

**"I'LL TAKE CARE OF THINGS..."**



For me, remembering Maestra Thecla is like remembering my mother because Prima Maestra was not only our Superior General, to whom we owed respect, obedience and docility, but she was also our mother—a mother who understood the strong

and weak points of the persons entrusted to her by divine Providence.

Her sensitivity and great humanity left a profound mark on my Pauline religious life. I got to know her during my years of formation in Rome, when she would visit the various sub-groups of the community and the different sectors of the apostolate. She readily stopped to greet people with warm and maternal affection, attentive to what they had to say. Her simple, decisive, spontaneous and welcoming personality inspired everyone with serenity and trust. She loved happy and lively recreations, during which she captivated us with her wit, jokes and games. Those times, filled with hearty laughter, restored and refreshed us in body and soul.

Prima Maestra's joyful spirit was also clearly evident on occasions such as vestitions and professions, at which she would greet and bless the new "little sisters" who were preparing to launch out on new apostolic experiences. At those times, her joy overflowed into praise and thanksgiving to the Lord.

I personally experienced her great humanity when my already frail health took a turn for the worse during my novitiate. In those days, young women asking to be admitted to the Pauline religious life were scrutinized carefully and frequently applicants were not accepted or else, later on down the line, some candidates were not permitted to continue the Pauline journey. I too ran that risk! But in spite of my precarious health, Maestra Nazarena allowed me to finish my canonical novitiate, even though I was not able to conclude it with my profession.

During the course of spiritual exercises that we made at Ariccia prior to profession day, I had the chance to speak with Prima Maestra. She asked me questions about my health (a situation about which she had already been informed) and reassured me with these words: "Don't worry about it. Just keep praying. For now, make your profession in your heart. I'll take care of things. In the meantime, do whatever Maestra Nazarena tells you."

I was the last novice to speak with Prima Maestra because that evening she returned to Albano, where she began to manifest signs of having suffered a cerebral spasm—the first symptom of the thrombosis that was to follow. I was told later by Maestra Nazarena and Maestra Costantina (the superior of the Albano community) that during that time of suffering, it was clear that my conversation with Maestra Thecla about non-admission to profession due to my health was weighing on her mind because she had murmured over and over again, "Poor little thing. Poor little thing. But if it's really not possible, then patience!"

The spiritual exercises ended and while my co-novices prepared to make their religious profession, Maestra Nazarena accompanied me to Albano (the community in which I was to be inserted and of which I am still a member to this day). There I was to undergo the medical treatments that would hopefully restore my health. And it was precisely because I was in this house that I had the chance to see Prima Maestra more often. It made me very happy to be near her! Within a short time, speaking became very difficult for her and the little she was able to say cost her a great deal of effort. But her bright and penetrating gaze revealed her interior strength, her thirst for holiness and her vibrant participation in the life of the Congregation.

Sitting on the terrace, she would look out toward the horizon and exclaim: "Down there, beyond the sea, many Daughters are carrying out the apostolate. How much good they are doing! May God bless them!" Or else, looking up at the stars, she would say: "The Daughters of St. Paul in faraway lands are looking at these same stars," and she would recite ejaculations, asking God to bless them with light, strength and grace.



When her health permitted, Prima Maestra would willingly visit the Clinic's bedridden patients. She had a smile and words of encouragement and comfort for everyone without distinction, including sisters from other Congregations. At Albano, we were all one big family and she was the "Prima Maestra" of us all. She participated with pleasure in the recreations organized by the patients. And she was surrounded not only by the necessary medical assistance but also by a great deal of attention and affection. Primo Maestro came to see her often. He would spend a lot of time with her, celebrate Mass, guide our meditation and visit the sick. Together, Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra welcomed Pope Paul VI when he visited Albano.

But in spite of all the medical care she received, the moment finally arrived when Prima Maestra reached the end of her earthly pilgrim-

age. Fr. Alberione hastened to her bedside to bless her and assist her passage to eternity while she, serene and composed, voiced her final "here I am" to God. At that point, her great heart, overflowing with love, tenderness and apostolic zeal, ceased to beat.

This is my testimony concerning the action of Prima Maestra in my life from that moment at Ariccia when she said to me, "I'll take care of things."

She truly took my vocational journey to heart in spite of the many problems and doubts surrounding it. A year later, I made my profession. And when Maestra Nazarenza handed me the little card bearing my new name and I saw that I would be called *Maria Tecla*, I knew that it was in honor of the person and works of Prima Maestra.

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