

S. Michael & All Angels, Barnes

## REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY 2019

### FAITH IN DISASTER

*'O that my words were written down in a book ... engraved on a rock forever'*

The prophet Job speaks from the depth of his grief and distress.

Dispossessed of his home, his children and everything he loves.

But he also speaks from the depth of his faith when he says:

*'I know that my Redeemer lives!'*

And he entrusts his life and the life of those he loves to a God who bring salvation out of disaster.

Like Job, we too desire to write down words.

We engrave the names of our dead in wood and stone, on paper and metal.

An outward sign of an inward truth – that they are not forgotten by us or by God.

In the face of apparent disaster, it is an act of faith.

Each Remembrance Sunday brings with it a different feel and flavour.

Last year it was the centenary of the end of the Great War.

I could speak today of the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall – a reminder that war continues long after the signing of a truce or the cessation of hostilities.

But this year is also the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of World War 2,

And I wish to tell you about someone called Edith Stein,

### EDITH STEIN

She was born into an observant Jewish family in Germany.

She was born on Yom Kippur – the day of Atonement – the holiest day in the Jewish calendar.

Edith had an intellectual gift, and embarked on a brilliant academic career, until 1933, when she was forced to quit her post in a university because she lacked the 'Aryan Certificate' required to hold such a job.

Around this time – controversially - Edith was Baptised, and soon after joined the Carmelite order at the church of Our Lady of Peace in Cologne.

She dedicated herself to a life of prayer, taking the name Sister Theresa Benedicta of the Cross.

As the oppression of Jews increased in Germany,  
Her order sent her to the Netherlands for safety.  
To begin with, Jewish converts were spared,  
but when the Dutch bishops spoke out strongly against Nazism,  
this toleration ended.

Sister Theresa Benedicta was arrested by the Gestapo at her convent on 2nd August 1942.

When they came for her, they gave the Nazi Salute and 'Heil Hitler'.  
She replied with the traditional monastic greeting: 'Praised be Jesus Christ'.  
She was taken to a concentration camp nearby,  
where the guards were so impressed by her calm and her faith,  
That she was offered a means of escape,  
But she refused, saying:

*'If somebody intervened at this point and took away my chance to share in the fate of my brothers and sisters, that would be utter annihilation'.*

A few days later, she and 987 Jews were deported to Auschwitz and gassed to death.

Edith Stein was born on the Day of Atonement,  
and she gave her life as an offering to God in love,  
for her brothers and sisters.

She took the name 'of the Cross'  
because she knew that a great trial was coming,  
and the reality of her faith would be tested.

Even before being sent to the Netherlands she asked the Prioress to grant a special request. She asked she might '*Allow her to offer herself to the heart of Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement for true peace*'.

When we hear such stories,

We must remember that acts of sacrifice and love do not happen randomly or spontaneously.

They occur because of a life-long formation of the human person in the way of love.

When Saint Paul wrote to the Thessalonians:

*'God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit'.*

He meant the Christians in Thessalonica,

but he also means you the Christians in Barnes.

As Christians, we must sanctify ourselves with the love of God,  
So that when faced with evil,  
(And it will come at some point, in some manner to each one of us)  
We will respond in the only way we know how -  
with the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ.  
We will respond with the same words as Sister Theresa Benedicta:  
*'Praised be Jesus Christ'*.

## **GOD OF THE LIVING**

Today, we remember and pray for the victims of wars past and present.  
We do so because Jesus says in today's Gospel:  
*'God is not God of the dead but of the living – for in him all of them are alive.'*  
We remember them not as people who were obliterated by trenches or gas  
chambers, by nuclear bombs or a bullet to the head –  
But as men and women who live on in the heart of God.

This is one of the deepest convictions of our Christian faith.  
That God is life itself, and gives life.  
The faithful departed now share in God's life,  
and we may even speak of them as more alive than we are,  
for they are nearer the source from which all things come.  
In this Mass we are joined to them by the prayers we offer,  
the living and the dead in one communion of love.