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## MAESTRA THECLA AND MY GARDEN



I could compare my relationship with Prima Maestra Thecla—a rapport of affection, trust and docility on my part—to a beautiful garden filled with flowers of all different sizes and colors. During my years of formation (1949-1956), many little “buds” sprouted in the form of chance encounters during which the two of us would exchange simple greetings and smiles, or else in the form of the short conferences she delivered to our formation group. A lovely “flower” that stands out in my memory was the one I received from her on 6 February 1957. I was leaving for Australia and I went to say goodbye to her (at that time, Maestra Thecla was a patient at Albano). She wanted to greet me on her feet, even though her nurses were not in favor of this. Prima Maestra gave me a warm hug and exclaimed with a smile, “A Pauline missionary should always be welcomed like this!”

Several years later I was transferred back to Rome and I spent a few months in the Generalate. I remember in particular our wonderful recreations, in which Prima Maestra always took part. I noted the naturalness with which she “stole” a few minutes from prayer to throw herself wholeheartedly into our joyous conviviality. One evening I was seated next to her in the courtyard. She looked at me intently and said in the Piedmontese dialect three times, each time more forcefully: “We have to become saints. We have to become *saints*. We have to become SAINTS.... If we don’t, then we should be beaten!” The next moment, she was immersed in the cheerful chatter swirling around us.

Prima Maestra was perpetually urged on by the yearning to give glory to God and do good to souls. In the early 1960’s the FSPs began to hold catechetical weeks, especially in the Ancona diocese. It was essential to prepare guides and study aids at very reduced prices so as to guarantee a good diffusion of this material. I had the joy of accompanying Maestra Assunta when she went to ask Maestra Thecla for advice about this initiative and permission to carry it out. The core of the matter was that we had a lot of expenses, yet the project required low prices. Maestra The-

cla listened attentively to the problem laid out before her and then asked a single question: “But will it do good?” Maestra Assunta replied: “There’s no doubt about that—it’s all Christian doctrine.” And Maestra Thecla said decisively: “Then go ahead. Don’t lose any time preparing the things that will do good to souls!”

My garden is filled with many more flowers—I wish you could visit it so as to see them for yourselves. But how? Unfortunately, the garden is sealed shut!

*Elisabetta Capello, fsp*

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## PRIMA MAESTRA IS YOUR MODEL



Prima Maestra is not only your Mother, she is also your model. Every Daughter of St. Paul who wants to be worthy of this name should examine herself in the looking glass of the one who was always and everywhere, in everything and at all cost, the model of the perfect Pauline. It can truly be said that a person could no longer see any defects in her. We all have defects, there’s no doubt about that, because only God is perfect. But in Prima Maestra all these defects, compared with our smallness, seemed to be virtues—virtues that did not enable her to do everything she yearned to do, however, in that they did not embrace all the points [she felt] God wanted....

Prima Maestra is your true model. Imitate her. You might be offended if I repeat this, but your indignation is sweet because it incites you to greater and greater filial fidelity. You have your model: Look at yourself in the mirror of her life; do what Prima Maestra did. Now, from heaven, she can say to you along with St. Paul: “Imitate me like I imitate Christ!”

Prima Maestra was your Mother.... You think of her, remember her, and feel that she is still alive. She was truly a lovable, kind and maternal person. Take her as your perfect model. “I believe in eternal life”: we believe in eternal life and consider Prima Maestra as being always alive in God.

*Cardinal Arcadio Larraona*