

## The Inclusive Community

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 27, 2009

Homily of Mary Scaine

Faithfulness

Mark 9:38-50

Let us begin our homily today wherein we are all participants. We are going to take in a deep breath and we are going to hold it for about seven seconds and then exhale. Is everyone ready? Deep breath..... Exhale! "Seven" in Hebrew/Aramaic means perfection. You have just breathed in and exhaled the Cosmic Creative Spirit.

Our theme today is "Faithfulness" Let us explore together what it means? The word is derived from the Hebrew/Aramaic "**ameyn**", it is a word of power, affirming that "this is the **ground** of connection with **Unity** from which my actions will come." It is directly related to the Aramaic word for "faith" (**haimanuta**) and goes back at least to the old Egyptian idea of **ament** - the **ground of being** to which, symbolically, the bones of our ancestors return. Faith (**haimanuta**) - indicates a person's *confidence, firmness* or *integrity* of **being in Sacred Unity**.

Being a woman, our theme today naturally is interpreted from a woman's point of view. We invite and welcome the men present here today, to connect with the **ground of their being** and seek and find their feminine side that is *deep* within them.

Two women I envision as personifying this **ground of their being** are: Esther and Edith Stein.

Let's begin with **Esther**:

There is one book in the Bible that is **not** filled with moral teaching and the name of God is not even mentioned. That is the book of Esther. It is one of two books in the Bible (Ruth is the other) named after a woman.

The Book of Esther speaks to us about the evil plot of Haman in Persia to wipe out the Jews. Haman is the king's right-hand man, his prime-minister, the second-most powerful man in the kingdom. It was he, who would determine the month and day on

which the Jewish people were to be killed throughout the mighty Persian Empire. That was the **fourteenth** day of the month of **Adar**.

Esther, the Jewess, becomes Queen and intervenes with her husband, King Ahasuerus to save the lives of her people. He graciously grants her wish. **Adar** was supposed to be a **month** of sorrow and mourning; instead, it ends up being a month of joy and celebration. They are so happy and so joyful they just have to celebrate. Thus is born feast of *Purim*. *Purim* is the Hebrew word for "**lots**" in remembrance of the **pur** (lots) cast by the wicked Haman. The wicked Haman is killed on the gallows he has prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7). Esther is given the estate of Haman. Mordecai takes Haman's place and becomes the king's right-hand man. The king therefore, issues an edit granting the Jews throughout Persia the *right to assemble* and protect themselves against their enemies.

The Feast of Purim continues to be celebrated by Jews today throughout the world. The principal ceremony of Purim is the reading of the *Book of Esther* in the synagogue.

During Purim, a plate full of cake, pastries, fruit, and nuts is sent to friends. It is also customary to give charity to at least two needy individuals during Purim so that they too may be able to enjoy the festival. Purim is a time of rejoicing and gladness, the merriest holiday on the Hebrew calendar today. The Jewish calendar is lunar, with each **month** beginning on the new moon. This year it fell on March 20, 2009 and next year it will be February 28, 2010, and then March 20, 2011.

Now **Edith Stein**: She was *one* of those people whose entire life seems to have been as *sign*. She was born on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement (we ironically celebrate it tomorrow) in Breslau, Germany. She was the youngest of eleven children. Her father died when she was not yet two years old. Her mother raised her and her other siblings and managed the family business as well. She was brought up on the Psalms and Proverbs.

Independent by nature and gifted with superb intelligence, at age thirteen she no longer practiced her Jewish faith and considered herself an atheist. She continued to admire her mother's attitude of total openness toward God. She was one of the first women to be admitted to the University of Gottingen, and became one of the star pupils of Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (study of human experience). He respected her so much he invited her to become his assistant at the University of Freiburg. At the age twenty-three she completed her doctorate dissertation on the **nature of empathy**. She developed a growing interest in religion and read the autobiography of Teresa of Avila, founder of the Carmelite order in one sitting. The next day she concluded "This is the truth." She became a Christian on the following New Years' Day.

Edith became a leading voice in the Catholic woman's Movement in Germany. By the time of Hitler she was well known in German academic circles. She entered the convent on

her forty-second birthday, taking the name of *Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross*. When her mother heard of her decision she was crushed and the rest of her family saw it as a betrayal. Her sister Rosa soon joined as a Third Order Carmelite.

In 1938 the all-out war was declared against the Jews, the "Kristallnacht." Believing her life to be in danger she was smuggled to a Carmelite convent in Holland. In 1940, Holland was occupied by the Nazis. She struggled to finish her mystical study on "John of the Cross."

The Germans offered an olive branch to spare Jewish-Christians, if the church kept silent. The bishops of Holland did not keep silent, they denounced the persecution of the Jews from their pulpits. Within a week all Jewish-Christians, including members of religious orders were under arrest. From a detention camp in Holland, wearing the "Star of David," she followed the fate of millions of others. Edith died in the gas chamber at Auschwitz on August 9, 1942. Many Jews believed that she died a Jew and not for her Christian faith. Yet, in 1987, she was beatified by Pope Paul II and the controversy goes on.....

Ironically, as I noted in the beginning she was born on the *Day of Atonement*, it was not the manner of her death, but her understanding that she was in *solidarity* with her people, *all* people. It was a final Act of Atonement for the evil of that time in our human history. She had reached the *ground of her being!*

Happy Birth Day Edith.....

Mary Scaine, 9/27/09

