



Anna Maria Parenzan, fsp

LESSONS LEARNED FROM HER TRAVELS ABROAD

Between 1936-1963, Maestra Thecla made fourteen long journeys abroad by land, sea and air. These trips served to deepen her apostolic fervor. While the first ones were colored by amazement at what she saw, the later ones carved into her heart the profound need of human beings for salvation—a need she felt to the point of suffering. In fact, she wrote from the Philippines in 1949:

I want to share with you a thought that struck me very deeply during this trip: how many souls there are in the world who neither know nor love the Lord! We really need to come out of our shells a little more so as to convince ourselves of this sad reality! When we read the statistics: “so many million people...” it is quickly said. But to see them, even if only in passing through their countries as we did: to see those cities swarming like anthills with people... what an impression it makes! We, who are called to an apostolate so vast that it embraces the whole world, must feel the need to help all these poor souls, to do good to them and contribute to their salvation by both prayer and the entire apostolate. As we say in the chaplet to the Queen of Apostles, we must “feel the needs of poor humanity,” of Asia, Africa, the Americas, Oceania and Europe. May all the Daughters of St. Paul feel this need, this love for souls!

Maestra Thecla transformed this anguish of heart into a sense of responsibility and into an awareness that “the entire world is our apostolic field. We must love all people in order to do good to all” (VPC 153).

Her contact with different cultures during her trips enriched her and caused her to reflect on things more deeply. Upon returning to Rome, she would always share with the sisters the things she had discovered on that particular trip because, as she said, there was always

something new to learn. Even a very simple insight could mature with time and be concretized in an apostolic activity (cf. VPC 38, 39, 45, 126).

She spoke enthusiastically about the customs, climate and natural beauty of the countries she visited, but at the same time she always underscored the sufferings and moral miseries of the people. “If only those multitudes of people could know the Lord!” she exclaimed. “It is up to us to help them reach this point!” And she concluded with a deep sigh: “If only we could print sisters the way we print books!”

While in Taipei, Taiwan, she wrote in her personal notebook: “How sad to see these poor people working with great sacrifice in all that water.... Almost all of them are pagans or Buddhists. Lord, have mercy on these souls who don’t know or love you.” A few days later, in Nagoya, Japan, she echoed that same prayer: “How many souls still don’t know you, my God! How sad! Send us many vocations to make you known and loved.”

Her grief for the countless people who did not know or love God urged her to infuse a great apostolic spirit in all the sisters.

One of her last decisions (made in October 1963), to open a community in Bolivia, revealed her missionary spirit. The sisters wondered how the Congregation would be able to carry out the apostolate of the editions in a country in which the majority of the people were illiterate. But Prima Maestra banished every doubt, saying firmly:

If the majority of the people do not know how to read, then we will do good through pictures and records. It is necessary to open an apostolic center and make the Lord known in this nation. In Bolivia too the Gospel must be proclaimed in one way or another!