

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

Today, the last day of the year, the Lord visited us once again, knocking on the door of our James Alberione community, Albano, Italy, at 10:30 this morning to call to himself our sister:

LI CASTRI MARIA CONCETTA – SR. MARIA JOSEPH
born in Palermo, Italy on 12 December 1931.

For the past three years, Sr. M. Joseph had been a member of the James Alberione community, Albano, where she was able to receive the care she needed for Alzheimer's disease, which prevented her from living in smaller communities and above all from continuing the book center service that she had carried out with such zeal. How much she missed the apostolate.... She dreamed day and night about "her" book center, her "pulpit"—the place where for most of her Pauline life she had had the opportunity to meet every category of people, making herself "all to all" in continual, tireless self-giving. Petite in stature and very agile, she moved with surprising quickness even with advancing age, a perpetual smile on her face. Her ability to listen to, interact and communicate with others made Sr. M. Joseph a treasured member of every book center in which she worked.

Her vocation was born as a result of an illuminating encounter with the Apostle Paul. She herself recounted that she had never had any interest in the religious life, even though she disseminated Pauline editions with great enthusiasm in her parish. She got to know the Daughters of St. Paul through her uncle even though he considered the sisters to be "communists" because they worked so hard! But one morning she had an awakening and firmly decided: "I will become a nun—a *Pauline* nun!"

She entered the Congregation in the house of Rome on 18 November 1951 and immediately had the opportunity to experience the Institute's mission in the Cagliari book center. She was sent to Rome for her novitiate, which concluded with her first profession on 19 March 1955. As a young professed, she worked in the St. Paul Film Agency of Cagliari and then, immediately after her perpetual profession in 1960, began a long curriculum in the book center apostolate, where she succeeded in establishing indelible and unforgettable relationships with parish priests, seminarians, families and people from all walks of life.

Como, Brescia, Perugia, Reggio Calabria, Cagliari and Bologna were the book centers in which she manifested her great zeal and extraordinary competence in this form of the apostolate. Her sole concern was to help people come to a better knowledge of the Word of God, ecclesial documents, the writings of the Fathers of the Church and also the most up-to-date contemporary authors. The book center held no secrets for her: her formidable memory enabled her to recall the faces, conversations and needs of all the people with whom she came in contact.

In her younger years, Sr. M. Joseph had worked assiduously to perfect her academic formation and had obtained a diploma in theology. But she was above all a self-taught person who used her night hours and rest periods to keep up to date and become familiar with books and authors. The big stacks of books that she carried to her room spoke of her desire to learn from everything and also revealed her single-minded and indefatigable attention to the apostolate. While stationed in Como and Perugia, she added to her book center responsibilities the service of local superior.

Advancing age did not cause Sr. M. Joseph to lose her impetus and dynamism. In 2011, she wrote from Bologna: "Within me, I've always yearned for the best. My zeal for the apostolate is boundless and I thank the Lord for my vocation, which I have never regretted. I'm as enthusiastic about it as I was in the early days. I know that I'm poor and incapable but I've always given my *all* to the Pauline mission, and I've always felt at home in it."

We thank the Lord for having blessed our religious Family with many fervent, convinced and holy sisters like Sr. M. Joseph. They are the seeds that die in order to revive a fascination for the consecrated life in all its original freshness and enchantment, infusing it with new life, new hope and new energy. As Cardinal C.M. Martini says, the Spirit is truly at work, using invisible and little co-workers to consolidate his victory.

Affectionately,

Rome, 31 December 2020


Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan