

ISTITUTO PIA SOCIETÀ
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Dearest Sisters,

We received the news that at about 11:00 p.m. yesterday, local time, the Risen Christ visited Koshikawaa Hospital, Tokyo, Japan to call to live with him in eternal joy our sister:

YONETAKE YOSHIKO – SR. M. BERTILLA
born in Sendai, Japan, on 26 June 1933.

It is a pleasure to remember Sr. M. Bertilla who, while holding some sprigs of cherry blossom, the symbol of the Japanese culture, sang a popular song about the flower with the beautiful voice she inherited from her mother, an opera singer. Sr. Bertilla enjoyed recounting the story of her vocation, which she said showed its first sign at the age of three when she met a nun wearing a black habit—an encounter that remained forever engraved on her heart. Her family ran a book shop and she liked to point out that this was the environment in which she was born. At the age of 25, her attention was caught by a vocation pamphlet left by the Daughters of St. Paul and by a subsequent visit to their community, where she met sisters who ran printing presses while at the same time praying the rosary. She was so struck by this that very soon afterward she entered the Congregation. It was 28 July 1959.

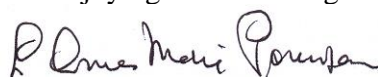
From the beginning of her formation, Sr. Bertilla's highly original behavior mystified her formators and superiors, but her good heart and yearning to consecrate herself to the Lord prevailed and at the end of her year of novitiate, she made her first profession in Tokyo on 30 June 1963. Along with the other sisters, she concentrated on capillary diffusion to schools, libraries and businesses, carrying out this mission with a true spirit of sacrifice and joy in spite of the fatigue involved. In 1977, she wrote to the Superior General: "I continually thank the Lord for calling me among the Daughters of St. Paul.... During my spiritual exercises, he enlightened me in a special way concerning the words *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God*. If my eyes are pure, then I will always see God in my sisters and in everyone else. And in this way I can concretize the words of M. Thecla: *Create a small heaven here on earth*."

With this desire in her heart, Sr. Bertilla responded to an appeal by the Superior General concerning the Congregation's need for missionaries by offering to help any communities in particular need. Her preference was to be sent to Peru because other Japanese sisters were already working there. Consequently, she enthusiastically accepted a transfer to that country in 1977. In Lima, she made a determined effort to learn a language that was certainly not easy for her. But her cheerful character and her love for music and dancing alleviated the difficulties she encountered in a culture very different from her own. She recalled once being moved to tears when, sitting on the Lima waterfront, she realized that Japan was on the other side of the globe.

In Lima and Arequipa (Peru) and La Paz (Bolivia), she dedicated herself with generosity and love to the vocation ministry, book center service and management of the stock room. In 2000, she went back to Japan to take care of her mother, who was gravely ill. It was during this time that she wrote a moving account of the conversion of her parents, who received baptism so as to be with their daughter even after death. She was delighted when they chose "Paul" and "Thecla" as their baptismal names. Thinking back on the many graces which the Lord had poured out on her, Sr. Bertilla wrote: "My heart sings only one thing: *thank you, Lord, for everything!*"

After the death of her mother in 2003, Sr. Bertilla returned to Peru for a short time. When she re-entered Japan, she was sent to Sendai, where she lived for 8 years. In 2013, she was transferred to Tokyo, where she underwent hip surgery. Last year, she was diagnosed as suffering from breast cancer, which had advanced to the point that an operation was not possible. She spent the last months of her life in a hospital specializing in palliative care. From there, she continued to irradiate serenity and humor.

On this 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time, the words of the Divine Master are truly consoling: "Those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Sr. Bertilla welcomed the invitation to lose her life on earth so as to possess it in eternity. And we are sure that she is now enjoying the eternal light of heaven in the company of her beloved parents. Affectionately,


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan

Rome, 28 June 2020