

## ALWAYS WITH YOU, MARY



Following in the footsteps of Sr. Thecla Merlo, I witnessed her Pauline Marian experience and I fell in love with it. I am a Daughter of St. Paul and I have arrived at the beautiful age of 96, almost 97.... I found among

Maestra Thecla's unofficial papers a familiar prayer that I have since carried with me for many years. It holds a special place in my heart and has accompanied me in my travels around the world. It begins with a *yes*, like that which Maestra Thecla and her first daughters said. I suppose she prayed it often. It clearly expresses the filial, trusting relationship with her (and our) Mother. Who knows how many times she prayed it during her lifetime: *Everything from you and for you. You accompany me everywhere. You tell me what I need to do. What I need to say. You place in my mind, in my heart and on my lips what you know is most helpful: speak for me and for the sisters who are your daughters. Mary I trust in you: may I imitate your humility, your charity, your spirit of sacrifice, your love for Jesus and for souls.* Venerable Thecla Merlo's entire life was a Marian journey. During her trips she invited the sisters to acknowledge the Madonna as their Prima Maestra and to entrust everything to her. From her we await all the graces which she dispenses. *Everything was given to Mary so that she could offer all she received to every vocation.*

God opened the pathways of the world to Sr. Thecla. She always prayed: *Accompany me everywhere.* Where? She didn't know, but she felt the call and placed herself in the Lord's hands. Her heart was that of a missionary. She embraced the world, the poor, especially those who did not know the Gospel. Her circular letters, written during her intercontinental travels, were very moving! She had trained us during our formative years to live as Paulines with the needs of humanity in our hearts! She encouraged catechesis in the parishes, and to even go to dilapidated buildings and slums with the Gospel. She invited us to share the little we had, and to never forget: *as Paulines we bring the Good News, be it a leaflet or a page of the Gospel!* She was a mother!

Surprisingly the small seed developed. Prima Maestra was an attentive, concerned and

compelling mother who cultivated the seed. The first vocations arrived and the first initiatives of the "new" apostolate were carried out. The departure "from Alba to the world" was like a Pauline Marian pilgrimage, everything was entrusted to Mary.

Maestra Thecla travelled abroad 22 times. Her first trip before the war was to visit the sisters of the USA, Brazil and Argentina. She traveled alone by sea. She meditated and prayed: *Mary, tell me what I must do and what I must say.* Looking forward, she would entrust that continent she was going to visit to Mary most holy: *tell me what to say....* In every visit, on every continent, she embraced the sisters, as Mary would have done, because *they are your daughters*, and she would communicate with love what she had learned and assimilated of the Pauline vocation: to live Christ as Saint Paul understood, lived and communicated him; proclaiming the Gospel by bearing witness to it with one's life and offering the Gospel through courageous evangelization in the Church, with the means of communication. She would say: "I would like to live a thousand lives for the Gospel". The Lord left tangible signs as an authentic imprint of his presence in every foundation. Her trips allowed us to follow the apostolic development of every continent and to rejoice in their Pauline and Marian characteristics. The end of the war was like a new beginning for us: vocations returned, and communities flourished.

Prima Maestra and Primo Maestro were planning for a Sanctuary to be built in Rome, dedicated to the Queen of the Apostles. Alberione had made a promise to the Lord asking that the Pauline men and women throughout the world emerge unharmed from the war. No member of the Pauline Family had perished!

The Sanctuary of the Queen of the Apostles in Rome is the fruit of gratitude for the promise made and for the graces received. Prima Maestra, with great love, was always ready to faithfully support the directives of the Founder. She urged everyone to collaborate: "Each of us must be faithful to the spiritual program that has been proposed...and we will all embrace this promise: to finish the construction of the Queen of Apostles Church."

Vocations multiplied and the care and creation of these "Marian shrines" that is, her daughters, multiplied. Sr. Thecla precedes us in everything. She trusted and entrusted everyone to Mary.

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