

SPEAKING ABOUT MYSELF SO AS TO SPEAK ABOUT HER!



I entered the Congregation in Rome, Italy on 4 November 1933, after having gone with my relatives to visit the cemetery where my mother was buried. I was 11 years old at the time and in the mysterious plan of God, she had died giving birth to me. I didn't know the sisters with whom I was going to live. The only Daughter of St. Paul I knew was my older sister, Sr. M. Irene, who over the years had come home from time to time to see my father. In 1933, my sister made her first profession and was assigned to the community of Rome, which had been opened just a few years earlier. Maestra Thecla told her: "Before you go to Rome, go home to see your father and when you come back, bring your little sister with you!"

It was thus that I arrived in that fabled city (and what a city!), to live among people I didn't know and even thought a little odd because I had never seen sisters before and didn't even know they existed. I cried the first six months I was there. I felt lost, like an abandoned baby bird. My sister was out on propaganda every day because, besides carrying out their apostolic ideal, the sisters were using their mission to help gather funds to help pay off the Institute's huge building debts—constructions undertaken almost exclusively with great trust in divine Providence. And that faith bore fruit!

Helped by the formation I had received, I asked to make my vestition as a Daughter of St. Paul at the age of 16. Our long work

days did not leave much time for rest and recreation, which was limited to an hour after supper. On summer evenings, after a long and fatiguing day in the technical apostolate, we were very happy to accept Prima Maestra Thecla's invitation to join her around a big table shelling peas or cleaning other vegetables from our garden. Chattering among ourselves, the words most frequently heard were: "Courage—in heaven we will rest!" a conviction we strived to live in a simple and sisterly spirit, in harmony with the human-Christian formation we had received from our mistresses.

Obviously, the first one to live these principles was Maestra Thecla, the Mother, teacher and Co-foundress of the Institute. She was an ideal woman—a person who possessed great faith and many human virtues. She was a mother to all of us at all times, and I can say that she fulfilled this role very concretely in my own life. I knew that she was watching over me with a maternal concern that still moves me deeply when I think about it today.

Prima Maestra Thecla was very attentive to the physical health of the sisters but even more so to their moral, spiritual and intellectual formation. She wanted each sister to grow in an integral way.

For me, Prima Maestra Thecla was a teacher who, in everything, taught by her example:

THROUGH PRAYER



Whenever she went to visit the Lord, she would truly detach herself from everything else. She entered the mysterious world of the supernatural so fully that if a sister had to interrupt her colloquy with God for some reason, she became worried because M. Thecla's recollection was so profound it was hard to "bring her back to earth." On one of these occasions, the sister-messenger had to tug on M. Thecla's veil several times to get her attention!

THROUGH CHARITY TOWARD HER NEIGHBOR

Prima Maestra Thecla was very big-hearted toward the needy. The families in the Antonino Pio neighborhood in Rome found her an open-minded and generous person, always ready to help them in their difficulties. No one who turned to her ever went home empty-handed.

THROUGH HER EXTERNAL BEHAVIOR

Prima Maestra Thecla was a self-controlled person, with a dignified bearing. Her warm and profound gaze probed a person deeply. I was always happy when our paths happened to cross as we left the Queen of Apostles Sanctuary after making the Hour of Adoration every afternoon. That was always

a reinvigorating moment for me because Prima Maestra's gaze not only transmitted peace but also "recharged" me, prompting me to live my vocation with greater commitment and serenity.

THROUGH HER APOSTOLIC DARING