

## LETTER TO SR. THECLA



I was asked to write an article—actually, a testimony—about Venerable Thecla Merlo. I accepted the request because it is hard for me to say “no” to people. But when I started to think about what to write, I realized that I could not offer a testimony because I know

Sr. Thecla only through the things I have read and the stories I have heard about her. In a testimony, you have to describe your contact with the person concerned and I did not have any contact with her. Big problem! I had to reconsider the situation.

Finally, the thought popped into my mind: Why not write a letter to her? A letter to someone opens the door to establishing and cultivating a relationship. Would this be acceptable in a testimonial article? Yes! I decided that writing a letter to her was a good solution for me.

But how should I start? I didn’t want to adopt an official tone because I wasn’t writing to the Institute. On the other hand, language that was too intimate would be inappropriate. A personal tone indicates a close relationship—one that I did not have with Sr. Thecla.

A letter should begin with a courteous greeting to the recipient. So how should I address her?

Since I live in the SSP Via Alessandro Severo community in Rome and often visit the subcrypt of the Queen of Apostles Sanctuary, where Maestra Thecla’s tomb is located, I decided to ask Fr. Alberione to help me out. I began my letter by jotting down some of the ways he opened his own letters to her: “Good Daughter of St. Paul,” “Good Teacher,” “Excellent Daughter of St. Paul,” “Reverend Maestra,” “Prima Maestra,” “Good Prima Maestra”...but none of these greetings sounded right in my own context (I hope that the Founder is not offended).

I then continued: “He [the Founder] knew you personally; he trained you and collaborated with you; you had many experiences in common. I am in a completely different situation.

“Writing to someone means addressing a living person who can read the content

of the letter and reply to it. Writing a letter shortens distances because it makes the recipient seem closer, more involved in the relationship instead of being a representative of heaven to whom one turns in prayer. Of course, I don’t mean that prayer is not important or that it cannot build a relationship.

“A letter is not an official document; it contains the experiences and thoughts that the writer wants to share with the recipient. It is a way of reinforcing bonds. It gives the author the hope of being heard and nurtures the desire to receive a personal, unofficial reply.

“A thought just occurred to me. I read somewhere that you, Maestra Thecla, had the heart of a mother. It is interesting that this is the first thing that comes to my mind whenever I think of you. So I feel comfortable turning to you in this way.

“Dear Sr. Thecla, you have a mother’s heart!



“Give me some sign of your presence in my life. Maybe you could even work a miracle.... But you remain silent. You don’t answer me. Why should you do what I want?

“I’m trying to convince you that it would be in your interest to do this because every grace received [through your intercession] would be useful for the cause of your beatification. But you just give me a mysterious smile from the picture on your tomb, like the smile on the face of Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*. Marvels, supernatural inspirations, mystical exaltations...none of these have ever been my specialty. I have almost no experience with them. Your silence, though somewhat inexplicable, is no surprise to me.

“You have a mother’s heart!”

[The rest of this letter is for the recipient alone.]

*Fr. Bogusław Zeman, ssp*