

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

Last night, at 9:45 p.m., our merciful Father visited the Thecla Merlo community of Albano, Italy, to call to himself our sister:

**VIVIAN SR. MARIA ANTONIETTA**  
**born in Marostica (Vicenza), Italy, on 30 December 1926.**

Canada, France, Madagascar, Pakistan, the Czech Republic...these were the nations to which Sr. Antonietta wholeheartedly dedicated her missionary zeal, her love for all peoples, and her openness of mind and heart toward the sisters of the Congregation through the various governing services entrusted to her over the course of her long Pauline life. It is worth listening to the account of her truly singular experience in her own words, beginning with the unusual and enlightening time of her vocational discernment, which she related in this way:

"In 1937, I was a fourth-grade student in Marostica (Vicenza) when one day my aunt, Sr. Bartolomea, a Daughter of St. Paul, showed up at our house. Turning to my sister, who had just completed the fifth grade, she said, 'Maria, I've come to take you [back to the convent] with me, as we agreed.' 'Auntie,' my sister replied, 'I've changed my mind about becoming a nun, so I won't be going with you.' I interrupted the exchange to exclaim: 'I'll go with you, Auntie!' My father strongly doubted that an 11-year-old girl had any idea about what the consecrated life was, but he reluctantly agreed to let me give it a try. The next 4 years of my life, spent in Rome, consisted of study, prayer and enthusiastic work in the apostolate, but they were also conditioned by hunger and the drama of World War II, which was ravaging Europe. On 24 January 1943, I made my religious vestition. But during that time, I was suffering from constant coughs and bronchitis. At the beginning of April 1943, my superiors decided it would better for me to return to my family. Once back home, I resumed my high school studies and adjusted well to my new way of life. I threw myself into many parish activities and began to dream about the future.

"In 1949, after finishing my higher studies, I was suddenly seized by strong doubts about my vocation in life. I was 23 years old and I said to myself in anguish, 'If only Primo Maestro were here to tell me to stay serene because I don't have a vocation to the religious life!' In November 1949, my aunt, Sr. Bartolomea, wrote to me, saying that on 15 December Primo Maestro and M. Thecla would be visiting our Verona community. Fr. Alberione was warm and fatherly. He asked me a number of questions, and then paused, resting his head against his hand. After a few moments, he straightened and said decisively, 'The Lord is calling you. You must return to the Congregation.'

"Feeling like my world had collapsed, I burst into tears and told him my problems. He had an answer for everything, gave me his blessing and advised me to talk to Prima Maestra. Seeing me emerge from his office in tears, she asked with concern, 'Antonietta, did Primo Maestro tell you that you don't have a vocation?' 'No,' I gulped, struggling for breath. 'He said I *do* have a vocation.'

"Thus I resumed my journey in the Congregation, supported by the solid, unwavering conviction that the Lord was calling me to the Pauline life. From that time on, thoughts of that moment filled me with great faith, courage and enthusiasm and helped me renew my determination to be faithful to the One who had waited so patiently for me. I was sure that the Lord would take care of everything and I lived my days intensively, certain that he was at my side. Today, looking back over those years, it seems to me that my life was simple and straightforward, permeated by God's love and tenderness."

Sr. Antonietta's second entrance into the Congregation took place on 18 December 1949 in the house of Rome. She made her novitiate in that community, concluding it with her profession on 19 March 1952. Maestra Thecla intuitively grasped that this newly-professed sister possessed the characteristics of a true Pauline missionary, to the point that, as Sr. Antonietta recounted, "Immediately after my profession, I left by ship for Canada. We disembarked in New York where, in the Staten Island

community, I found a note from M. Thecla welcoming me to America and wishing me a good insertion in our Montreal house, which had been opened just a few months earlier, and which was my final destination.”

In Montreal, Sr. Antonietta was immediately entrusted with the formation apostolate and, in 1957, as soon as she had made her perpetual vows, she was appointed Delegation Superior of Canada and local superior of the Montreal community. When her second term of office ended in 1964, she was asked to serve as superior of the Toronto community.

In 1967, another great missionary leap awaited her. This time, she was sent to Pakistan. In Karachi, which at that time was a community dependent on the General Government, Sr. Antonietta was asked to serve as superior for a year. The following year she returned to Italy because she was made a member of the commission preparing for the Congregation’s Special Chapter. But the surprises for Sr. Antonietta were not over: in 1969 she was appointed Delegation Superior of France and local superior of the community of Lyon. Because of the vast governing experience she had acquired, she was elected a general councilor of the Congregation at the conclusion of its Special Chapter in 1971—a service she carried out for two consecutive terms under the leadership of Sr. Ignazia Balla and Sr. Maria Cevolani, Superiors General.

In 1984, when her service in the General Government ended, Sr. Antonietta was appointed Delegation Superior of Pakistan and superior of its Lahore community. She returned to Italy seven years later, her health undermined by pulmonary sarcoidosis (an inflammatory disease of the lungs and lymph nodes). But this malady did not interrupt her commitment and service to the Congregation. In 1991 she was appointed provincial superior of Italy, a particularly difficult responsibility for her, since she had lived most of her life in overseas circumscriptions.

But the Lord still had some surprises in store for her: in 1994 she was sent by the Superior General to Madagascar to solve a difficult book center problem. Having resolved the situation thanks to abundant prayer and a great spirit of faith, Sr. Antonietta returned to Italy. But her time there was brief because she was soon sent to the Congregation’s new foundation in Prague (Czech Republic), where she carried out the service of superior for some time.

When she finally returned to Italy for good, she was asked to serve as spiritual animator in Cicogna, as superior of the FSP Divine Master community in Rome, and then at the acceptance/information desk in the Generalate community, Rome. In 2009, Sr. Antonietta was transferred to the Thecla Merlo community, Albano where, as long as her strength permitted, she computerized documents and other material needed by the Secretary General’s office.

In 2011, she wrote: “I hope for God’s mercy and compassion and the intercession of the Queen of Apostles and St. Paul in the time that remains to me here on this earth. I am grateful to the Congregation for all it has offered me, including simple membership in it, and for the assistance it offers me.”

We thank Sr. Antonietta for her very rich vocational journey, for all the good she spread in the circumscriptions and communities in which she lived, and for sowing serenity, peace, a spirit of discernment and great wisdom wherever she lived. To her we entrust the many young women seeking their vocation in life, asking the Lord to place on their paths people who can offer them enlightened and wise guidance, rich in faith, so as to help them discover “the golden thread of the love of God that connects all existence” (*Pope Francis*).

Affectionately,



Sr. Anna Maria Parenzan

Rome, 28 December 2022