

## REVISITING PRIMA MAESTRA



**I**t was November 26, 1957, when I entered the community of the Daughters of St. Paul in Via Antonino Pio in Rome. The first few days were quite full as I tried to adapt to a lifestyle that was so different from what I was used

to and to familiarize myself with the various areas of the convent. Challenging? Yes! One of my first acquaintances was a chance encounter with Prima Maestra while I was on my way to the Queen of Apostles Temple for prayer. I did not know anything about her except that she was the Superior General. A title that meant little or almost nothing to me.

Over time, I gradually got to know Prima Maestra more closely. In the years of my initial formation in Rome there were many opportunities to meet with her. I and my companions (we were “Juniors,” however this title was not in use at that time) would visit Prima Maestra in her office. I was always enriched by these visits. Prima Maestra would welcome us with utmost spontaneity and make us feel at ease in her presence.

I often recall these memories. And now, that I have been asked to share something about my experience with Prima Maestra, I would like to focus on a specific personal encounter I had with her. Hopefully this will shed some light on who this woman, the Superior General was for me.

I had gone to Ariccia with some other sisters for my Spiritual Exercises. It was customary during our Exercises to be received individually in the “camera caritatis” by Primo Maestro and Prima Maestra. It was my turn to meet with Prima Maestra. I had to wait a little longer near her room because she was delayed due to another commitment. Soon enough I found myself sitting across from Prima Maestra and I noticed that her eyes were more brilliant than usual. Her gaze was always striking, a characteristic that could not be unnoticed. But this time it was even more brilliant and vast. I looked at her in admiration as she asked: “*how are you?*” It was not simply the words “how are you” that invited me to speak but the tender feeling behind those words.

Prima Maestra then shared with me: “you know, I was a bit late because I was finalizing the purchase of our new house in Rocca

di Papa with the lawyer. It is a beautiful house with a garden, chestnut trees, and fresh air. The sisters who have had surgical procedures in Albano and need rehabilitation or rest can go there to recover. I am so happy that I bought this house”. Her eyes gleamed with joy as she thought of her Daughters. Within myself I was asking the question: “but why is she sharing this with me, I am just a young sister? Why does she feel so free to let me participate in her joy?”

From time to time, I return to the memory of this meeting and to what Prima Maestra helped me to discover and to know about her. Who is the woman behind this gaze? What did this gaze, which I often encountered when our paths crossed, say to me then and even now?



When one went to Primo Maestro for a personal meeting, his gaze was penetrating, he looked at you in silence as if he were reading your soul and then he would speak. Prima Maestra’s gaze was different. My interpretation of her gaze focuses on the experience I just shared.

Her gaze was filled with love for her Daughters. Yes, I was the one sitting in front of her, but within her gaze were all the sisters of the Congregation; she embraced them all. It was I who was with her but in me she saw everyone. Only a person who lives for others and is forgetful of herself, can communicate this conviction.

This is what I think and have experienced with Prima Maestra. All of us who knew her know how she lived for us.

The most evident proof of her radiant gaze is that she gave her life for all of us, those of yesterday, today, and tomorrow, so that we might become saints.

Her gaze, her eyes continue to inspire me. We are all called to be an open book that speaks for itself, that challenges and teaches us how to live for others through the great gift of our Pauline vocation.

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