepted to share the fate of her own, without bitterness, and with the peace of one who has already given everything to God.

Prayer: Lord, I entrust to you all the victims of hatred and persecution. Keep us from every form of antisemitism and contempt.

Today: Pray for the victims of the Shoah and for all who suffer persecution today.

Day 9: The science of the cross

Edith died at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942, while she was writing a book about the cross. Her own life had become what she was trying to understand: an offering united to that of Christ, for her people and for the world.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I place my intention before you. Through the intercession of Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, teach me to carry my cross with love. Amen.

Today: Pray for a while before a crucifix.

Closing prayer

Saint Edith Stein, daughter of Israel and bride of Christ, I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for those who seek the truth, for Europe and for peace between peoples. Obtain for us the grace to recognize in the cross the way of life, and to remain faithful to the truth, whatever it may cost, as you did until the very end. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint Edith Stein and the prayer to Saint Edith Stein.

PILGRIMAGE

Carmel Maria vom Frieden in Cologne, Home of Edith Stein

The Carmel Maria vom Frieden (Mary of Peace) in Cologne is the main place of remembrance of Saint Edith Stein in Germany. It is the community she entered on October 14, 1933, and where she became Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. Her body was never found, since she died at Auschwitz: there is therefore no tomb, but this Carmel keeps her memory, her archives, and a daily prayer faithful to her spirit.

An old community

The Carmel of Cologne is one of the oldest Carmelite monasteries in Germany. Founded in the 17th century, it had the Baroque chapel Maria vom Frieden, in the old town, as its church. Suppressed during the secularization of the early 19th century, it was refounded later and settled in the Lindenthal district. It was there that Edith Stein knocked at the door in 1933, at the age of forty-two, after being excluded from teaching by the antisemitic laws.

The Lindenthal monastery was destroyed during World War II. After the war, the community returned to its original site, near the Church of Maria vom Frieden, and rebuilt its convent there. Today it keeps archives devoted to Edith Stein, which gather her manuscripts and many documents about her life.

Edith Stein at the Carmel of Cologne

From 1933 to the end of 1938, Edith lived the life of a Carmelite in Cologne: prayer, silence, work. She received the habit there in April 1934, made her vows there and, at the request of her superiors, completed her major philosophical work *Finite and Eternal Being*. After Kristallnacht, in November 1938, she

asked to leave so as not to endanger the community. On December 31, 1938, she was taken to the Carmel of Echt, in the Netherlands. John Paul II beatified her in Cologne itself, on May 1, 1987.

Praying at the Carmel of Cologne

Before your visit, you may reread the life of Saint Edith Stein. On site, the church is the place where you can join the prayer of the Carmelites, especially during the services. A time of silent mental prayer, in the Carmelite manner, lets you entrust an intention, for example for someone searching for the truth or for reconciliation between peoples. The prayer to Saint Edith Stein can accompany this moment. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.



The interior of the Church of Maria vom Frieden in Cologne.

Other places of Saint Edith Stein

- **Wrocław** (Poland): the Stein family home, now a place of remembrance and dialogue.
- **Speyer** (Germany): the city where she was confirmed and taught with the Dominican sisters from 1923 to 1931.
- **Beuron** (Germany): the Benedictine abbey where she made many retreats.
- **Echt** (Netherlands): the Carmel where she lived from 1939 until her arrest on August 2, 1942.
- **Oświęcim** (Poland): the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial, where she died on August 9, 1942, and the neighboring Carmel, founded to pray in that place.

Practical information

The Carmel Maria vom Frieden is in the center of Cologne, reachable on foot or by tram from the main train station and the cathedral. It is a cloistered monastery: only the church is open to visitors, and access to the archives is by request. On August 9, the saint's feast, and around October 12, the anniversary of her birth, special celebrations may be organized. Inquire with the Carmel or the Archdiocese of Cologne before you come.

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