We Are Made for Authenticity: Edith Stein Conference 2020

Against the backdrop of confronting sexism, atheism and the Nazi regime, St. Edith Stein had every reason to doubt her purpose and authentic identity in the world. No one would have questioned if she had adhered to the relativistic norms and societal conventions of her day. Despite this however, she lived her life in pursuit of the Truth. She was one of the first woman to pursue philosophy in academia. Her philosophical writings on empathy stood in stark contrast to the other philosophies spreading through Germany at the time. Throughout all of this, St. Edith Stein continued to affirm God as the basis of both truth and reality and the stronghold of meaning in a hectic and constantly changing society.

St. Edith Stein called us to remember that we are made in the image and likeness of God; we are made for authenticity. Modern society and philosophy, however, tell us that the truth is subjective, relative, and only within ourselves. They can lead us to believe that our identity is not a celebration of the image of God, but only something in our own heads to create and change. Adrift from meaning, truth, and God, we are left empty and confused as we attempt to construct our identity from the pieces left available to us by society.

Modern discussions of gender raise questions about the meaning of authentic femininity and masculinity. Pressure to attain high levels of career, academic, and monetary success leads to unhealthy competition and comparison in pursuit of an ultimately unattainable standard of perfection. We find ourselves in a constant state of never being good enough. Social groups and trends try to convince us that they are our primary source of identity. Amidst this uncertainty and outside judgement, we are left with a fear of living life as we authentically are. Social media allows us to portray and play with the image of our identity like it is a snakeskin and hide the truth of who we really are instead of encouraging us to see and be seen in the totality of all our joy, love and suffering. Unsatisfied, our hearts ache for the truth and authentic love.

Philosopher, theologian and saint, Edith Stein reminds of us our beautiful vocation: “to be the image of God, bring forth prosperity, and be masters over the earth.” In other words, we are created to live and love God who is Truth and in doing so become our most authentic self. In the words of Mary McCormack, OCD, “If God is drawing me into an intimate friendship with him, then he desires the ultimate meeting between the *real* person that I am and the *real* God that he is.” And not only this, He wants us to live all dimensions of our reality in that same truth. We need to accept who we are in order to have real, authentic relationships.

Turning to contemplation, discernment, and communal formation we can remember our identity as centered in God, in truth, in reality. Christ’s self-giving love on the Cross tears down the layers of falsity masking our hearts and gives us the courage to live bravely in God for our eternal destiny. It is by learning to trust in this love that we gain the courage to be who God made us to be. We accept and love who we are by discovering His loving gaze.

With open arms and minds we invite you to attend “We Are Made for Authenticity” the fifteenth annual Edith Stein Conference presented by the Notre Dame Identity Project on February 7-8, 2020 at the Morris Inn at the University of Notre Dame. We hope for conference attendees to join us in conversation, prayer, and contemplation. We also welcome submissions of abstracts for paper presentations. Please join us!