



# Carmelite News

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Sept – Nov 2010

## Would You Give Your Life For Your People?

Each summer, the Carmelite family celebrates three feasts commemorating holy men and women who died so that others might live. As we intensify our disciplines of prayer, silence and community in the Fast of the Order (see box), we remember the sacrifice and love of these martyrs who showed us how to live the spirit of Carmel.

*Would you give your life for your people?* On July 17, 1794, chanting a hymn of praise to God, a community of 16 French Carmelite nuns from the town of Compiègne ascended the scaffold during the height of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror. There they offered their lives to restore freedom, justice and peace in their beloved country. Unknown to their executioners, for months before this event these nuns had made a daily act of consecration of their lives for the restoration of peace. Ten days after their deaths by the guillotine, the Reign of Terror ended, somehow exhausted, we believe, by the Carmelites' generous self-gift.

The story of these martyrs of Compiègne (feast July 17) has captured the imagination of people all over the world. It has been immortalized in Poulenc's opera *Dialogues of the Carmelites* – though the opera is a fictionalized account, it does convey the drama, intensity and love so present in the last days of these our sisters. William Bush, author of *To Quell The Terror*, tells how the normally raucous crowd fell to silence as the nuns processed to the scaffold. He calls the martyrs "bearers of God" through their oblation: "For through the inexplicable, self-imposed and unprecedented silence [of the crowd] that accompanied their long procession...it was God, through them, who was revealing something of God's presence and power in the world at that hour." It was not that God wanted this violence, but rather that humanity had to have its eyes opened to see what it was doing. *Would you give your life for your people?*

In June of 1939, another Carmelite nun, Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta, feast August 9), mirrored the consecration of the nuns of Compiègne in order to quell the violence in her own country of Germany. On the eve of World War II, she offered her life "to the heart of Jesus" for "true peace," that "a new social order might be established," and "for the Jewish

people" who were her own. Edith Stein was born in Breslau, Germany, into an observant Jewish family. She was a brilliant scholar, studying philosophy under the famed father of phenomenology Edmund Husserl. She was an unflinching seeker of truth, and it was through her studies that she found her faith in Christ. She converted to Catholicism in 1922 and entered the Cologne Carmel in 1933. Though she desired to enter Carmel much earlier, she delayed on the advice of spiritual directors in order to pursue her work, until at last prejudice against the Jewish people and against women closed off all academic opportunities.

In Carmel, Edith Stein found the way to live for her people, not only through her oblation but through prayer: *The world is in flames...Are you impelled to put them out?...Do you hear the groans of the wounded on the battlefield...? You are not a physician and not a nurse and cannot bind up the wounds. You cannot get to them...[But] bound to the Crucified, you are as omnipresent as he is. You cannot just help here or there...You can be at all fronts, wherever there is grief. Your compassionate love takes you everywhere.* (Essay of Edith Stein).

On August 2, 1942, Edith Stein was seized by the Nazis from a Carmel in Holland where she had fled for safety. Two hundred forty-two Jewish Catholics were arrested that day in retaliation for a pastoral letter published by the Dutch bishops condemning the Nazi regime. Also arrested was Edith's sister Rosa who had accompanied her to Holland. As they were taken away,

### Please Join in the Carmelite Fast!

Last September we invited our newsletter readers to join us in the Carmelite Fast, which begins on September 14 and ends at Easter. The Fast of the Order is a time to live out contemplative values with greater intention and intensity. The months of the Fast are dedicated to observing and deepening the practice of contemplative prayer, silence, solitude, and justice in community life, through daily small sacrifices and self-offerings. Please join us again this year in a practice that trains and prepares our hearts to give ourselves and our lives for the transformation of our world.

Edith is reported to have said "Come, Rosa, let us go for our people." On August 9, 1942, she who had lived for her people now died for them, as she was killed in the gas ovens of Auschwitz. Of Edith Stein it has been said: "she took upon herself all the inhumanity and brutality of her tormentors as an act of reparation in union with the sufferings of Christ. She was utterly penetrated by the conviction that redemptive love is the only means by which the world can be overcome." *Would you give your life for your people?*

On July 26, 1942, the very day the Dutch bishops' pastoral letter was released, another Carmelite, Titus Brandsma (feast July 27) died in Dachau by lethal injection. Titus, born in Holland, entered Carmel in September, 1898, and later became of professor of philosophy at the University of Nijmegen, which he helped to found. He was adviser to the Catholic journalists of Holland, and was a very effective writer and outspoken journalist himself. Titus was arrested in January, 1942, for collaborating with the bishops to defend the Church's freedom of education and the press. During his detention, he wrote a poem inspired by a print of Fra Angelico's *Christ Crucified*: "A cup of sorrow I forsee, Which I accept for love of Thee. The painful way I wish to go; The only way to God I know."

*Would you give your life for your people?*

**Please join us to celebrate  
Thérèse of Lisieux and Teresa of Avila  
Sundays October 3 and October 17**

The feast days of our Order's great doctors of the Church, Thérèse and Teresa, fall on Fridays this year (October 1 and 15). Thérèse of Lisieux, also known as the Little Flower, is beloved around the world for her "little way" to God and for fulfilling her promise to "spend her heaven doing good on earth." Teresa of Avila is the warm, vibrant and determined reformer/foundress of our Order. Her written works describing the life of prayer inspire and guide our Carmelite charism. To allow more of our people to share in these feasts and in our prayer, we will celebrate:

**Thérèse of Lisieux on Sunday, October 3, at our 9 a.m. Mass, and  
Teresa of Avila on Sunday, October 17, at our 9 a.m. Mass.**

We would be so glad if you could join us! Your presence will enhance our celebrations and you will find out more about our saints.



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