

SAINTS OF CARMEL

Edith Stein (St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross): She was born in a Jewish family in Breslau Poland in 1891. While studying philosophy in University, she became the assistant to Edmund Husserl, one of the preeminent philosophers of Europe at the time, and founder of phenomenology.

At the age of 30, she was given a copy of Teresa of Avila's *The Book of Her Life*, to which she responded: This is truth. She converted to Catholicism, was baptized in 1922, and formally entered the Carmel of Cologne in 1933. During the rise of the Third Reich, she continually argued in warning against Nazism and moved to the Carmel in Holland. After the fall of Holland, both her and her sister were arrested and taken to Auschwitz where she died in the gas chamber in 1942.

Her primary work is the *Science of the Cross* which is a commentary on St. John of the Cross's *Dark Knight of the Soul*. She uses her philosophical education to explore the effects of the Cross on the human soul and how it is not only through the Cross that salvation has been won, but that the Cross is necessary to the conversion and redemption of a person. She expounds on the "life-giving and life-forming power of the Cross."

Titus Brandsma: Born in Bolsward, Holland, in 1881, Bl. Titus Brandsma joined the Carmelites in 1898 at the age of 17. He made his first profession in 1899 and then he was ordained to the priesthood in 1905. He taught in a number of schools before taking up a post as Professor of Philosophy and the History of Mysticism at the Catholic University of Nijmegen where he was later appointed Rector Magnificus.

He is most noted as a writer and journalist who called out the dangers and evils against the rise of National Socialists in Germany and defended the freedom for education and Catholic Press. Following the occupation of Holland, he was arrested and sent to Dachau where he was killed in July of 1942.

Michael of St. Augustine: One of the most frequently cited influences in the *Carmelite Directory of the Spiritual Life*. He appears 77 times in *The Directory*. In contrast, St. John of the Cross is referenced 33 times; Theresa of Avila 6 times.

All appearances are that he was drawn to Carmel through his fervent devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

We may consider two central foundations of Michael's spirituality. The first is an emphasis on poverty and the renunciation of all things. The purpose of poverty, he taught, was that having renounced every creature (or thing), a person can repose perfectly in God. Such detachment allows one to rest without willing, knowing, understanding, feeling or desiring of any created thing. This is different from a Franciscan understanding of poverty which embraces poverty as a means of imitating the life of Christ. The second foundation is the deiform life, which is a life that is directed toward God as one's final, definitive destiny. In other words, our goal, or what we

seek at the end of our life is not a gift from God, like entry into heaven and life eternal, but our end is God Himself.

Regarding *The Directory* and other significant saints of Carmel, it says: It is a crime to remain ignorant of the writings of St. Theresa, St. John of the Cross, St. Mary Magdalen dei Pazzi, Father Michael of St. Augustine, Father Michael de la Fuente, John of St. Samson, Marie Theresa Petit, and others of their kind.

John of St. Samson: 1571-1636, a lay-brother of the Province of Tours, France; He was a renowned mystic and leader of that celebrated school of spirituality upon whom the rest of its writers more or less depend. He is often described as the soul of the Tourraine Reform, which was the movement in Carmel that brought the Reform of Teresa and John to the Ancient Order.

Other Saints of Carmel:

Br. Berthold: Likely the Brother B. who is mentioned in the Letter of Albert of Jerusalem giving the Rule of Carmel

Simon Stock: Prior general of the Order who received the Scapular from the Blessed Virgin

Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection: Author of the spiritual way known as *Practicing the Presence of God*

The Martyrs of Compiègne: 16 Sisters of the Carmelite monastery in Compiègne who were arrested during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution, and martyred at the guillotine.

Elizabeth of the Trinity: Her spirituality of the Trinity was not well known during her life, but after her death, as many of her journals and letters became known as particularly poignant understanding and knowledge of the Holy Trinity for our time. She died in 1906 and was beatified in 1984).

Nicholas the Frenchman: Author of *The Flaming Arrow*, a foundational work of Carmel that called the brothers of Europe back to the strict and authentic practice of the Rule.

Mary Magdelene de Pazzi: When she had only been a novice for 1 year, Mary Magdelene de Pazzi grew seriously ill and while on her death bed, she was allowed to make final vows. While she is most well known for her mystical experiences of ecstasy and visions, she took the ecstasies as a sign of her weakness. The other faithful sisters in the house were of such faith that they did not need such graces in order to love and serve the Lord, but for her, they were evidence that God believed her faith needed such support and bolstering.

Her collected works include 5 volumes of dictation recorded by novices during her visions. Nearing the end of her life, she requested two gifts of God: to look on any neighbor as good and holy without judgment and to always have God's presence before her.

From Catholic.org:

What her experiences and prayer had given her was a familiar, personal relationship with Jesus. Her conversations with Jesus often take on a teasing, bantering tone that shocks those who have a formal, fearful image of God. For example, at the end of her forty days of graces, Jesus offered her a crown of flowers or a crown of thorns. No matter how often she chose the crown of thorns, Jesus kept teasingly pushing the crown of flowers to her. When he accused her, "I called and you didn't care," she answered back, "You didn't call loudly enough" and told him to shout his love.

She learned to regret the insistence on the crown of thorns. We might think it is easy to be holy if God is talking to you every day but few of us could remain on the path with the five year trial that followed her first ecstasies. Before this trial, Jesus told her, "I will take away not the grace but the feeling of grace. Though I will seem to leave you I will be closer to you." This was easy for her to accept in the midst of ecstasy but, as she said later, she hadn't experienced it yet. At the age of nineteen she started five years of dryness and desolation in which she was repelled by prayer and tempted by everything. She referred to her heart as a pitch-dark room with only a feeble light shining that only made the darkness deeper. She was so depressed she was found twice close to suicide. All she could do to fight back was to hold onto prayer, penance, and serving others even when it appeared to do no good.

Her lifelong devotion to Pentecost can be easily understood because her trial ended in ecstasy in 1590. At this time she could have asked for any gifts but she wanted two in particular: to look on any neighbor as good and holy without judgment and to always have God's presence before her.

Far from enjoying the attention her mystical experiences brought her, she was embarrassed by it. For all her days, she wanted a hidden life and tried everything she could to achieve it. When God commanded her to go barefoot as part of her penance and she could not walk with shoes, she simply cut the soles out of her shoes so no one would see her as different from the other nuns. If she felt an ecstasy coming on, she would hurry to finish her work and go back to her room. She learned to see the notoriety as part of God's will. When teaching a novice to accept God's will, she told her, "I wanted a hidden life but, see, God wanted something quite different for me."

Some still might think it was easy for her to be holy with all the help from God. Yet when she was asked once why she was weeping before the cross, she answered that she had to force herself to do something right that she didn't want to do. It's true that when a sister criticized her for acting so different, she thanked her, "May God reward you! You have never spoken truer words!" but she told others it hurt her quite a bit to be nice to someone who insulted her.

Mary Magdalene was no pale, shrinking flower. Her wisdom and love led to her appointment to many important positions at the convent including mistress of novices. She did not hesitate to be blunt in guiding the women under her care when their spiritual life was at stake. When one of the novices asked permission to pretend to be impatient so the other novices would not respect her so much, Mary Magdalene's answer shook this novice out of this false humility: "What you want to pretend to be, you already are in the eyes of the novices. They don't respect you nearly as much as you like to think."

Mary Magdalene's life offers a great challenge to all those who think that the best penance comes from fasting and physical discomfort. Though she fasted and wore old clothes, she chose the most difficult penance of all by pretending to like the things she didn't like. Not only is this a penance most of us would shrink from but, by her acting like she enjoyed it, no one knew she was doing this great penance!

In 1604, headaches and paralyzation confined her to bed. Her nerves were so sensitive that she could not be touched without agonizing pain. Ever humble, she took the fact that her prayers were not granted as a sure sign that God's will was being done. For three years she suffered, before dying on May 25, 1607 at the age of forty-one.