
Sister Josephine Koeppel of St. Teresa, O.C.D.
(Ida Klara Koeppel)

Entered into eternal life: Sept. 10, 2011



Lay all your cares about the future trustingly in God's hands,
and let yourself be guided by the Lord just like a little child.

The words of St. Teresa Benedicta, Edith Stein, could be a summary of the development in Sister Josephine's own spiritual life as she lived decade after decade in Carmel. Through many years of prayer and service, Sr. Josephine came to a great simplicity of spirit, a childlike belief in God's care and a joy of heart that revealed itself plainly, particularly through the last days of her life.

Today we celebrate Sr. Josephine's life and vocation. We give thanks to God for His work of grace in her life, for the many talents He had given her, for the service that she gave to the Church through her life of contemplative prayer and through her translations, making known St. Teresa Benedicta to the English-speaking world.

Reviewing Sr. Josephine's life of 90 years is an experience in inclusiveness. She counted two countries as home, Switzerland and America; she embraced the contemplative life, while her interests and her writings went far beyond the cloister wall; she was comfortable speaking with archbishops, superiors general, editors of journals, and performing the simple manual tasks of community life.

She organized a travel bureau before entering Carmel; and then entered the cloister of Carmel; during World War II she served in a USO in Indiantown Gap helping soldiers who were soon to be sent to the battle front in Europe. Praying for them was a prelude to her life of prayer.

She lived for six months in the beautiful, spacious Carmel in Cologne, Germany with its large choir and broad hallways, studying the Edith Stein archives. But her office in Elysburg Carmel was a tiny room where everything, she would proudly say, was within reach from her chair [not to exert energy uselessly!].

More importantly, she was inclusive of people and their needs, their sorrows, their joys. Her prayer was for all who asked; her smile was there for everyone; she made friends quickly.

The Koeppel family in Lebanon, Pennsylvania was close-knit; she spoke affectionately of Mom and Pop and was close to her one brother, Otto, four years her senior. The family was proud of their Swiss background, sang Swiss folk songs, faithfully attended Mass and devotions, and worked hard.

Even then, a mild Klara Koeppel showed signs of leadership. She loved to read and her brother loved to listen to her; so, on cleaning days, she would pick up a book and start reading, while Otto agreeably did the chores. She explained that she and Otto would move from room to room, she continuing to read and he continuing to work.

Klara served as organist at St. Gertrude's Church in Lebanon, and at Mary, Gate of Heaven Church in Myerstown. When she spoke of these years, it was always with fond memories of the pastors and the faithful.

In 1948, Sr. Josephine entered the Carmel of Loretto, Pennsylvania, and a year after solemn profession became one of the founding members of the Monastery of the Sacred Heart and of the Holy Face in Elysburg.

Her name in religion, Josephine, was given to her in this way: the Carmel in Loretto had no sister named Joseph, and the Superior General of the Order, visiting at the time, commented that there ought to be a "Sister Joseph."

It is the custom in our Carmels to give a title following the name; so the General's title, "of St. Teresa" was given to her also. This name, Josephine pleased her and she fostered throughout her life a devotion to St. Joseph.

There was a 9 inch statue of St. Joseph in her work room, "forever" as they say. When she was critically ill we brought it to her bedside; she reached out for it, clutched it to herself with a big hug and smiled. We knew that everything was well with her, more than well.

The Carmel in Loretto had helped the Carmel of Cologne during the difficult years of World War II and a bond between the two monasteries was formed. The Cologne prioress sent a copy of St. Edith Stein's book, *Life in a Jewish Family*, to the Loretto nuns. Sr. Josephine was the only one who could read it and she realized that it would be good to make Edith known in America. It was that simply -- her work of translating began.

The first writing of Edith which Sr. Josephine translated was "The Mystery of Christmas", a short essay which revealed Edith's love for the mystery of the Incarnation, the coming of God in the Infant Jesus. Christmas was special to Josephine; she kept in her room, throughout the year a small, waxen statue of the Infant molded in such way as to be lying, curled up on the right side as a baby might sleep. To her this statue signified abandonment, safety, rest in the arms of the Father.

Translating Edith Stein's life, the letters and *The Science of the Cross*, and collaborating

with Susan Batzdorff, Edith's niece in writing and translating, was a labor of love for her.

Often, Sr. Josephine would begin a conversation with the pronoun 'she', e. g. "when she was in Cologne Carmel." We instantly knew to whom she was referring: that is how absorbed Sr. Josephine was in her work and in her personal prayer relationship with Edith Stein.

There is one comment which I would like to share. It was made by Edith's niece, Susan Batzdorff, upon hearing of Josephine's death.

"Her life was well lived and she has contributed a great deal to Edith Stein biography and scholarship which will survive her for a long time."

The contact between Sr. Josephine and Susan Batzdorff spanned 33 years. Over the years of collaboration, they became close friends, regarding each other as sister.

We have many blessed memories of Sr. Josephine, many happy memories and much gratitude to God for her life and His goodness revealed through her.

May she be rejoicing with Him and
the saints forever. Amen.

