

Readings: *Hosea 2: 16,17 & 21,22; Ps 44 (45):11 – 17; Matthew 25: 1 – 13.*

Today's saint was born Edith Stein, the eleventh child of a Jewish family in Breslau (then in Germany, now in Poland). As a schoolgirl and as a university student she was a determined atheist but was committed to the search for ultimate truth. Her studies of psychology, history and philosophy eventually led her to recognize "the world of faith". She read the autobiography of Saint Teresa of Avila in a single night, and her judgement on it was "This is the truth!"

She was baptized, aged 31, in January 1922. Whereas she had earlier rejected her Jewish heritage, she now felt joined to Christ not only in spirit but by race.

For ten years she taught philosophy and became a deep thinker and mystic. In October 1933 Hitler became Chancellor and the dictator of Germany and began a systematic persecution of the Jews. Edith lost her position as a teacher and joined the Carmelite sisters in Cologne, taking the religious name Teresa Benedicta of the Cross. In a letter Sister Teresa compared herself to the exiled Queen Esther, who was able to plead for her own people, the Jews, with the Persian King. She wrote "I am a very poor and powerless Esther, but the King who has chosen me is infinitely great and merciful."

She came increasingly to believe that that the suffering of the Jewish people was a bearing of the cross of Christ, in which she wished to share: "My people's destiny is my own".

Hoping to protect her Carmelite sisters, Teresa left Cologne with her sister Rosa and joined a Carmelite house in the Netherlands. After the German occupation in 1940 she was subject to the Nazi laws, although baptized Jews were at first exempted from deportation, and, despite – or perhaps because of – a pastoral letter from the Dutch bishops protesting against the deportations, the Nazi authorities ordered that Christians of Jewish descent in the Netherlands should be deported to the East for "resettlement".

Teresa and her sister Rosa were arrested on 2 August 1942, and deported by cattle truck to Auschwitz extermination camp, where she was murdered on 9 August.

She was canonized in 1998 and in the following year she was declared a Patron Saint of Europe (together with Saints Benedict, Cyril & Methodius, Catherine of Siena and Bridget of Sweden).