

A MOTHER WHO ACCOMPANIES

MY TESTIMONY ABOUT VENERABLE THECLA MERLO

When I look back on my first steps in the Society of St. Paul, my memory is immediately colored by the discreet yet profoundly deep presence of Venerable Thecla Merlo. I did not know her personally, yet her figure reached me like a mother who welcomes without fanfare, like a light that guides without imposing itself. From the moment I entered the congregation, I sensed a special closeness—almost filial—to this extraordinary woman whom Blessed James Alberione called “the First Teacher,” transforming the young and simple Teresa, a seamstress and catechist from Castagnito, into “the First Teacher.”

One aspect of my vocational story that deepens this bond: my Pauline vocation was born of an encounter with the Daughters of St. Paul. It was they—the women’s congregation founded by Alberione with the vision, help, and maternal presence of Venerable Thecla Merlo—who helped me discover the light of the Pauline charism. Through their apostolate, their hardworking serenity, and their way of living the Gospel through communication, I sensed that within that spirituality there was also a place for me. It was a providential encounter that I carry in my heart as a gift. Realizing that all of this was born from Thecla’s yes, from her docility and courage, gives my journey an even deeper sense of gratitude.



I am always struck by how Alberione saw in her what was not yet evident to the world’s eyes: a heart capable of spiritual motherhood, a practical and farsighted intelligence, and a faith that was solid yet never rigid. He chose her to found the Daughters of St. Paul, and within that call lay the seed of something that would blossom throughout the entire Pauline Family. It is no coincidence that today we remember her as the mother of this great ecclesial reality—a mother who knew how to sustain, encourage, console, and guide.

My gratitude to Maestra Thecla begins precisely here: in recognizing that her motherhood continues to generate life even today, in our vocations and

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in our daily journeys. Every time I encounter her writings, her simple, concrete words, I perceive a living presence, a reassuring warmth. I feel accompanied by her, as by a guide who speaks little but knows how to remain close with determination and gentleness.

One of the dimensions of Thecla Merlo that fascinates me most is her spiritual balance: a woman deeply united to the Lord yet always immersed in reality, attentive to the needs of her sisters and brothers and to the demands of the apostolate. Here, another strong bond I feel with her comes into play: her connection with Canon Francesco Chiesa. If Alberione was the founder who opened new horizons, for Maestra Thecla, Canon Chiesa was a spiritual, formative, catechetical, and pastoral guide. His

MOVING AHEAD WITH THECLA



My witness can
be summarized
with one word:

Gratitude



figure—so important and luminous for me—becomes an additional bridge that draws me closer to the Venerable. Knowing that she herself was formed in his spiritual school makes me feel in continuity with a heritage that is not merely historical but living and life-giving.

As I deepen my Pauline journey, I become increasingly aware of how Maestra Thecla's presence has woven—almost silently—the fabric of my religious life. Through her example, she has taught me that holiness is not built on extraordinary gestures but on daily faithfulness; that apostolate is a service of love; and that communication, before being a technique, is a relationship and a gift.



I experience Maestra Thecla as a mother who knows her children's steps, who encourages without illusion, who supports without replacing, and who points to Christ as the center and motivation of everything. Her docility to the Spirit and her profound unity with Alberione's thought and heart have given the Pauline Family a form that even today educates, inspires, and guides us.

For this reason, whenever I think of my vocation—born through the Daughters of St. Paul, nurtured in

the Society of St. Paul, and culminating in the gift of the priesthood—I cannot help but include her in the journey: a mother, a sister, a guide; a woman who knew how to live out evangelical radicality with meekness and courage; a presence that continues to shed light.

My testimony can be summed up in a single word: gratitude. Gratitude for what Venerable Thecla Merlo has given to the Pauline Family. Gratitude

for what she continues to give me personally through her spiritual motherhood. Gratitude for that first delicate and mysterious encounter with the Daughters of St. Paul, through which the Lord allowed my vocation to take root.

To her, my mother and sister, I offer my most sincere thanks. I entrust to her intercession my desire to continue walking with the same trusting heart with which she responded to her call, collaborating with Blessed Alberione and allowing herself to be formed by Canon Chiesa. May she continue to guide me, as she has guided so many, toward an apostolic life fully given to the Gospel and the mission of the Church.

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