

ISTITUTO PIA SOCIETÀ
FIGLIE DI S. PAOLO
CASA GENERALIZIA
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Dearest Sisters,

We received the news that at 11:15 a.m. today, the risen Christ visited the infirmary of our Divine Master community, Alba, Italy to call to eternal life our sister:

SORIO MARIA – SR. MARIA BERNARDETTA
born in Dossobuono di Villafranca (Verona), Italy on 21 August 1936.

Sr. Bernardetta entered the Congregation in the community of Alba on 8 December 1954. After a period of initial formation, during which she learned the art of bookbinding, in particular the gilding press, and after finishing her secondary school studies, she was sent to Rome to make her novitiate, which concluded with her first profession on 30 June 1958.

As a young professed, Sr. Bernardetta learned to love the book center apostolate—a service that would characterize almost her entire Pauline life. Brescia, Treviso, Rome, Turin, Lodi, Pavia, Cremona, Savona, Novara, Trent, Mestre and Como were the communities in which she gave the best of herself to the many categories of people, religious and lay, who flocked to these apostolic centers. Sr. Bernardetta sought to familiarize herself with the contents of the center’s books and the thought of their authors and tried to ensure that the shelves were stocked with titles that responded to the diverse socio-cultural-ecclesial situations in which the people lived. In the communities of Novara and Mestre, she also carried out the service of local superior, and from 1970-1971 she served as a councilor of Italy’s northwest Province.

Sr. Bernardetta was particularly sensitive to the Pauline spirituality and to the wealth of grace she had received in the Congregation. Her habitual attitude was one of praise and gratitude to God for the abundance of blessings that had enriched her life. Several years ago, hearing a lot of talk about “apostolic mysticism,” she sought to concretize this concept in her personal life, explaining that: “When I receive Jesus in communion at Mass, I say to him: ‘Take possession of my entire being and act in me. I offer you my mouth, my eyes, my feet and my hands—use them to reach the people with whom I come in contact through the apostolate.’ And I am convinced that he is doing this. I feel his power sustaining my nothingness and so I move ahead, trusting in the power of obedience and in the grace of office.”

Sr. Bernardetta had deeply assimilated the teachings of the Founder concerning the sacred nature of the book center mission and she sought put into practice his invitation to reflect the light of God on humanity (cf. FSP58, p. 311). In particular, she felt in harmony with Fr. Alberione’s recommendation to the sisters to carry the book center in their hearts (FSP 58, p. 315), and to form a mentality different from the one in society, giving it a new imprint and direction (FSP58, p. 436).

A year ago, when she celebrated her 60th anniversary of profession, she wrote: “It is with gratitude to God that I look back on my 60 years of religious consecration. I praise the Lord with all my heart for the love and grace with which he supported me throughout this long journey. I want my life to be a hymn of praise to the Blessed Trinity. My heart explodes with joy at the thought that Mary is walking beside me, holding me by the hand. I feel small and weak, but the Lord has used me to work wonders of grace, gifting me with the opportunity to serve him through this marvelous apostolate.”

Last October, Sr. Bernardetta reluctantly left her service in the Como book center to accept a transfer to Alba, where she could receive treatment for the intestinal cancer that the doctors had discovered was spreading throughout her body. In the last months of her life, she continued to give the Lord first place in her life and her intimate relationship with him deepened even more. Up to the very end, fidelity to liturgical prayer remained her consolation and hope—the light that transformed her solitude into a blessing, her sorrow into joy and her suffering into salvation (cf. Est. 4:17).

Affectionately,


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan
Superior General

Rome, 14 March 2019