



# ST. TERESA BENEDICT OF THE CROSS

## SOLEMN PROFESSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024)

*Et clausa est janua.*  
And the door was shut.  
(Mt 25:10)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,  
and most especially you, who are going  
to take your vows of religion,

**T**HE PARABLE OF THE wise and foolish virgins never leaves us indifferent. The bridegroom who arrives late, the lamps that are going out, the door that is shut... The foolish virgins are unlucky, and their sad adventure gives rise in us to compassion at best, at worst to indignation. Who could claim to have been prudent in all his choices? Who would never had yielded to heedlessness?

Many questions remain open after reading this gospel. How could a bridegroom who is late demand that exhausted virgins should not slumber? As to the wise virgins, aren't they a blatant example of a total lack of charity towards their sisters? Why does the bridegroom pretend not to know those who are by now desperately knocking on a shut door? Everything would have been so simple, had not this door been shut.

But who may well have closed the door? Is it the bridegroom? One or another of the servants? Or one of the wise

virgins, anxious to preserve their intimacy? The gospel keeps silent on all these points.

However, the fact remains that the event is a wedding, and as Providence has allowed it, it is precisely to celebrate a wedding that we are gathered today: the wedding of St. Teresa Benedict of the Cross, Edith Stein, who is crossing the door of paradise; your own wedding, too, as you are going to take your solemn and definitive vows of religion.

To live means to find oneself permanently in front of doors. A youngster will enjoy, and sometimes wear himself out, contemplating these doors, inserting his foot in them, then withdrawing it. Crossing a door for good is peculiar to adults. After that, the door closes, and other doors are then encountered. At the end of the road, a last door opens, that of eternity, that of blessedness, that of the face to face with the Lord. Such is life.

During the 51 years of her life, Edith Stein crossed many doors. The door of a devout Jewish family, in which she was born on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 1891. — Speaking of families, let us give thanks for all the gifts you have received in your own family, and first of all the gift of faith. — Other doors were for Edith that of philosophy, in which she excelled; that of her baptism on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1922; that of her entry in religious life, in the Carmelite Order, on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1933; that of the Auschwitz Birkenau camp and its gas chamber, in which she was to die on August 9<sup>th</sup>, 1942.

The ultimate door in her life was closed by the executioner in the Auschwitz camp on her who had been named by her fellow prisoners “the Angel of comfort,” during the few days she had spent in the camp. As the wise virgins, as St. Maximilian Kolbe and many other martyrs, it was with her Lord that St. Teresa Benedict of the Cross crossed the abyss of human cruelty, to taste the abyss of divine love and mercy. “It is not human activity, but the passion of Christ that can save us; my desire is to take part in it,” she wrote. Her wish was granted beyond her expectations. As the door of hatred was closing on her, the door of Heaven was opening wide. She wrote, “The Cross is the path leading from earth to Heaven.”

One thing is imperative for those who cross a door: to cross it with the Lord. That is precisely what her mother, who had remained Jewish, confessed when she saw her to the train that was

to take her to the Cologne Carmel, “the Eternal is with you.” And Edith herself answered her saddened friends, “I leave you all the more to love you and serve you.” Remaining with God, seeking Him ceaselessly, loving and serving, according to one’s own vocation, always more and more one’s brothers in the community, one’s neighbours and friends, such is indeed the substance of religious life, summed up by Therese of the Child Jesus with these few words: “In the heart of the Church, my Mother, I shall be love.” Such a path entails many self-denials and has often been compared to martyrdom.

Remaining in the presence of God is not something always easy. Aged 14, Edith Stein became an atheist, merely keeping a token religious practice to satisfy her mother. She no longer believed in God’s existence. Edith Stein’s lamp was philosophy. Thirst for the truth remained for her the sole prayer. This quest for truth, undertaken with zeal, humility, and docility, led her towards Christ. Edith was mindful to feed her lamp. “Whoever seeks truth, consciously or unconsciously, seeks God.” Such is the case for a monk. Through prayer, either in community or solitary, during the times of *lectio divina*, both in days when light is abundant and in days of drought, in days when the bridegroom seems to be very close as well as those when he seems to be late, a monk seeks God and awaits Him.

Awaiting God demands perseverance. Sooner or later, a cry will be heard, “Behold, the bridegroom comes! Go out to meet him.”<sup>a</sup> Do not think that this cry will resound only on the very last day of your life. This cry keeps resounding at every moment. You will hear it whenever one of your brothers comes to you, whenever more or less fortunate circumstances either give fragrance to your life or season it. The time to go and encounter Christ is always the present time, and all of us should take time to do this. Lost and squandered time can never be recovered.

For Edith, a decisive encounter with Christ took place when she was staying in the house of absent friends. She opened the door of the library, and took a book at random: it was the life of St. Teresa of Avila. She spent the night reading it. On the morning she closed the book and whispered, “This is the truth!” One more step was left: to give her consent and ask for baptism.

a. Mt 25:6.

Consenting to the light given to us is, for us too, our daily bread. The *Fiat* of a profession day is not sufficient. The word we then solemnly pronounced should constantly be reformulated, so that the consent we gave should remain alive. Our Lady remains for us the living icon of a given and never taken back *Fiat*. Let us walk day after day in her school, as children who listen to their mother, as Edith Stein who wrote:

You have to commend yourself entirely into God's hands, without any human support; the shelter is then all the deeper and more beautiful.

And also:

The arms of the Crucified One are wide open to draw you against His Heart.

A question is still pending. Why is the bridegroom late? Can God be late? Let us venture to say that if God is late, or more exactly if we think that He is late, it is probably because we are not yet ready to make Him welcome. Indeed, God is merciful enough to take His time with us. Don't let us try His patience too long... In each of us, there is something of the foolish virgins, and something of the wise virgins. Let us keep the lamp of faith kindled with the fire of divine love. Then, as St. Benedict assures us, "our heart will expand, and we shall run the way of God's commandments with an unutterable sweetness of love."<sup>a</sup>

a. *Rule*, Prologue.

Amen.

