

YOU OWE PRIMA MAESTRA EVERYTHING



On 15 Sept. 1960, in preparation for the feast of St. Thecla, Fr. Alberione confided to the Daughters of St. Paul: “You owe Prima Maestra everything, and I too owe her a lot because she has enlightened and directed me in happy and sad circumstances, and has consoled me in the difficulties that have been obstacles on my path. Sr. Thecla said: ‘Are you all on the way to holiness? The most important thing we must do is to become holy. First become holy, and then carry out the apostolate.’ (CSAS 38.10) And: “The Lord is inviting us to great holiness. He has called us to the apostolic life, which is the most precious and beautiful life of all because it is the same one that Jesus and the apostles lived. The apostolic life: namely, to become holy and to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls” (CSAS 51.11).

SR. THECLA: A WOMAN WHO SERVED GOD COMPLETELY

Quite a bit of time has passed since 5 February 1964 when Maestra Thecla, the first Daughter of St. Paul, left the earth to return to heaven. Even though there are many members of my Congregation (the SSPs) who did not know her, nevertheless we are all very grateful for the way she always remained at the side of the Founder, Fr. James Alberione, as a good—indeed a very good—mother to the whole Pauline Family. A witness to this are the many sisters whom she formed and directed with maternal solicitude. Her writings and prayers shine with a formidable missionary spirit that serves as an example to all of us. Her heartfelt wish that she might have a thousand lives in order to announce the Gospel gives us a glimpse of the depth of her yearning that Christ might be proclaimed everywhere and by every means.

I don’t know much more about Prima Maestra (as her sisters called her), but I can assure you that I think she was a pioneer in proclaiming the Word; a mother who together with so many other fathers and mothers opened a new and a precious path to sanctification in the Church.

In this difficult and complex time for the contemporary Church and for our Pauline Congregations and Institutes, her concrete witness motivates us to use all our energies to the maximum in our apostolic activities and fraternal life.

In the various photos I have seen of Maestra Thecla, I am struck by her serene gaze, her prayerful demeanor and her smiling face—qualities very much needed today. They remind me that the proclamation of the Gospel takes place through my entire being—namely, how I behave and express myself, as well as the way I live and share myself with the brothers or sisters in my community, including by smiling!

Another aspect that strikes me is Prima Maestra’s closeness to our Founder and her support of him. It is often said that behind a great man there is always a great woman. The relationship between Blessed James Alberione and Prima Maestra Thecla is a clear example of this understanding between a man and a woman, each with their unique personalities but both able to respond together to God’s plan for them. I like to think that without Maestra Thecla our Founder would not have become the person that the Church today is little by little learning to see. It was Alberione who chose Thecla and he was amply rewarded for that choice. Now we hope that she too will reach the honors of the altar.



One last thing: I wonder why it is that this kind of mutual understanding and spirit of fraternity are not very noticeable in the Pauline Family today? What prevents us from reaching that type of communion, which would be so beneficial to us in our work of evangelizing modern humanity? I praise the Lord for the beautiful collaboration between the SSPs and FSPs in their animations for Communications Week and World Communications Day each year, but I think we could do a lot more together. I will stop here, invoking the intercession of all our holy fathers and mothers on the whole Pauline Family.

Fr. Roberto Roveran, ssp