

- Last Sunday I was blessed to spend some time in the family home of St. Edith Stein in Wroclaw, Poland. This saint who is standing next to St. Maximilian Kolbe in our apse mural, has long been fascinating to me because of her Jewish roots.
- At the age of 30, St. Edith Stein converted to Catholicism after reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Ávila in a single sitting over the course of an entire night. After a few years of teaching and academic work, Edith Stein became a Carmelite nun in Cologne, Germany.
- Yet, even though she became a Catholic and even a nun, Edith Stein never forsook her Jewish heritage. And in fact, she died because of it – being gassed to death in 1942 in the Birkenau section of Auschwitz, along with her sister, Rosa, and so many other Jews.
- Scripture refers to the Jews as the “chosen people” of God, the people to Whom God revealed Himself. Throughout the Old Testament, we can read the stories of how God made covenants with His chosen people, of how He revealed Himself and His law to them.
- With these gifts, God laid upon the Jewish people certain expectations. Of course, as we know, the Israelites were not always faithful to our Lord and broke their covenant with Him.
- Both our first reading from Isaiah and Matthew’s Gospel today speak in symbolic terms of the failure of Israel to heed God’s commands and produce good fruit. Not only that, they beat and killed the prophets who were sent to call them back to God’s ways.
- Worse yet, when our Lord sent them His Son, their long-awaited Messiah, the chief priests and leaders of the Jewish people rejected Him and handed Him over to Pilate to be crucified.
- Their pride, lack of love, and lack of fidelity led Israel to its downfall. They failed to live as God asked, and so God turned over the Kingdom of God to a people who would produce good fruit: the Gentiles, who with the faithful Jews would form the early Church.
- And now, as members of His one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church, we are members of God’s chosen people. Yet, do we take to heart this lesson from the Jews? Do we consider well that God expects us to bear the good fruit of virtue and charitable works in our lives?
- Through baptism our souls became vineyards of the Lord. Through the Sacraments God clears our souls of the stones of sin, planting within us the choicest vines of virtue. But what kind of grapes do our souls bring forth?
- Do we try to produce good fruit by fulfilling the demands of His precepts? Are we striving to glorify God with our lives and preparing our souls for Heaven? Are we striving for moral excellence, or are we content with mediocrity?
- It’s true that our Lord is more merciful than we can imagine, and that He will happily forgive our sins if we’re truly sorry for them. But we cannot be presumptuous of God’s mercy, nor can we lose sight of the fact that there is a temporal punishment due for our sins.
- If we are lacking in diligence and zeal during our earthly lives, failing to produce good fruit, then we may face some serious consequences in Purgatory – if we even make it there!
- This is why we should be mindful that God does have expectations of us, and we have those spelled out for us in what we call the Precepts of the Church.
- The Precepts of the Church are the absolute bare minimum requirements for all Catholics. If we refuse to meet this bare minimum, then we aren’t really in communion with the Church.
- Along with following the Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church represent to us what we absolutely must do to avoid Hell! To knowingly and intentionally transgress these precepts or fail to fulfill them can be a mortal sin. So what are they?

- 1) Attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation. 2). Go to confession at least once a year. 3). Receive Holy Communion at least during the Easter Season. 4). Observe the days of fasting and abstinence prescribed by the Church. 5). Provide for the material needs of the Church. Each of these is required, unless one has a legitimate reason for not fulfilling them.
- Yet, the bar is pretty low, don't you think? Our God is not a task-master! But we must do at least this much, along with heeding the moral teachings of the Church, which have their root in the 10 Commandments.
- While this is the minimum that God *expects* from His children, He *wants* more from us! Truly, no one becomes a saint by doing the bare minimum. So we should aspire to do more!
- For example, to give God the glory He so richly deserves, and to bear the good fruit that He desires us to bear, we must first cultivate a serious prayer life by developing the habit of making time for God every day.
- Praying the Rosary and doing other devotions, going to Adoration and doing mental prayer, reading Scripture daily or praying the Liturgy of the Hours are all great ways to beef up our prayer lives.
- Instead of being satisfied with Mass only on Sundays and Holy Days, strive try to go daily if you can and receive Holy Communion as often as you can licitly do so. Instead of going to confession only once a year, endeavor to go every 4-6 weeks.
- To bear copious fruit that truly glorifies God, we should also make fasting and penance a regular part of our lives, and not relegate these practices solely to Lent. These practices both strengthen our wills so we can better avoid sin and enable us to make reparation for sin.
- As for providing for the material needs of the Church, we are asked to tithe on our income. But this precept of the Church should also inspire us to do works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal, as a means of practicing the ever-important virtue of charity.
- While our works of charity won't save us, they're an important sign of our faith in God and an indispensable way of becoming more like Christ.
- Lastly, if we want to bear that good fruit God so greatly desires of His children, it's important that we really know our Faith, that we take the time to catechize ourselves, and that we evangelize and share our Faith with others!
- This includes witnessing to and promoting Christian values in society, and fighting evils like abortion, and anything that infringes upon our right to worship freely.
- Brothers and sisters, being Catholic is a tremendous blessing and privilege, but it comes with certain expectations from God. Yet when we can find it within ourselves to go beyond the bare minimum of what God expects, we greatly please Him – and we also become holier.
- Knowing that our Lord's yoke is easy and His burden is light, let's not grudgingly fulfill the bare minimum of what He asks of us, but with great love for God seek to give Him the greatest glory we can by bearing good fruit.
- May God bless our efforts to please Him, and one day unite us to Himself for all eternity.
- St. Edith Stein, pray for us.