



## ASSOCIATED ARTISTS

*The following testimony is by Sr. Giuseppina Balestra, one of the oldest members of our Congregation. For many years she served as Maestra Thecla's driver and in this capacity accompanied her to many communities in Italy and other parts of Europe.*



Maestra Thecla's charity toward the sisters was very discreet. More than once it happened that I was a little downcast and defensive after she had pointed out one of my shortcomings. However, the next time I saw her she would smile at me and with her penetrating gaze seem to ask: "You're not still sulking, are you?" At other times, she would say very straightforwardly: "I made that observation because I love you and want you to become a saint. It would be a bad sign if I had to put on 'velvet gloves' whenever I wanted to tell you something. Go now! Be serene and strive to become holy!"

Maestra Thecla was a humble woman who knew how to gratefully accept the "corrections" of even simple sisters like me. Once we arrived unexpectedly at one of our branch houses. The sisters' eyes shone with joy when they saw us but the superior was concerned because two members of the community were out of the house at that moment. She called them by phone and in a short time they arrived home. As soon as she saw Maestra Thecla, one of the two sisters ran up to her, grabbed her hand and kissed it enthusiastically. Maestra Thecla immediately pulled her hand away, making it clear that she did not like this type of "devotion." The sister was very hurt, but Maestra Thecla failed to see this.

I saw the suffering of this sister, who held herself apart from the rest of the group for the entire time we were there. When we left the community, I mustered my courage and said, "Prima Maestra, you did not like it when that sister kissed your hand but the poor thing was very hurt. Be tranquil and don't resist when the sisters want to kiss your hand. That act could help a person come closer to you, especially one who doesn't know you or who doesn't dare to approach you because at first glance you inspire awe!" She replied: "I'm very glad you brought this to my attention because I was not aware of it. You know I don't want the sisters to kiss my hand but if it will bring them closer to me, then I have no problem with it. Look here—the problem is this: no one ever tells us superiors our defects, even when they are obvious. The sisters are afraid to say anything. And because of this we never correct ourselves. I'm really glad you told me this. Deo gratias! When you see me doing something that is not right, please let me know about it."

Both in the branch houses and in Rome, Maestra Thecla was the heart and soul of beautiful community recreations. Whenever she traveled, it was normal for her to include in her luggage a box containing a variety of games for which only she, myself and (sometimes) M. Assunta Bassi knew the "tricks" involved. Because of this, Maestra Thecla would jokingly say that she and I were "associated artists." If the help of another person was needed to perform a trick successfully, then Maestra Thecla would always choose the shyest member of the community or else the sister who seemed to hold her in the greatest awe.

After those recreations, more than one sister would say to me: "You know, Prima Maestra's behavior banished all my fear of her. I'm so happy about that! What a nice person she is! I never imagined she was like that...."