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Dearest Sisters,

“Lord, I know you will come for me soon, and when you arrive, you’d better be smiling!” This was Sr. Assunta’s most frequent prayer in this last stage of her life—a prayer that expresses very well her familiarity with God, as well as her optimism and hope. In the certitude that the Lord has already smiled upon her, we want to inform you with deep emotion that he visited our James Alberione community, Albano, Italy at 4:30 p.m. today to call to eternal rest our sister:

BASSI EMMA – SR. ASSUNTA
born in Licciana Nardi (Massa), Italy on 16 June 1915.

Sr. Assunta was born the day after the birth of our Congregation and she lived the entire spectrum of the Pauline story with incredible joy and enthusiasm. She loved to recount: “Whenever I’m out among the people, I like to watch them, greet them, try to understand how they are living. I find this very enriching. Sometimes someone will come up to me and say, ‘Are you a sister?’ ‘Yes,’ I answer. ‘And are you happy to be a sister?’ ‘Yes, I am.’ ‘I can tell that you are just from the way you greeted me.’”

Let us allow Sr. Assunta herself tell us something about her long life since, like a true daughter of Tuscany, she had a wonderful ability to tell a good story:

“My Pauline vocation is connected to my love of reading. One afternoon in Nov. 1927, I went to my parish priest to return a booklet on the rosary he had loaned me for the month of October. At that time, I had finished elementary school and was just beginning my intermediate studies. My pastor said to me: ‘You might think about going to Alba, where girls can continue their studies and work with books. They give you a metal frame and a box containing iron slugs of all the letters of the alphabet. You pick out the letters and fit them together on the frame to compose the text of a book, word by word and line by line..... After doing this for three years, you can decide whether you want to remain there. If not, you can come back home with no problem.’ I had never seen a nun before but after a minute’s reflection I replied, ‘I think I would stay there.’ At that moment, I felt something change within me. Up to that time, my main thought was how I would fix up our family home once my three older sisters got married and I was left in charge of the house. But from that moment on, my fixed thought was ‘Alba.’ The name made me dream of a pretty little town, a convent and a group of sisters who made books.... I left for Alba with my sister Lina (who later became Sr. Epifania) on 2 Jan. 1928. Our father accompanied us on the trip. I was 12 at the time but I looked older. When we knocked on the convent door, Maestra Thecla opened it. She didn’t look like any of the pictures of nuns I had seen in books. She wore a simple dress, typical of the local country women. She had a penetrating gaze, a big smile and a frank way of speaking. The house was poor, almost dilapidated. There was no sweeping staircase or large rooms. There were big slabs of stone on the ground in front of the house to prevent people from sinking into the mud. In the morning, we washed our faces in a tin basin at the foot of the bed. In the refectory, we sat on rough plank benches. We made the Visit in the evening, kneeling on the bare ground. I was astonished at where I had wound up! Everything seemed so strange to me. I was convinced that I would not be able to endure that type of life for very long and thus that I would die early—most likely in about 15 or 20 days! I thought: ‘I wanted to come here. I insisted on it, overcoming the resistance of my father. Now that I’m here, I’m staying and if I die—well, patience!’ I resigned myself to this fate and began to pray for a good death. Then, one evening after supper, it hit me that I was no longer worried about my fate and that I was finally beginning to feel happy in my new environment.”

Sr. Assunta made her novitiate in Alba, concluding it with her first profession on 30 Nov. 1932. In 1934 she was transferred to Rome to carry out the service of formator and teacher, while at the same time studying theology and philosophy within the Congregation. During the 1957 General Chapter, she was elected a general councilor and was reconfirmed in this office during the 1964 Chapter, held after the death of Maestra Thecla. It is impossible to summarize in a few lines Maestra Assunta’s commitment to the apostolate. Looking back on those years of intense work, she said: “Urged on by Fr. Alberione and supported by the encouragement and faith of M. Thecla, we worked hard. In fact, our activities were so absorbing and the initiatives we carried out so demanding that we barely took note of the passing time or of how many big and small projects we accomplished. Once they were done, they were done. We were always looking to the future. Now, looking back on those days, I ask myself: ‘How did we do it?’ God alone knows.”

M. Assunta continues: "During the Special Chapter, I was not re-elected councilor for the apostolate. Instead, I was asked to leave the field of apostolic initiatives. But I can say in all sincerity that this was not a drama for me. Even before the Chapter ended, I was sent to Alba as mistress of the juniors preparing for perpetual profession. Nothing had changed in the depths of my soul: the apostolate is an essential aspect of our vocation and a Daughter of St. Paul is an apostle no matter what work she does."

In 1973, M. Assunta was made the superior of our Turin community and three years later she was appointed the superior of our Spanish Delegation. During the 1977 General Chapter she was once again elected general councilor for a 6-year period.

Beginning in 1984, she served as superior subsequently of the three Roman communities dependent on the General Government: Via dei Lucchesi, Borgo Angelico and Via del Mascherino. Afterward, she was assigned to the Castro Pretorio community (Rome), where she carried out the writing apostolate. She also continued to collaborate in the formation of the Institute's young members by communicating to them her passion for the apostolate and the ideals that motivated her life as a Pauline. She recounts the wealth of these experiences in her book, *The Mission of the Daughters of St. Paul*.

In 2004 M. Assunta was transferred to the Thecla Merlo community of Albano and afterward to the James Alberione community in the same town. She wrote: "I am immensely grateful to God for the vocation he gave me. Every once in awhile I wonder with amazement why the Lord ever chose me. I am happy to be a Pauline. My temperament makes it easy for me to remember all the beautiful moments of my life. I have to make a real effort to remember my more painful and difficult experiences. When someone once asked me what the hardest times of my life were, I couldn't remember even one...."

M. Assunta looked back on the wealth of her experiences with a profoundly contemplative spirit, saying: "What do I feel when I reflect on the Congregation's journey? I ask myself: 'How did we do it?' I am convinced that Jesus Master has kept his promise. He has walked alongside us, making it possible for the Congregation to expand and multiply its apostolic activities. And it all happened according to the divine style: God does amazing things in simplicity, poverty and silence.... I cannot help but be deeply moved by the fidelity and infinite goodness of the Lord. 'Do not be afraid!' He's the one we have to count on."

She wrote in her personal notes: "I am reflecting on how important it is that we receive a specific formation and that our studies be *decisively* directed to our mission. I am thinking about how urgent it is that we learn to collaborate on all levels so as to 'transfuse' into daily life a synthesis of the values that make up the Pauline vocation: a spiritual life that consists of both prayer and activity; intense zeal; a sensitivity to history and to the Church; the ability to live the mystical dimension of the apostolate so as to adopt new things in a mature way, motivated by the values characteristic of our origins and always feeling urged on by the need to proclaim 'Jesus Savior' by means of a language based on the Gospel and understandable to the people of today, who are yearning for that message."

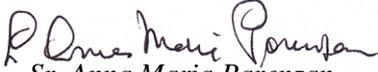
The sisters who had the grace to spend some time with M. Assunta in the last years of her life remember her reflective attitude and her habit of asking disconcerting questions such as: "Is it worth living for this purpose?" "Have we understood Fr. Alberione correctly?" "Do our young members know what it means to be a Pauline today?" "Is our formation program preparing apostles?"

M. Assunta felt a profound connection to the whole Pauline Family. In a brief message dated 1 March 1999, which she asked be opened only after her death, she wrote: "I am happy to be a member of the Pauline Family. I deeply appreciate what Fr. Alberione always said concerning our collaboration with the Society of St. Paul. This collaboration is a gift and a wealth for both our Institutes and makes us apostolically effective." In a post script, she adds: "I have always felt a spirit of fraternal communion with the Pious Disciples and the Pastorelle Sisters. We all have a single ideal: to give Jesus Christ Way, Truth and Life to the world."

M. Assunta yearned to see the face of her mother, whom she never knew on this earth. During the last days of her life, imagining the joy of that meeting, she often said: "I want to sit down next to my mother...we have so many things to say to each other!" We are sure that the Lord has satisfied her desire.

This dear sister begged us to pray for her and we do this with great love, thanking her for her perpetually youthful heart and for being a living memory among us of the amazing story of our Congregation, which contains the seeds of a future full of hope.

Affectionately,


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan
Vicar General

Rome, 7 May 2012