

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent – Homily by Fr. Dan Donovan (March 8, 2015)**

The phrase the “**paschal mystery**” occurs a number of times in the liturgy of Lent and of the Easter Season. It refers to the **death and resurrection of Jesus** and to the fact that the two together constitute one **single saving event**. The word “paschal” evokes the **Jewish Passover**, the annual celebration of the liberation of Israel from oppression in Egypt. For Christians, the death and resurrection of Jesus represent a **new Passover**, a new form of liberation, a passing over from sin and alienation from God to forgiveness and new life in his presence.

The life-giving, life-transforming power of the Paschal Mystery is brought to bear on us for the first time **in baptism**. In every Mass, we remember, give thanks for, and, in some sense, render that same mystery present among us.

Today’s reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians invites us to focus for a moment on the path that Jesus had to walk before being brought to the fullness of the resurrection, a path that involved suffering, pain and death on the cross. Stories in the media about the **Islamic state** of Iraq and Syria, stories of horrendous violence and brutality, stories of religious minorities, including Christians, being driven from their homes and villages, of some being tortured and murdered, of women and children being taken into captivity, remind us of how life in the world is still lived under the **shadow of the cross**.

In a course entitled “**Major Christian Thinkers**” which I am teaching this year at St Michael’s College, I have included for the first time **Edith Stein**, a remarkable woman canonized by John Paul II in 1998. Edith was born into a large, middle class Jewish family in Germany in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although as a teenager she ceased believing in God, she had a deep passion for truth, a passion that led her to study philosophy and to embark on a philosophical career. Various experiences and contacts gradually awakened in her a sense of religion and an attraction to Christ and to the mystery of the cross. The decisive moment in her search came when she found and read **Teresa of Avila’s account** of her life. “That,” she said “is the truth.” A few months later she was baptized into the Catholic Church.

After a decade of teaching, lecturing and writing as a Catholic intellectual, Edith entered the **Carmelite convent** in Cologne, Germany, in 1933, taking the name **Sister Teresia Benedicta a Cruce**.

After the infamous Kristallnacht or night of broken glass with its attacks on synagogues throughout Germany in November 1938, Edith knew that her presence in the midst of the sisters put them all at risk. And so she was moved to a Carmelite convent in Holland. It was during those years that, in response to a request of her superior, she wrote a study of the life and writings of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Carmelite priest, poet and mystic, **John of the Cross**. Entitled The Science of the Cross, the work reveals as much about Edith as it does about John.

In the summer of 1942, the Dutch bishops had a letter read in all parishes condemning the Nazi authorities in Holland for rounding up Jews. In retaliation, those same authorities immediately ordered the arrest of Jews who had become Catholic, including Edith Stein and her sister Rose who, by this time, was also a Catholic and was with her when she was taken. As they left the convent, Edith was heard saying to her sister: "Come, we will go for our people." Within a week the two women, along with other Jewish Catholics, were put **to death in the extermination camp** at Auschwitz. Edith died there, as John Paul II put it, "as a daughter of Israel 'for the glory of the Most Holy Name' and at the same time as **Sister Benedicta of the Cross**, literally blessed by the cross.'

In his homily at the beatification ceremony, the pope commented on Edith's passion for truth. The search for it, she once wrote, "is in a very profound sense a search for God." Her search reached a climax in her reading of Teresa of Avila's account of her life. In it, the pope remarked, "she found truth, not the truth of philosophy, but rather the truth in person, the living person of God. Edith Stein had sought the truth and found God."

John Paul II began his homily at **Edith's canonization** by citing a verse from Paul's letter to the Galatians: "Far be it from me to boast in anything but in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The pope went on to say that "The mystery of the cross gradually enveloped Edith Stein's whole life. " "Although many of our contemporaries would like

to silence the Cross, nothing,” he added, “is more eloquent than it. The true message of suffering is a lesson of love. Love makes suffering fruitful, and suffering deepens love.”

Edith was a **woman of prayer**, of contemplative prayer but also of prayer for others. She prayed for her family and for all Jews suffering under the Nazis, for the church and the Carmelite order, for the German people. With time, she came to understand that God’s answer to her prayers was, in the words of the pope, “**her specific vocation to ascend the cross with Christ**, to embrace it with serenity and trust” and in doing so to make her life and death one great sacrifice, one prolonged prayer for her people and all peoples, for peace and reconciliation. Her canonization expresses the church’s conviction that with Christ **she has passed from death to life**.