



### **Wholly Holy: Body, Mind, and Soul Seeking God**

Saint Edith Stein clung to her Incarnational faith and allowed Christ to transform her: body, mind, and soul. In both word and deed, she exhorts us to follow suit. She believed “one can only gain a scientia crucis [knowledge of the cross] if one has thoroughly experienced the cross.” By the example of her life, St. Edith Stein demonstrates that thorough experience demands complete surrender. We must allow the entirety of our being to be crucified with Christ in order to attain the wholeness God desires for our lives. Christ Incarnate did not come to redeem the flesh, the mind, or the spirit alone, but the fulness of the human person.

Sin leads us away from this holy wholeness in two ways: by reducing the identity of the human person to his or her physical reality and by devaluing the body, prizing the life of the mind above all else. Both mindsets rely upon a compartmentalization of the human experience that prevents us from totally uniting our identities to Christ crucified. Saint Edith Stein conquered each of these challenges to the integrated life of cruciform love in her work as a philosopher and in her solidarity with the most vulnerable women of Auschwitz.

As a student of phenomenology under Edmund Husserl, St. Edith Stein did not dismiss sensory experience as unimportant to the pursuit of truth, nor did she exalt pleasure as the end toward which human life is oriented. Instead, she emphasized the importance of the body in building a relationship with God, who is community, humility, and truth. As we were made in the image and likeness of God to be temples for the Holy Spirit, our enfleshed creatureliness is an integral part of our identities. Following the example of Our Lady, we give our assent to God’s will through our bodies in selfless acts of service. Just as Mary’s response to the shepherd’s appearance at Christ’s manger “was to “[keep] all these things, pondering them in her heart,” so too we are called to allow our interaction with others and the physical goods of creation to spark contemplation of the divine (Luke 2:19).

This meditation upon the divine further inspires imitation of God’s creative nature. Unconcerned for her own survival, St. Edith Stein is said to have spent her last days on earth tending with a motherly affection to the suffering strangers around her. One eyewitness famously recalled St. Edith Stein ministered to her fellow prisoners “like an angel, comforting, helping, and consoling them.” Refusing the predominant Nazi narrative that regarded the Jews as mere bodies, bestial, and unworthy of fellowship, St. Edith Stein sought to reassert the dignity of every human person she encountered through small gestures of compassion. Following Christ’s example, she is remembered to have washed the feet of the women of Auschwitz, “combed their hair,” and ensured to the best of her ability that “they were fed and cared for.” The gift of our lives and the presence of God in all creation demands that we devote the whole of our beings to cruciform stewardship.

After a difficult year of physical disconnect, we long for integration. Sobered by the surge in domestic violence cases over the course of the pandemic, we remember the deadly consequences of objectification. With St. Edith Stein, then, we seek a thorough experience of the cross so that we too may shout “with all [our] heart[s]: 'Ave, Crux, Spes unica' (I welcome you, Cross, our only hope).” With open arms, minds, and spirits, we invite you to attend “Wholly

Holy: Body, Mind, and Soul Seeking God,” the seventeenth annual Edith Stein Conference presented by the Identity Project of Notre Dame March 18-19, 2022 at the University of Notre Dame. We are excited to welcome conference attendees to join us in person for prayer, conversation, contemplation, and service. We welcome submissions of abstracts for paper presentations. Please join us!