

# 7th September 1943



On Tuesday, September 7th 1943, a freight train containing 987 Jews left the Dutch transit camp of Westerbork, northern Holland. Twenty-nine-year-old Ety Hillesum was in the twelfth wagon. In the first freight wagon were her parents Louis and Riva, and her younger brother Mischa. Destination: 'the East'. They arrived at Auschwitz on 10th September. Ety died on November 30th.

En-route to Auschwitz, Ety wrote two postcards which she managed to slip through the train. The one addressed to a family friend, Christine Van Nooten, was then found by passers-by and mailed on. It read: "sitting on my rucksack in the middle of a full freight, opening the Bible at random, I received this word: **'The Lord is my high tower'**".

Insecure and emotionally disturbed. A sexually chaotic woman with, to say the least, a turbulent life. Raised up in a deeply dysfunctional unhappy family, she would write in her diary: "chaos within, chaos without". Thanks to a Christian psychotherapist, Ety discovered the existence of an 'inner self'. Slowly, this young woman regained contact with her inner life emerging from beneath the chaos. Sounding her own depths, she discovered the existence of **"a basic steady undercurrent... which I call God"**.

Brought up without any religious background, Ety discovered God looking deep within herself. "There is a really deep well inside of me, and in it dwells God. Sometimes I am there, too. But more often stones and grit block the well, and God is buried beneath. Then, he must be dug out again". Surrounded by horror and hatred, this frail young woman found herself kneeling down in her tiny bathroom, at night, praying, and listening to that hidden source of life present within her, transfigured by faith.

Doing so Ety discovered that "the rottenness of others is in us too", and so she refused to hate and chose to suffer. She became a woman full compassion, able to say: **"I live in constant intimacy with God"**.

On 27th January 1945 the Soviet Army liberated the camps of Auschwitz. Last Wednesday, 27th January, was **Holocaust Memorial Day**. Speaking at his Wednesday Audience, Pope Francis called for the need to remember. Let us remember Ety. Let us remember that it is possible, in the middle of chaos, fears and death to find a way to a loving God living inside of us. We all need to remember this in our time of pandemic.

*In honor.*

Father Ivano