

MAESTRA THECLA, WOMAN OF COLLABORATION AND COMMUNION



Dearest Sisters,

As we prepare to celebrate the 53rd anniversary of Prima Maestra Thecla's passage to eternal life, it is beautiful to take yet another look at our Mother so as to grasp above all her abilities as an intermedi-

ary and collaborator in the work carried out by the Founder in obedience to the signs of God.

In the thick *Positio* that documents the heroic virtues of Venerable Sr. Thecla Merlo, we read: "Thecla Merlo [...] was a great woman, a perfect religious, an enlightened and far-sighted Co-Foundress, open to the needs of modern times; a humble and faithful executor of the divine will; a person who sought only and always the glory of God and the good of souls."¹

From the very beginning, Maestra Thecla served as an intermediary of the grace of the charism, manifesting complete trust in God's chosen instrument. In the early years of the Institute's foundation, she confided: "I have great trust in the Lord but also in the Theologian because I know he has been sent by God, thus where he leads I cannot be mistaken in following."²

Sr. Nazarena Morando offered this testimony: "When the Daughters of St. Paul did not yet have a name, a face or a house, Prima Maestra believed and surrendered herself with complete trust to God. She was docile to the point of heroism. Her faith led her to accept the will of God in the dispositions and directives of Primo Maestro even when everything was unclear, compulsory and involved sacrifices and renunciations. [...] Prima Maestra's character was anything but weak and passive. She was a strong-willed, energetic and decisive woman. [...] Thus her self-surrender and docility were the fruit of her faith."³

Maestra Thecla followed the Founder with a docile heart, knowing that through him God was pointing out the way. She wrote in 1950: "I have complete trust in your words" (LMT 86n.).

And in another letter written the same year: "Act like a father who corrects his daughter. You know that I am in your hands. Use me as you would a handkerchief. I am always very afraid of not doing things well and of leading the Daughters of St. Paul astray..." (LMT 87n.).

And Fr. Alberione, as can be seen in many of his writings, used her as an intermediary in transmitting his directives to the Congregation.

On the long apostolic trips by car and plane that she made with the Founder, he confided to her his joys and sorrows. On 16 October 1939, she wrote to Sr. Paolina Pivetta: "By now you know that I had to leave in a hurry. I was asked to see if I could help Primo Maestro a little because he is in urgent need. Never before has he been faced with so many pressing material needs. I feel so sorry for him and I don't know what I can do to help him..."

Fr. Alberione felt Maestra Thecla to be his partner in the plan of God: he kept her informed about every step he took and solicited her presence in his visits to the houses (LMT 22, 42, 57, etc.). He asked for her opinion concerning problems and initiatives (LMT 4, 6, 7, etc.). He entrusted to her the task of transmitting to the sisters his norms regarding the apostolate and he counted on her to arrange things in such a way as to establish a proper relationship with his other feminine Institutes (LMT 3, 9, 53, 54).

Prima Maestra accepted and applied every directive of the Founder with the wealth of her [mediatory] gift and she offered him the input of her experience so that a more profound discernment could be made in matters that were still unclear (LMT 53, note n. 1).

The Founder continually cast her in the light of a Mother in whose footsteps we should



¹ *Informatio*, p. 2.

² *Le nostre origini (Our Beginnings)*, p. 10.

³ *Summarium*, §684.

Dearest Sisters...

walk: “The docility of the Daughters of St. Paul to Prima Maestra explains their rapid development and the success of their apostolate” (LMT 115). He affirmed that she was a great help to him in setting up the Pious Disciples and the Pastorelle Sisters, collaborating as she did in their birth, growth and canonical approval (cf. AD 237).

On 2 September 1954, Fr. Alberione urged the sisters to welcome the words of Prima Maestra as if they were his own: “There are not two thoughts here,” he said, “just one, and I believe it is the thought and will of God.”

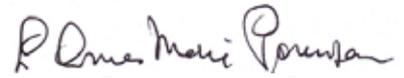
On 15 September 1960, in preparation for the Feast of St. Thecla, Fr. Alberione confided to the Daughters of St. Paul: “You owe Prima Maestra a lot and I do too because she provided me with light and direction in both happy and sad circumstances. She was a comfort [to me] in facing the problems that littered our journey.”

Maestra Thecla fulfilled *the role of mediator continually*, as Fr. Renato Perino reminded us on the occasion of the *I Carry You in My Heart* Congress: “I think that the great mission and the great lesson of Maestra Thecla was this *continual mediation*, lived in a spirit of fidelity to Fr. Alberione, with an obedience that

was at times heroic and carried out *on her feet* (that is, to the full)....”

During the same Congress, Fr. Silvano Gratilli, ssp, declared: “She [M. Thecla] carried out the valuable service of intermediary between the Founder and the Daughters of St. Paul. She accepted, assimilated and transmitted his inspirations, intuitions and directives and saw to it that they were accepted. She developed them and helped [the sisters] develop them. She put them into practice and saw to it that they were put into practice. The result is the Pauline apostolate throughout the world. To say that Prima Maestra Thecla Merlo was the Mother of the whole Pauline Family is not rhetoric but a statement of the truth.”

Today too, Maestra Thecla would speak to us about communion, collaboration, co-responsibility, gratuitousness, and commitment to cultivating around us a more authentic family spirit so as to be “one in mind and heart,” all—both religious and laity—united in ensuring that “the Word of God races ahead and is glorified.”



Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan