

ISTITUTO PIA SOCIETÀ
FIGLIE DI S. PAOLO
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Dearest Sisters,

Shortly after midnight last night, one of the members of our community of Alba, Italy, was suddenly called to the eternal wedding feast:

CONTI SR. MARIA IDA
born in Bore (Parma), Italy, on 5 April 1922.

Sr. Maria Ida, the sister of Sr. M. Irene (who passed away in 2014), entered the Congregation in Susa, Italy, at the very young age of eleven. Her mother had died while giving birth to her and this experience marked her entire history profoundly and painfully. She herself described the separation from her family and village in the following way:

“On 4 November 1933, which was a Holy Year, I made my last visit to the cemetery with my family to say a broken-hearted goodbye to my mother who, due to complications that still remain a mystery to me, died when I was born. My sister had already made her profession in Alba and was destined for the community of Rome, and M. Thecla said to her: ‘Before you come to Rome, pass by to see your father and bring your little sister to the capital with you.’ That was how I arrived in the ‘fairy-tale’ world of life in the city (and what a city!), and took up residence among unknown people whom I found very strange because I had never seen nuns before or even knew that they existed. (She had been raised by relatives and had never even met her sister before then.) I spent my first six months in Alba in perpetual tears,” she admitted, “because I felt as lost and lonely as a baby sparrow.”

In Rome, Ida learned the art of typography. In spite of her tears, she had happy memories of her first years in the Congregation, which had something prodigious about them: “Even today, I still think with real astonishment of the duties and responsibilities that were entrusted to us,” she said, “because we were considered to be experts in the art of bookbinding and printing. Looking back on those years today, they have the flavor of the miraculous. For example, we typeset by hand all of Fr. Giovanni Pelliccia’s Greek grammar, without having studied Greek!” She made her novitiate in Rome, concluding it with her first profession on 19 March 1941. As a junior professed, she continued to work in the typography.

In 1947, immediately after her perpetual profession, Sr. M. Ida contracted a serious lung disease for which she needed pneumothorax treatment and streptomycin, which M. Thecla hastened to request from M. Paola in the United States. After a time in the community of Albano, Sr. M. Ida returned to Rome in 1950 to devote herself to teaching. From 1954-1958, she had the opportunity to attend the Regina Mundi Institute in Rome, from which she received a degree in Religious Sciences with a thesis entitled: *The Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Universe*. She was a competent and beloved teacher of philosophy and Sacred Scripture in the Philosophy and Theology courses that were held within the Congregation. While continuing to teach the younger sisters, she also collaborated with input for *Ut Unum Sint*’s Bible Correspondence Course, and afterward was part of various commissions set up to prepare for the Congregation’s Special Chapter.

In 1973, Sr. M. Ida was appointed councilor of the circumscription’s Rome province (located in Via Flaminio Ponzio) and in 1976, while continuing her mandate as provincial councilor, she was appointed superior of the new community of Villa Gaia, where the sisters who worked at the St. Paul Film Agency in Rome lived. When the FSP provinces in Italy were unified into a single province in 1979, Sr. M. Ida was made provincial secretary—a role she carried out for three consecutive terms and which enabled her to offer a valid support to the successive provincials.

In 1989, after a brief period of updating, she was transferred to the Generalate community, where she was assigned to the International Secretariat of the Apostolate. There, she focused in particular on reorganizing its archives and cataloguing the news sent in from all over the Pauline world. Sr. M. Ida was a member of the Generalate community for more than twenty-five years and was fully involved in its life and activities, collaborating with services in all areas of the house. We remember her as an attentive and

faithful vice superior, always ready to lend a hand at the reception desk and, above all, to guide liturgical celebrations and organize feast-day celebrations. For her, the preparation of these festive occasions was a true “community liturgy” and she threw herself into them wholeheartedly, with great creativity.

She was also asked to reorganize the big community library—a time-consuming task which she undertook willingly because she understood its value. She devoted time and energy to cultivating a sense of Pauline scholarship among the sisters and taught them to see the library as a fundamental tool for personal and community updating. In fact, she could be quite strict when she found important books missing, with no indication as to who was using them....

In 2015 Sr. M. Ida accepted a transfer to the community of Alba because of her declining health, although the move caused her great suffering. There, she continued to work in an autonomous and self-sufficient way up until almost the end of her life. Indeed it was only a week ago that her deteriorating health situation made it advisable for her to use a wheelchair to get around the house.

Sr. M. Ida was preparing to celebrate her 100th birthday this coming April, but the Lord visited her last night while she slept to call her to participate in his wedding feast: “As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” For her too, the “hour of God” had arrived: a time of joy in which she is now singing a new song to the Lord.

Affectionately,



Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan

Rome, 16 January 2022