

Homily based on the readings from August 9, 2024 (Nahum 2.1, 3.1-3, 6-7; Matthew 16.24-28)

As you may recall, this past Tuesday we celebrated the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord. Although it is something of a coincidence with respect to the calendar, today's Gospel reading comes immediately *before* the account of the Transfiguration. It is no accident, though, that these events took place one after the other. As we heard today, Jesus informed his followers that each of them would have to *take up his cross* – quite literally, that they would have to submit themselves to torment and death. That is a difficult pill to swallow, even for the most committed disciples. With the Transfiguration, Jesus gave his apostles a foretaste of what would come next. As you may have heard me say on Tuesday, he had *told* his disciples about Good Friday, but he had to *show* them Easter.

Today we also celebrate the memorial of one of our more recently canonized saints, Saint Teresa Benedicta of the Cross – better known to

some by her secular name: *Edith Stein*. In case you are unfamiliar with the details of her life, she grew up in a Jewish family in Germany, but walked away from her faith as a teenager. After many years of agnosticism, she was baptized in 1922 and eventually entered the Order of Discalced Carmelites as a religious sister. She was a famous and *prolific* philosopher, the author of dozens of scholarly books and articles. The main reason we remember her, though, is that she was imprisoned by the Nazis and murdered at Auschwitz – exactly 82 years ago today.

When Edith Stein became a Carmelite, she took the name Teresa Benedicta of the *Cross*. Although Hitler had already been named Chancellor of Germany at that point, it is unlikely that anybody could have foreseen the full scope of the horrors that were coming – for Edith Stein or for the rest of the Jewish population of Europe. Nevertheless, Saint Teresa quite literally took up her cross – making it part of her very identity. Even without knowing the details of her own martyrdom, she clearly understood the cost of discipleship.

On the one hand, the story of Edith Stein is heartbreaking – like that of all the innocent people who died as a result of the twisted ideology of National Socialism. On the other hand, Saint Teresa accepted her cross willingly, even joyfully, because she recognized what comes next. As she wrote, about a year before she died:

[T]he Cross is not the end: it is lifted up and shows us the way to heaven. It is not merely a sign, but Christ's undefeated weapon: it is the shepherd's sling with which the divine David battles the evil Goliath. With it, Christ knocks loudly at the door of heaven and opens it. When these things come to pass the light of God will shine out and all who follow the Crucified will be filled with it.

In other words, the darkness of Good Friday is an essential forerunner to the eternal radiance of Easter, when all God's *faithful servants* will come to share in his transfigured glory.