

spiritual life/Online

Online continuation of **spiritual life** magazine Published 4 Times a Year

Volume 3 Number 2 • Summer 2017



The Tears of St. Peter by El Greco (1541-1614)

Editor

Edward O'Donnell, OCD
EdODonnell@aol.com

Publisher

Washington Province of
Discalced Carmelite Friars,

**Changing Your E-mail
Address or Adding a
New Address:** Please go
to our website and enter
your new e-mail address at:
www.spiritual-life.co

34 Editorial

35 The Power of Sacred Symbols *By Susan Muto, PhD*

45 Treating Distractions in Prayer Gently, Humbly, and Lovingly *By Marc Foley, OCD*

47 Teresa's Life: A Window into the Truth of Edith Stein *By Daniel Lydon, CSV, PhD*

62 Book Notices

63 Books from *ICS Publications*

spiritual life/Online is the continuation of the print edition of **spiritual life** (1955–2014) (ISSN 0038-7630). **spiritual life/Online** is a Catholic four-times-a-year electronic publication: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. © 2017 by the Washington Province of Discalced Carmelite Friars, Inc., 2131 Lincoln Road NE, Washington, DC 20002-1199. Tel: 1-202-832-6622.

In the waiting room of the Medical Faculty Associates clinic here in Washington, DC, I witness many deeds of loving kindness. Many young and old people arrive there as patients every day. Some are being pushed in wheelchairs and others walking with canes or crutches. We are all waiting for the nurses to call us in to see the doctor assigned to us so we can tell her or him of the pain we are suffering from our various afflictions. There is small talk among us about our problems and even some lighthearted joking about waiting in the crowded room. We are all expecting to receive some alleviation of our pain, and maybe even feel good when we leave.

Sometimes this experience of waiting reminds me of the scene from the Gospel of John that depicts the crowd of sufferers gathered at the Pool of Bethesda expecting a cure “when the water is stirred up.” John tells us that Jesus takes pity on the crippled man who could not get to the water in time to be cured: “Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked” (Jn 5:8).

Jesus’ act of loving kindness (*hesed*) to the crippled man is what we all hope for. Whether we are suffering from physical infirmities, or from emotional or spiritual ones, we welcome the healing power of Jesus’ mercy and love into our lives.

Edward O'Donnell

The Power of Sacred Symbols

A GOLDEN SUNRISE on a frosty morn. Light refracted from a stained glass masterpiece. The gnarled fingers of an old woman, a wreath forecasting the Christmas season.

SYMBOLS like these give rise to thought and enkindle our religious consciousness. We may see the same wreath and imagine a circle of believers where two or three are gathered in Jesus's name. Here we welcome the young, middle-aged, and old—women and men representing a rich multicultural diversity—spouses and children, friends and extended family members, workers and those retired—all belong to the community of faith. Our voices rise up in prayer and praise.

Our response to grace rolls over us like wind swaying in fields of ripe grain. The scriptures we read reveal a treasury of truth. The masters, whose spiritual works we consult, contain streams of wisdom inundating the ages and revealing currents of mature faith, hope, and love quenching the thirst of all who seek a deeper spiritual life.

The Power of Sacred Symbols

In this circle of like-minded believers, we are encouraged to trust our story and to grow in grace. The narration of the Annunciation is a case in point. In expressing her understandably human consternation to the Angel Gabriel about the miracle of motherhood, Mary says, “How can this be since I am a virgin?” (Luke 1:34). The awesome truth, proclaimed every time we recite the Nicene Creed, is that by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man.

MARY’S RESPONSE to this revelation manifests not only the sheer courage of her consent but also the liberating release inherent in her acts of self-renunciation and abandonment to the mystery of transforming love. She says in all simplicity, as we must try to do, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). Only when her “*fiat*” had been expressed did the angel leave her.

We remember Mary when we thank God for the joys and sorrows, the pleasures and pains, that symbolize the reality of everyday life. Each story we share has layers of symbolic meaning as when our Blessed Mother set out to visit her cousin Elizabeth so that they could celebrate together the miracle of birth. A few months later Mary’s child would be born under the most wretched of circumstances, yet that stable would echo the praise of the angels with

The Power of Sacred Symbols

mother and son, Joseph and the shepherds echoing their celestial song of joy.

SCRIPTURE TEACHES US TO REMEMBER THE PAST IN FAITH, to imagine the present in hope, and to anticipate the future in love. That is why I listened so intently to the layers of meaning revealed in the following story a dear woman shared with me. She said, with a tissue in hand:

“My maternal grandmother has always been especially important to me. She, more than anyone, gave me unconditional love while I was growing up. She babied me, while my mother was rushing me to grow up before the two brothers and sisters behind me. I spent much time with Grandma. She taught me how to plant a garden, how to peel apples and bake a pie, how to drink my tea and milk out of a saucer (But don’t let your parents see you doing this!) She told me family stories and showed me baby bunnies in the garden. In high school, she hemmed my skirts as short as I wished (it was the style) and listened without criticism or direction while I talked about boys. She always had time to visit, and my friends enjoyed her, too.

“When I went off to college, she regularly sent mail, and always included a couple of dollars for treats. We shared secrets. I loved her quick, irreverent sense of humor, her kindness and earthiness. When, in her seventies, she became

The Power of Sacred Symbols

more and more ill, I quit my job to take care of her with my aunt and mother. I was able to tell her that I hoped I would be the kind of grandmother to my grandchildren that she had been to me. Writing this brings tears to my eyes. I miss her. She is woven into the fabric of who I am. She was a dear friend to me.”

Stories

A person’s conversion story can also be a source of lasting symbolic value, one worth sharing with others. Before their life turned around, many in a small faith group I facilitated admitted being overly attached to functionalism—to their plans and projects, often forgetful of their dependence on God. Yet their thirst for transcendence could never be slaked by worldly attempts to wipe it away. All acknowledged the need to press beyond the limits of mere functionality and pursue the longing they felt to answer in the affirmative the call to conversion.

People who have transcended fear and want to fly to freedom teach us what it means to let go of inordinate attachments and to acknowledge, with a mystic like St. Teresa of Avila that God alone suffices. In one of her *Letters from Westerbork*, written on August 18, 1943, a few months before her death on November 30, Etty Hillesum shared this graced insight with her friend, Tide:

The Power of Sacred Symbols

“This afternoon I was resting on my bunk and suddenly I just had to write these few words in my diary, and I now send them to you: *‘You have made me so rich, oh, God, please let me share out your beauty with open hands. My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with you, oh God, one great dialogue. Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on your earth, my eyes raised toward your heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude. At night, too, when I lie in my bed and rest in you, oh, God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer.’* I have been terribly tired for several days, but that too will pass.

“Things come and go in a deeper rhythm, and people must be taught to listen; it is the most important thing we have to learn in this life. I am not challenging you, oh God, my life is one great dialogue with you. I may never become the great artist I would really like to be, but I am already secure in you, God. Sometimes I try my hand at turning out small profundities and uncertain short stories, but I always end up with just one single word: God. And that says everything and there is no need for anything more. And all my creative powers are translated into inner dialogues with you. The beat of my heart has grown deeper, more active, and yet more peaceful, and it is as if I were all the time storing up inner riches.”

The Power of Sacred Symbols

The symbolic depth of God's goodness powerfully reveals itself in the tempest-tossed unpredictability of daily life. Examples of believing parents, friends, teachers, and co-workers, who both teach and practice their faith, sustain us all in times of crisis. As one member of the group told us,

“My eighty-four year old friend is a spiritual prayer partner and a special pathway to God for me. Her West Indian wisdom is surely that of Solomon and she has the tenacity of St. Paul. Each conversation is like a homily wished for at Sunday Mass... My family has given me a strong spiritual upbringing too. Through them I have come to realize that we are bound together as a people by a force greater than ourselves. Our heritage is a kinship shared by and with the women of the Church as we live our story and follow our journey and continue to believe in each other.”

CULTURAL PRESSURES promoting the myth of instant fulfillment incline us to overlook the eternal message of what is precious and truly important. Our desire to change what can be changed must begin with a commitment to inner transformation. This point of our journey starts with prayer of the heart and candid self-examination. We have to accept our faults and failings with a sense of humor and humility. We must never forfeit our compassion for the vulnerability of our own and others' wounded condition.

The Power of Sacred Symbols

Symbols

At times I envision the Church as a great ship in the middle of an ocean. I am down in its lower depths, where I see her taking on water faster than we passengers can bail. Somebody says, “Quick, get a lifeboat. She’s sinking.” I think for a moment and then I say, “Give me another bucket. I may go down in this storm bailing, but I’m not getting off this ship!”

This is the ship on which my Italian peasant grandmother, Elizabeth, sailed from Italy to enter into an arranged marriage. She had eleven children, five of whom died of various diseases. I only knew her until I was twelve years old, but she remains for me a living, breathing pillar of faith.

I believe that the power of sacred symbols, caught in narratives, gives us an opportunity to reclaim the foundations of our faith tradition and to remember that it is on the ground of its incredibly strong shoulders that we proclaim the truth that sets us free (John 8:32).

THOUGH IT IS DIFFICULT IN THIS AGE OF INDIVIDUATION TO FIND A COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS, there is a woman, who never fails to inspire me, tries to encourage new models of faithful living. She seeks support where she can find it, mainly in small Christian groups. Her friendships, her ministry

The Power of Sacred Symbols

and sense of apostolic zeal, her discipleship and teaching are influenced as much by the Church as by other professionals, both Christians and non-Christians. Recently she wrote:

“WE LIVE IN TENSE TIMES, but I try to remain thankful for all that God has done for me uniquely and for us as a community of believers. I appreciate myself as a woman, as a single Catholic professional, who believes in a life of prayer and a passion for service. In this I identify with other Christian women. Catholic or not. The decisions I make are rarely, if ever, in conflict with essential Church teachings. Doctrine is seldom the problem. Certain practices I find more alienating than affirming.

“Once a group of seven of us, single women, myself included, wanted to buy tickets for a parish dance. We were refused admission because we would be attending as a group, not as couple for none of us were dating. I heard later that some of the married women felt threatened by the presence of so many single women at the dance. I almost gave up at that point, wondering what life in an average parish held in store for me. Even though I knew that the pastor did not always know what to make of me, I stayed on, and for this grace I am grateful. At least we now have a good program in place to minister to singles. I consider this a sign of progress, don’t you?”

The Power of Sacred Symbols

At the wedding feast at Cana, Mary tells the servers, when the last drops of wine are about to be poured to turn to Jesus and “do whatever he tells you” (John 2:5). In these, the last of our Blessed Mother’s words recorded in the scriptures, we find a short formula for renewal on every level of our lives:

TO DO WHATEVER HE TELLS US means that we have to renounce the false or negative self-talk that kills initiative and drowns our best intentions in petty gossip, envy, and jealousy. To do whatever he tells us means that we have to resolve with all of our courage and creativity to give up our popular or polarizing agendas and follow his way for us.

When all is said and done, we must try our best to symbolize by the lives we lead the firm conviction that we will do whatever Christ tells us with resolute hearts and obedient spirits. Though such forces as secularism and moral relativism threaten the Church we love, we will remain like that “perfect woman” in Proverbs 31:10, who becomes an irreplaceable support and a source of spiritual strength for all those entrusted to her care.

THE ENGLISH MYSTIC, JULIAN OF NORWICH’S VISIONS OF REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING drew her into the epicenter of Christ’s ignominious death and glorious resurrection. She refused to flinch in the face of pain or to doubt the efficacy of God’s gracious plan for her life. Comparable to ETTY HILLESUM’S UNINTER-

The Power of Sacred Symbols

rupted dialogue with the Holy is Julian's symbolic "showing" of a hazel nut:

"He showed me a little thing, the size of a hazel nut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind's eye and I thought, 'What can this be?' And the answer came, 'It is all that is made.' I marveled that it could last, for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small. And the answer came into my mind, 'It lasts and ever shall because God loves it.' And all things have been through the love of God.

"In this little thing I saw three truths. The first is that God made it. The second is that God loves it. The third is that God looks after it. What is he indeed that is maker and lover and keeper? I cannot find words to tell. For until I am one with him I can never have true rest nor peace. I can never know it until I am held so close to him that there is nothing in between."

SUCH A SACRED SYMBOL BRINGS US FULL CIRCLE, revealing, as it does, the lasting bridge between what we believe and why we live these beliefs in daily life in conformity to the will of God, with a firm intention to run the race of faith to the finish line (Hebrews: 12:1).

Susan Muto, PhD, is a single laywoman living her vocation in the world and doing full-time, Church-related ministry in the Epiphany Association.

Treating Distractions in Prayer— Gently, Humbly, and Lovingly

The great mystic St. Teresa tells us that she could not control either her mind or imagination during prayer. They were “like wild horses...running here, now there, always restless”¹ or “like little moths at night, bothersome and annoying.”² Distractions are often bothersome and annoying but they can also be a source of spiritual growth. Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection gives us a perspective in this regard.

“Fidelity to the practice of [the presence of God]... fosters...awareness of God within.... [It] must always be performed *gently, humbly, and lovingly*, without giving in to disturbance or anxiety.... We must not get discouraged when we fail, for the habit is only formed with effort, yet once it is formed we will find contentment in everything.”
(italics added)³

What happens when we are distracted and refocus our mind on God, gently, humbly, and lovingly? The answer is so obvious that it may have escaped us. We grow in gentleness, humility, and love. If you have a hundred distractions during your period of

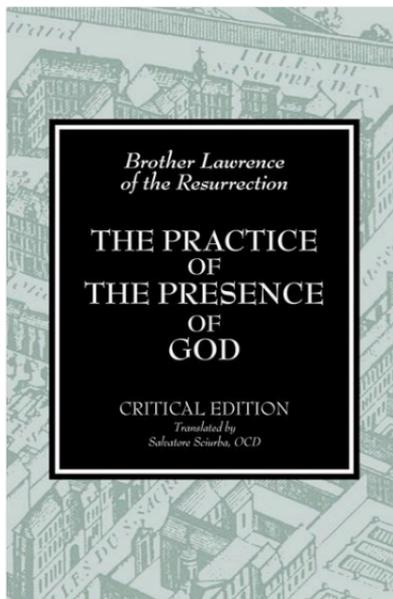
Treating Distractions in Prayer

prayer and gently, humbly, and lovingly re-center your mind upon God a hundred times, you have made a hundred acts of the will. In consequence, you have grown spiritually. We should neither be disturbed, anxious, nor discouraged by distractions. They invite us to unite our will to God's will and to grow in virtue.

Marc Foley, OCD, lives in Washington, DC, and is the author of several books, including *The Ascent to Joy: Selected writings of John of the Cross*.

NOTES

1. St. Teresa of Avila, "The Way of Perfection" in *The Collected Works of Saint Teresa of Avila, vol. 2*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1980), p. 107.
2. St. Teresa of Avila, "The Book of her Life" in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, vol. 1*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, OC. and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987), p. 155.
3. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, trans. Salvatore Scieurba, OCD, (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994), p. 41.



The Practice of the Presence of God. Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, OCD. ICS Publications, Washington, DC. Edited by Conrad De Meester, OCD. Translated by Salvatore Scieurba, OCD. Preface by Gerald E. May, PhD.

The only English translation of the French critical edition, this volume includes a general introduction, bibliography, and testimonies about Brother Lawrence by those who knew him. With 5 photos and illustrations.

Daniel J. Lydon, CSV

Teresa's Life: A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

EDITH STEIN, A JEWISH PHILOSOPHER, convert to Catholicism, Carmelite, and martyr at Auschwitz, was canonized a saint in the Roman Catholic Church on October 11, 1998—four days before the feast of St. Teresa of Avila. It is well documented that it was her reading of Teresa's *The Book of Her Life*¹ that moved Edith to accept the Christian faith and to be baptized a Roman Catholic.

I would like to explore what it might have been that Edith found in the Life of Teresa that helped her hear the call of God to embrace faith once again. It would not be the faith of her ancestors, but the Christian faith that Edith would embrace. Teresa's experience of a merciful and tender God, a God who is real and whose presence can be felt—that is the God to whom Edith was drawn.

Edith Stein

Edith Stein was born in Breslau, Germany, on October 12, 1891, into an observant Jewish family.

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

By all reports Edith was a gifted child. Edith was a bright student and enjoyed learning. She was deeply influenced by her mother's strong faith, but by the age of thirteen Edith wanted to leave school. One biographer explains:

“Perhaps her frail constitution and a resulting psychological and mental exhaustion contributed to the unexpected decision. The collapse of her childhood faith may also have been a factor. Edith Stein acknowledged years later that from thirteen to twenty-one she could not believe in the existence of a personal God.”²

Edith says of that time in her life: “I dropped prayer consciously and by my own decision.”³

Although an atheist, Edith accompanied her mother to temple services and recovered from her breakdown. She passed the exams required for high school graduation and enrolled at the University of Breslau to study German and history. Required to study philosophy at Breslau, Edith became enamored with Edmund Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. In 1913 she transferred to the University of Göttingen to “sit at the feet” of Husserl. Edith's mother supported her in this move and knew of Edith's loss of faith in the God of her people: “Edith's piety had not succeeded in effectively resisting the inroads liberal thinking had made on the family's traditions and customs.”⁴ Edith, it seems, was more edified

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

by her mother's "complete absorption in God" than with her religious practice.⁵

Edith was involved in a search for truth

Edith was involved in a search for truth and, to her, Edmund Husserl was the philosopher who could help her find it. In 1916 she completed her doctorate in philosophy with a dissertation under Husserl. In her doctoral dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy*, Edith investigated the psychophysical individual: "This was her first attempt to treat the major theme of all her writings: the structure of the human spirit."⁶

Stein began to serve as Husserl's assistant in Freiburg. Toward the end of 1917, Edith received difficult news. Her friend and fellow philosopher Adolf Reinach was killed on the front lines in World War I. Edith, disoriented by the death of her friend, knew she had to attend the funeral in Gottingen. She fully expected to find Adolf's widow crushed by her loss, but she found Frau Reinach sad and grieving, but "filled with a hope that offered the other mourners consolation and peace."⁷ Anna Reinach's Christian faith seemed to give her an inner strength Edith had not seen up to that point. From the moment of her encounter with Frau Reinach's "unshakable faith in a living God,"⁸ Edith's inner transformation began in earnest.

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

For the next year Edith explored the Christian faith but hesitated converting. Her essays from this period reveal a woman on an intense journey of faith. Something new was happening inside of her. She writes in a work on the philosophical foundations of psychology:

“There is a state of resting in God, of a complete relaxation of all mental effort, when one no longer makes any plans or decisions, where one no longer acted, but abandons all the future to the Divine Will.”⁹

One morning, on a visit to the cathedral in Frankfurt, something happened that affected her deeply:

“We went into the cathedral for a few moments, and as we stood there in respectful silence, a woman came in with her shopping basket and knelt down in one of the pews to say a short prayer. That was something completely new to me. In the synagogue, as in the Protestant churches I had visited, people only went in at the time of the service. But here was someone coming into the empty church in the middle of a day’s work as if to talk to a friend. I have never been able to forget that.”¹⁰

Discovery

Edith would often visit her friends, the Conrad-Martiuses, at their farm in Bergzabern. By then,

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

both Edith and her friend Hedwig Conrad-Martius were deeply into a search for meaning in their lives. Hedwig said later, “It was as if we were both walking on a narrow mountain ridge, aware that God’s call was imminent.”¹¹ During a visit in the summer

She chose to read the autobiographical life of Teresa of Avila

of 1921, Edith was searching for a book to read in the library of their home. Her guests had gone out for the evening. Edith

was all alone. She chose to read the autobiographical *Life* of Teresa of Avila. Once she began to read, she found it impossible to put it down. She stayed up the entire night reading the book. Edith’s biographer says of that experience:

“What the experience with Frau Reinach had begun, the ‘Mother of Carmel’ perfected. When she finally laid the book down she said to herself: ‘This is the Truth.’”

Edith was baptized January 1, 1922 in Bergzabern. She took the name “Teresa” as her baptismal name. Breaking the news to her mother was difficult, but her mother wept and she accepted it. Teresia Renata Posselt writes:

“Edith Stein wasn’t ready for that; she had never seen her mother cry before. She had expected insults and abuse and possible exclusion from the family... I’m convinced that what overpowered Frau Stein was the transformation she observed

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

in Edith Stein that seemed to make a supernatural force radiate from her entire being. Being a God-fearing woman, she was able to feel, though not to comprehend, the holiness emanating from her daughter. For all her deadly anguish, she knew that she was powerless against the mystery of grace.”¹³

When asked by a friend to explain her conversion, all that Edith would say was, “*secretum meum mihi*—That is my secret to myself.” What could it have been about Teresa’s *Life* that had such a powerful effect on Edith? What power is in a text that could enable Edith to overcome her fear of surrendering to the God she began to know again? What was it about Teresa’s story that pushed Edith into a new life, that brought her transformation to a new level?

What follows is only speculation. It is filtered through this author’s own experience and reading of Teresa. How Teresa’s *Life* actually influenced Edith is Edith’s secret, but this exploration may uncover the power Teresa’s *Life* and the life of Edith may have on our own lives as disciples of the Risen One in the 21st century.

Teresa of Jesus, Reform of Carmel, and Her Life

Teresa, of Jewish ancestry, was born in Avila, Spain in 1515. Teresa entered the Carmelite convent of the Incarnation in Avila in 1536 and, after

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

more than 25 years in that convent, experienced a call to reform the Carmelite Order. In 1562 she founded the convent of San José in Avila. In that same year she completed her spiritual classic, the *Life*. Teresa went on to found 16 reformed convents and with Juan de la Cruz assisted in the reform of the male branch of the Carmelites. While the *Life* contains autobiographical material, it is not, strictly speaking, an autobiography. The *Life* is more the story of God's impact in her life. It is the story of her experience of the Lord who reached out to her and called her to Himself.

A contemplative reading of Teresa's work reveals four major ways God entered Teresa's life. These are not so much lessons Teresa learned about God, but rather ways God informed her soul of his loving presence.

God pursued Teresa and gradually took over her life with merciful tenderness.

All throughout the *Life*, Teresa speaks of a God in pursuit of her soul. Despite her attempts to flee from God, Teresa knew that God was in pursuit of her:

“God delivered me.... He strove, against my will to keep me from being lost.... His Majesty was considering and reconsidering in what ways He could bring me back to Himself.” (2.6,8)¹⁵

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

God was relentless in his pursuit and closed in on Teresa with an almost overwhelming “mercy and greatness” that Teresa describes:

“The more I strove to distract myself, the more the Lord enveloped me in that sweetness and glory, which seemed to surround me so completely that there was no place to escape.”(24.2)

For Teresa, “He never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust His mercies” (19.15). Touched with God’s tender mercy, Teresa could only abandon herself into this presence: “Nothing other than You can give pleasure any longer; for [my soul] desires to live no longer in itself in itself but in You”(16.5).

God invited Teresa into a deep relationship as friend.

Teresa felt closest to God when in prayer. Teresa has a very simple way of speaking about prayer: “It is nothing else than ‘an intimate sharing between friends, it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us’ ” (8:5). She felt God holding her by the hand and walking with her through the garden of her soul:

“It was a great delight for me to consider my soul as a garden and reflect that the Lord was taking His walk in it. I begged Him to increase the fragrance of the little flowers of virtue that were beginning to bloom.”(14.9)

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

Teresa was invited by God to pray continually. For Teresa, “It’s like the experience of two persons here on earth who love each other deeply and understand each other well; even without signs, just by a glance, it seems, they understand each other” (27.10).

God provides boundless gifts to those who surrender to Him

Teresa had a strong sense of the presence of evil. She speaks often of her distractions, temptations, and even afflictions. She sees these things as part of life and trusted that the Lord would help her through the trials she experienced. Teresa writes: “The Lord, who never failed me, who, in all these trials I enumerated often consoled and fortified me, then told me not to be anxious; that I had served God a great deal and had not offended Him” (33.3). The Lord, Teresa believed, would help anyone, who turned to Him for help:

“If people wish to gain freedom of spirit and not be troubled, let them begin by not being frightened by the cross, and they will see how the Lord also helps them carry it and they will gain satisfaction and profit from everything.” (11.17)

In fact, more than the trials and temptations she underwent, Teresa speaks of the many gifts the Lord bestows on those He loves: “Let us not cease to believe that even in this life God gives the hundredfold

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

(22.15). Teresa writes of the great gift of a “wonderful interior joy” (38.11)—an “enjoyment of God” (16.1). She received courage: “I consider this courage the Lord gave me against the devils one of the greatest favors He granted” (26.1), and she received greater freedom: “May the Lord be praised who freed me from myself” (23.1). The gifts bestowed by God are unmerited and bear much fruit in the life of the beloved: “This heavenly water, this magnificent favor from the Lord, always leaves great fruits” (18.15). Love is the greatest of all gifts:

“God gives to us without any merit on our part. And let us thank His Majesty for them, because, if we do not acknowledge we are receiving them, we will not awaken ourselves to love.” (10.4)

The journey into God’s life is an ecstatic journey

For Teresa, the journey she is undertaking is one of ecstasy. She describes this ecstasy in terms of fire: “This love also seems like a huge fire that always needs something to burn so as not to go out” (30.20); she speaks of being “stupefied and stunned” (38.11) and of being “bewildered and inebriated in this love” (16.2). Teresa describes what has become known as her “transverberation” as a visit from a beautiful angel who plunged a fiery dart several times into her heart, and as Teresa says,

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

“It reached deep within me. When he drew it out, I thought he was carrying off with him the deepest part of me; and he left me all on fire with the great love of God.” (30.13)

She also states:

“The pain was so great that it made me moan. And the sweetness this greatest pain caused me was so superabundant that there is no desire capable of taking it away, nor is the soul content with less than God.” (29.13)

Teresa’s Life and the life of Edith

Edith had been on a search for the Truth for many years by the time she picked up Teresa’s story. She had been “walking on a narrow ridge, waiting for the divine summons to come at any moment.”¹⁶ That night, as she began to read the story of a fellow Jewish woman’s intense and real experience of a living God, Edith heard the summons and was made ready by God to respond. The story of Teresa’s understanding of the Truth¹⁷ resonated with Edith’s intimate experience of God. Perhaps Edith could pray with Teresa, “That you bestow such sovereign favors on souls that have offended You so much, certainly brings my intellect to a halt” (18. 3). God is not a being that a person can examine and know intellectually. Like Teresa, “People must walk along this path in freedom, placing themselves in

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

the hands of God” (22.12). Edith might have been finally able to say with Teresa:

“What I have come to understand is that this whole groundwork of prayer is based on humility and that the more a soul lowers itself in prayer, the more God raises it up.” (22. 11)

Finally, Edith was to peer into the window of the One who called Himself “the way, the truth and the life.” Edith heard the testimony of a woman who experienced God as friend, as lover, and as one who transforms a person from someone concerned about worldly realities to a person who becomes “powerless against the mystery of grace.”

Epilogue: Edith’s Life after Her Baptism

After her baptism, Edith Stein taught for nearly 10 years at a Dominican sisters’ woman’s teacher training college in Speyer. In 1933 Edith Stein entered the Carmelite Order in Cologne. Sensing the threat to Edith and the other sisters, Edith’s superiors transferred her to the Echt Carmel in Netherlands in 1938. After the Nazi invasion of Holland in 1940, and especially after the Bishop’s public statement against the treatment of the Jews July 20, 1942, Edith knew that she would soon be arrested and taken from her Carmelite sisters. The inevitable happened on August 2, 1942. Edith and her sister Rosa, who had come to live with Edith

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

at the Echt Carmel, were arrested by S.S. officers. A biographer writes:

“The two sisters sorrowfully said farewell to the rest of the community. Meanwhile, the street had filled with local residents incensed over the latest act of violence. Surrounded by the crowd and unable to fully absorb the situation, Rosa became disoriented. Seeing this, a neighbor recalled, Edith took her by the hand and said reassuringly, ‘Come, Rosa. We’re going for our people.’ Edith Stein understood that the last stage of her journey had begun. Together with Rosa, she walked to the corner and got into the squad car. In a few minutes, Echt had been left behind.”¹⁸

From August 2 to August 7, the sisters spent time in two different Dutch concentration camps. On August 9 the sisters were transported to Auschwitz and executed.

At the camps, mothers were in despair and ceased caring for their children. One eyewitness said that Edith, in her final days, began to care for the children “so that everyone was amazed.” One Dutch guard was deeply moved by his encounter with Edith:

“When I met her in Westerbork, I knew this was truly a great woman. She was in the hell of Westerbork only a few days, walking among the prisoners, talking and praying like a saint. Yes,

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

that's what she was. That was the impression which this elderly woman gave, though, on the other hand, she seemed quite young. She spoke in such a clear and humble way that anyone who listened to her was seized. A talk with her was like a visit to another world.”²⁰

Conclusion

Theologian Karl Rahner said that “the devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or s[he] will cease to be anything at all.”²¹ Teresa served as a window into the mystical life for Edith Stein. Because of her reading of Teresa’s classic of Christian mysticism, Edith was forever changed. She found peace and freedom. She found God.

May all those seeking to grow as disciples of Jesus be lured into a deeper relationship with the living God by looking to Teresa of Avila—and Edith Stein—as models of faith and believe always that God “never tires of giving, nor can He exhaust his mercies.”

Daniel J. Lydon, CSV, PhD, has a doctoral degree in Spirituality from the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He presently teaches Theology and co-directs the Adult Faith Formation program at St. Viator High School in Arlington, Heights, IL.

NOTES

1. Henceforth called *Life*.
2. Waltraud Herbstrith, *Edith Stein: Biography* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 5.
3. Freda Mary Oben, *Edith Stein: Scholar, Feminist, Saint* (New York: Alba House, 1988), 7.
4. Herbstrith, *Edith Stein*, 11.

A Window into the Truth for Edith Stein

5. Ibid, 12.
6. Oben, *Edith Stein*, 13.
7. Herbstrith, *Edith Stein*, 26.
8. In Jean de Fabregues, *Edith Stein* (New York: Alba House, 1965), 38.
9. In Hilda C.Graef, *The Scholar and the Cross: The Life and Works of Edith Stein* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1956), 30.
10. From Edith Stein's *Life in a Jewish Family*, in Herbstrith, *Edith Stein*, 29.
11. Oben, *Edith Stein*, 17.
12. Graef, *Scholar and Cross*, 32.
13. In Herbstrith, *Edith Stein*, 36. Originally from Teresia Renata Poselt, *Edith Stein: Eine Grosse Frau unseres Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg-Basil-Vienna: Herder, 1963), 59.
14. Graef, *Scholar and Cross*, 30.
15. All of the quotes from Teresa's *The Book of Her Life* are from: Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, tr., *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. I (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1987).
16. See footnote 10.
17. Teresa tells us that her Life is the story of her coming to understand the Truth: "Thus, I understood that the Lord gave me understanding of what the Truth itself is (355). Earlier in the Life she prayed: "Blessed is the soul the Lord brings to the understanding of truth!" (185).

Words of Pope Francis

We will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer. In each of these "little ones," Christ himself is present.

His flesh becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled...to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: "As we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love."

Book Notices

In All Seasons, For All Reasons Praying throughout the Year

By James Martin, SJ

Liturgical Press Paperback \$7.95

The Christian longing to share anguish, fear, gratitude, and awe has found expression in many forms of prayer, beginning in Scripture and the practices and words of Jesus. Over the centuries many fruitful approaches to prayer have taken hold, but often there is a certain unease about what is right or what is best. In this welcome and welcoming book, Fr. James Martin eases these concerns with thoughtful, practical encouragement about prayer in all of its forms. *All Seasons, For All Reasons* is drawn from "Teach Us to Pray," Fr. Martin's very popular monthly column in *Give Us This Day* and presents the challenge of faith and hope today.

Would I Like Jesus:

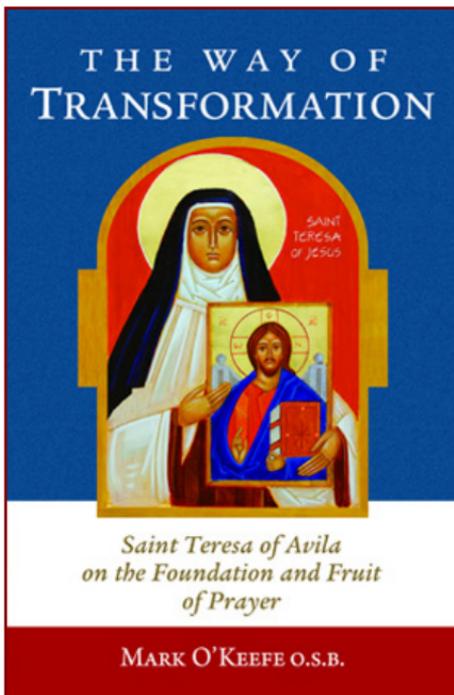
A Casual Walk through the Life of Jesus

By Peter Fleming

Paulist Press Paperback \$14.95

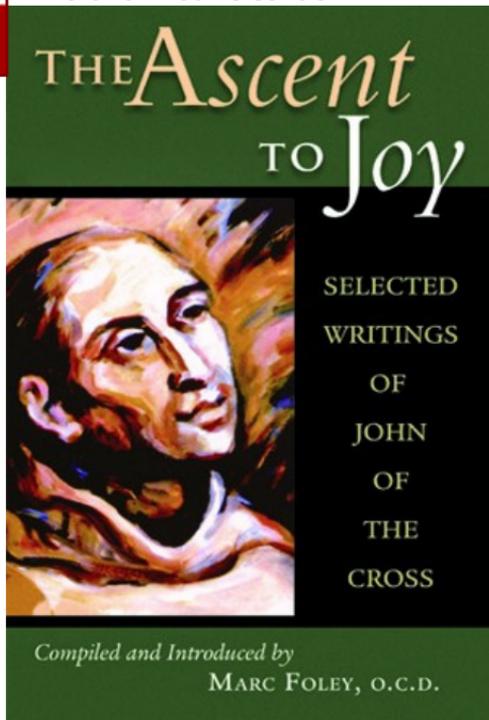
The author wants to find out, by looking at the life of Jesus according to the Gospel of Matthew, if he likes him. If this man were actually God, and the account is a record of God's life on Earth, our emotional reaction to him, as opposed to our intellectual response, becomes tremendously important: would we like God, simply like him, if we met him, heard him speak, and saw him in action?

ICS PUBLICATIONS



The Way of Transformation is a play on the title of St. Teresa's classic *The Way of Perfection*. Written for her Discalced Carmelite nuns, it is nonetheless considered Teresa's "operations manual" for anyone genuinely committed to the spiritual life. But by "perfection" she doesn't intend the futile pursuit of idealized flawlessness, as some might think. Rather, Teresa means achieving an authentic human fulfillment—a true becoming of that person we are meant to be.

Father Marc Foley provides substantial introductions and notes to carefully selected excerpts from John's own writings, presented in a systematic order. This allows the book to function as both a primer of John's teaching and a profound introduction to the contemplative way. The introduction offers a helpful biographical summary of John's life as well as a chronology of key events in his life to situate his texts in a clear historical context.



www.icspublications.org
Scan this QR Code
>>>>>>>>>>>>



ICS Publications
2131 Lincoln Road NE
Washington, DC 20002
1-800-832-8489