

OBSERVING MAESTRA THECLA HELPED ME GROW AS A PAULINE



I got to know Maestra Thecla during the time I was a novice and junior professed sister in the Via Antonino Pio community, Rome (1958-1964).

My earliest memories of her are of the conferences she gave us after Mass every Sunday morning in the AP conference hall—the only room big enough to hold our huge community. The theme of her talks was often the liturgy of the day, in particular the Letters of St. Paul. I liked the way she spoke to us spontaneously, using simple language and making suggestions that were easy to apply to daily life. Those of us in formation lived in the Divine Providence House. Behind it was the Divine Master House—the Generalate community where Maestra Thecla and her council lived.

I could see that the professed sisters held Prima Maestra in great reverence and so I observed her very attentively. When the weather was nice, she and her councilors would take a short walk in the courtyard and gardens of the Generalate after the midday meal and I enjoyed watching them. I could see them joking with one another and discussing things in a serene and sisterly way and this edified me greatly. In the early afternoon, Maestra Thecla would leave the Divine Master house and walk quickly to the Queen of Apostles Sanctuary to make her hour of adoration. I too liked to make the Visit at that time so it was another golden opportunity to observe her.... She always knelt in the first pew to the left of the altar and would remain on her knees for the whole hour, her gaze fixed on the Tabernacle. Her whole attitude revealed her profound and intense relationship with Jesus Master and filled me with an ardent desire to learn to pray the way she did.

I never had any personal conversations with Maestra Thecla but whenever our paths crossed she would always smile at me and nod

her head. As novices and then as Juniors, it was our job to clean the Generalate staircases on Saturday mornings. We were a very lively cleaning crew and sometimes, hearing all the ruckus we were making, Prima Maestra would come out of her office, smile and offer us some candy. It was easy to see that she was pleased with our vivacity and industriousness.

One incident that took place while I was a Junior helped me grasp Maestra Thecla's sensitivity to her Daughters and attention to them. I was sent to a local community to work in the book center and I left Rome overflowing with the apostolic enthusiasm transmitted to us by Maestra Assunta. But little by little I came to realize that perhaps I had idealized this apostolate too much and that, consequently, my expectations were unrealistic. In fact, the way the book center mission was concretely carried out did not always conform to the idea I had formed about it in Rome. This caused me great suffering but I didn't mention it to anyone. One day I received a letter from the Generalate, asking me to come to Rome to speak with Maestra Thecla. When I was sitting before her and one of her councilors, she said to me with great simplicity: "I don't think you are in the right place, so I have decided to transfer you to the diocesan Catechetical Office, where I'm sure you will do a lot of good." And that is exactly what happened! I never learned how Maestra Thecla came to realize that I needed this change. I think she must have followed each of her Daughters in prayer and that she felt their needs on a spiritual level.

For me, observing and listening to Prima Maestra helped me shape my Pauline identity because it made me strive to integrate prayer, study and apostolate in my life so as to be conformed to Jesus Master.

Whenever Maestra Thecla would return from her long trips abroad, she would tell us enthusiastically about the peoples and cultures she had encountered and all the new things she had learned. In this way, she helped us understand the importance of our apostolate. "How many souls are thirsting for the Gospel!" she would exclaim. "And if we who have received the mission to bring them the Word of God don't do this, then who will?"

Thank you, Maestra Thecla, for opening vast and beautiful horizons to me. Thank you for your faith, which never faltered, even when the apostolic initiatives aimed at "doing good" (as you put it) were very challenging. Thank you for witnessing with your life to the beauty of the Pauline vocation and for inspiring me to live it to the full!

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