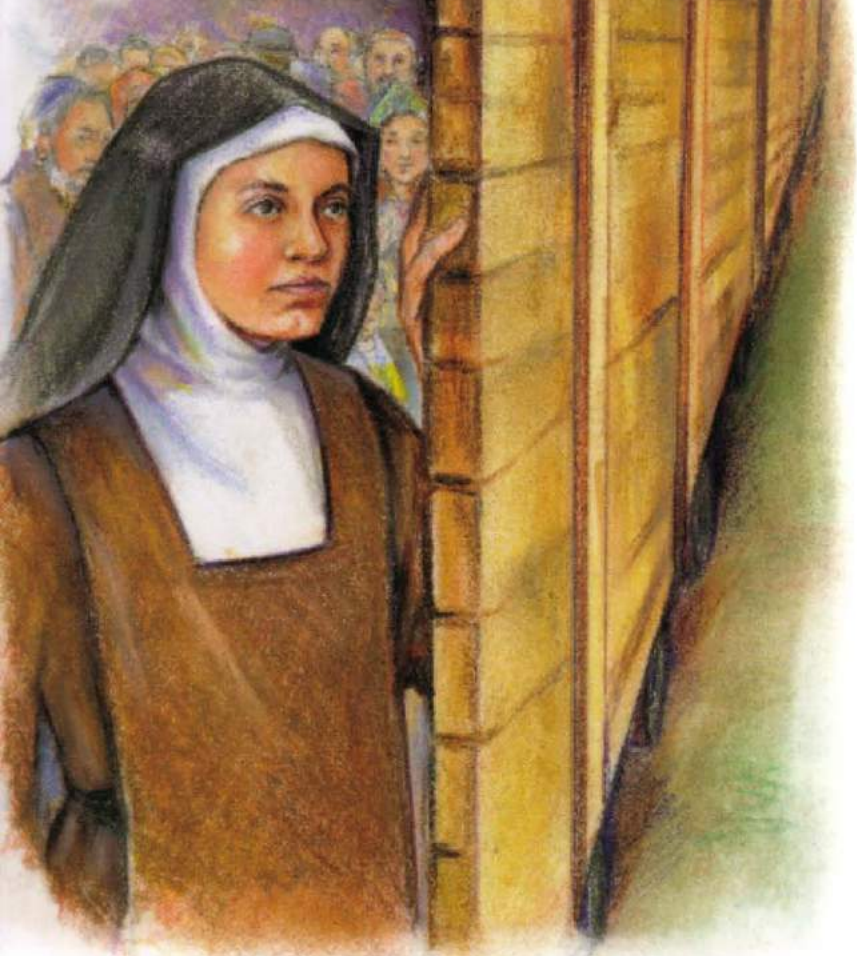


Saint Edith Stein

Blessed by the Cross

by Mary Lea Hill, FSP



Saint Edith Stein

(Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, OCD)

Blessed by the Cross

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THE BOXCAR

It was so dark. She could feel, hear and even smell the other people, but she could see no one. *There must not be any stars out tonight*, Sister Benedicta thought, straining to see even a sliver of light. *Dear God, it's 1942! Who would have thought that such a thing could happen now?*

They had been moving very steadily for a couple of hours. The constant click, clack, clack of the train's wheels pounding down the track filled the awful silence. Sister Benedicta was able to recollect her thoughts a bit and pray. *Thank you, Lord, for allowing me to be here with my people. Have mercy....*

All around the nun was a chorus of muffled sighs and moans. She suddenly became aware of soft sobbing right next to her. "Are you crying?"

"I can't get my mother to talk to me," a desperate little voice whimpered. "She only cries. She won't answer me."

"Your Mama is very tired, dear. Things

will get better, you'll see," Sister Benedicta soothed. "Tell me, what's your name?"

"Edith Weiss."

"Edith! My, that was my name, too. Now I'm called Sister Benedicta. Here, can you take this?" Sister Benedicta said, as she tried to place a handkerchief in little Edith's unseen hand. "Better now?" she asked. "Edith, you know that even when mamas are very, very tired, they are special people."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes! They are a special gift from God. God made mothers so that he could love us more."

"What about fathers?" asked the little girl.

"Certainly, fathers, too. God is our Father, isn't that so?" She touched the tired little face leaning against her arm. "Yes! The King of the universe is our Father, Edith. Even though we wish he would show it more clearly now, I'm certain he's caring for us right here in this train. Our fathers and mothers can't always give us what we want, or what they know would be best.... But even when they can't give us these things, they still love us very, very much." Sister Benedicta paused and gently stroked Edith's tear-stained cheek. "Do you believe this? Of

course, you do. Right now our Heavenly Father would like to give us only what is good and comfortable and warm. But because he doesn't, do you think he loves us less?"

Little Edith nestled even further into the unseen folds of Sister Benedicta's robes. She let out a tiny muffled sigh.

"Not less, little Edith, but so much more! He is our Father—our loving Father. We are his chosen ones. Now no more talking for a while. Try to rest. I won't let you fall. Close your eyes. Think of God's love."

Sister Benedicta caressed the child's hair and soon felt the little girl relax, her head nodding. She knew the little one was dozing, even if fitfully. "Oh, Jesus," she whispered, "please protect these young ones... and all of us, who are your Father's children."

Half dozing herself now, Sister Benedicta felt her mother's arms around her, hearing her loving words. In her mind, it was that frightening day years ago in 1893 when her father had died. Mama Stein was gently rocking her youngest daughter. "Don't cry, my darling. Papa has gone to heaven, but he will continue to watch over his little girl. At this very moment, he is probably telling

God what a good girl his little Edith is. Two years old, but so good."

"Me, too, Mama? Me, too!" wailed four-year-old Erna. Mama reached out and pulled her close too.



It was always that way, Edith and Erna, Erna and Edith. They were the two youngest children in the Stein family. It seemed impossible to speak of one without the other. The two little girls were alike in many ways and yet so different in others. The older children called them "Open" and "Closed." Erna was a simple, direct child, "clear as water," while Edith was more complex and seemed to be a book "sealed with seven seals."

THE CROW AND THE PUSSYCAT

From the window of her little office Mama Stein gazed at her two youngest daughters. They loved to play in the lumberyard. *I'm so fortunate, Mama thought, to be able to work so close to home and my children.* Her husband, Siegfried, had established the lumber business, which she herself now ran. No one had thought a widow with seven children would be able to keep such a business going, but Auguste Stein was an intelligent and resourceful woman who put great trust in God.

"Oh, Mama," Frieda, Frau Stein's second daughter, called from her desk. "Look at little Edith! She's just so smart."

"My Edith is a bit *too* smart sometimes," smiled Mama. "Look at her out there in the yard drilling Erna on her lessons. Why, she's hardly old enough for kindergarten! What are we to expect in the future?"

"Here they come for supper," Else, the oldest Stein daughter suddenly called from upstairs.

A door slammed and two little sets of legs came dashing up the stairs.

"My," twenty-four-year-old Paul exclaimed, swiveling in his chair, "you two are so fast. You're all swish and giggles. Maybe we should enter you in the national races." He stood and strained as if trying to follow a race at the track. "Can you see it now? Neck and neck miniature ponies cross the finish line in a blaze of glory, leaving everyone else behind in the dust!"

"Oh, Paul, don't tease them so much," said Else as she grabbed one of the two and began to brush the sawdust from her dress.

"Yes, be careful, Paul," laughed Arno in typical teenage fashion. "Remember the Crow will squawk and peck you, and the Pussy will hiss and scratch you to death."

"I'm *not* a crow, Arno." Erna was insulted.

Darting over to where he sat, Edith glared at him. This only caused Arno to flap one imaginary wing. With the other hand, he reached down to pet Edith. "Here Pussy, Pussy!" he cooed.

"Stop being such a pest, Arno. I'm going to be angry with you," called Else. "We want a little peace for Mama when she comes in from the yard, don't we? She'll be tired."

At this the teasers and their little victims looked at each other and began giggling and laughing. Just then Mama walked in the door. At the sight of the merriment, she smiled lovingly from one to the other. "How pleased I am to be blessed with such good children. Noisy, yes, but nice."



"I can, too!" shouted the annoyed little girl.

"Prove it, Pussy," Paul pressed.

"OK, I will!" With that, Edith recited a ballad of the great German poet, Schiller. It was a perfect mimicry of the way she had heard Frieda practice it for school.

"Well, did you all hear that? What reward shall we give the kitten?" Paul asked as he lifted his little sister onto his shoulders.

With hands firmly planted on her hips, Edith announced very solemnly, "I don't need a reward, but I've decided what I want for my birthday."

Amused, the whole family turned to see what would come next.



"All I want for my birthday is school!"

"I'm going to be six years old and I want to go to the Viktoriaschule (Victoria School), just like Erna."

"But, dear," protested Mama, "the year is half over and you can't even read or write yet."

"I'll learn quickly, Mama. I learned all those poems, didn't I? Else will help me get in."

"Well, Mama, I think our little genius deserves a chance," responded Paul, bouncing Edith up and down on his shoulders.

"Just because I teach at the Viktoriaschule," protested Else, "you think I can obtain exceptions for my family?" Else glanced from Mama to Paul, from Rosa to Frieda, then from Arno to Erna. It was obvious that protests were useless. Under the beaming smile of the little victor she agreed. "Okay, I'll try my best."