

Rocca di Papa, October 23, 1997

St. Therese of the Child Jesus, doctor of the Church

During this month we witnessed the solemn proclamation, by our Holy Father John Paul II, of St. Therese of Lisieux as doctor of the Church.

The idea had been in the wind for quite some time. Some people doubted it would ever come about because this saint never had any kind of higher learning, her writings were not an "elaborate scientific presentation of the things of God", and her way of thinking was of a disarming simplicity.

Recently it was being said that she might just be defined as a "young doctor".

But Divine Wisdom, which is never lacking in the Church, has instead proclaimed St. Therese of the Child Jesus to be the 33rd doctor of the Church.

It is a great honour, an inestimable honour! If her life story has been published in more than 500 editions, now present all over the world (much more, they say, than the Work of St. Teresa of Avila), now it will have an ever wider spreading. Even more now people will want to know what made this young Carmelite so extraordinary.

I think that the extraordinary thing about this soul was what the Holy Father pointed out in his address.

He saw the greatness of Therese in her discovery: "In the Church, my mother, I will be love".

She longed to have many vocations in the Church: to the priesthood, to be a missionary, etc. But this was not God's will for her. So the Holy Spirit made her understand clearly her specific task in the Church, which is the Bride of Christ: *to be love*.

But *being love* was not just something she had discovered; it became her life. The words of witness, which led to her canonization, stand to show it.

I too was surprised to see that her brief life was so incredibly studded with acts of love. And not only love towards God (her unending trust in Him is admirable and well known), but also love towards her neighbours.

Therefore, Therese had found her place in the Church. But it seems that when, in a burst of joy, she understood her vocation, she did not comprehend fully what the Holy Spirit had revealed to her.

In fact, we can say that to be love in the Church is not the vocation of St. Therese alone. In these times it is strongly evidenced that love is the vocation of every Christian woman.

Due to circumstances which exist above all in other portions of Christianity, the Church today is redefining Her stand - which is the stand of Christ - with regard to priesthood for women. And at the same time, like Therese, women have the growing conviction that it is precisely love which gives meaning to their lives.

It is this typical vocation of the woman follower of Christ which gives origin to her genius, that which the Holy Father John Paul II calls "feminine genius".

Perhaps it is also thanks to this discovery of St. Therese that she has now become a doctor of the Church.

In fact, not only did she respond to a personal call of the Spirit, but to a general call, meant for all women, thereby highlighting a particular aspect of Christian life and doctrine.

And since this discovery of Therese is none other than a revelation of the Marian profile of the Church, whose model is Mary, a profile which men and women are called to live in the Church particularly in our times, it is a universal vocation.

Love, which the Holy Spirit diffuses in our hearts, this sublime love which makes us participate in the life of God!

Therese's vocation, her thoughts and reflections on love as being the life of every other Christian vocation, calls to mind an exquisitely oriental passage which Athenagoras used to repeat to me and which concerned the Holy Spirit:

"Without the Holy Spirit God is far away, Christ remains in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church a mere organization, authority a domination, mission a kind of publicity, cult a convocation and man's action a slave's moral code. But with the Spirit, Christ becomes present, the Gospel becomes the trinitarian mission, authority a liberating service, mission a pentecost, liturgy a commemorative celebration and a foretaste, man's action becomes divine."

Without the love that He pours forth, everything loses meaning.

This is what Therese of the Child Jesus, doctor of the Church knew and this is what she teaches.

Love - as we have been saying in these past days of our meeting here at the Center - mutual love is our "uniform".

So let us put this uniform on every morning, the moment we awake, and never, never take it off again.

Headlines

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October: meeting with the persons responsible for the zones

With the arrival at Rocca di Papa, on the 1st of October, of the persons responsible for the 77 zones of the Focolare Movement (which covers 198 nations), the Center of the Opera has literally been overflowing with vitality and expectation.

During the first three "invigorating" days, if we can say this, all the participants were able to "go in depth" through a very beautiful program. Two themes of Chiara on the collective spirituality marked out the course for the whole month, indeed for the entire year. Gerard's theme

¹ *Aforismi e citazioni cristiane*, Dizionari Piemme, 1994, p. 196.

on sanctity, the new themes of Hubertus on Jesus-Mediator and of Vera on the earthly Paradise offered a taste of the Abba School. The question and answer session with Fr. Foresi was dynamic, rich with wit and wisdom.

In the afternoons various updatings on the latest events made everyone participate in the life of the Opera today: Enzo's valuable theme on "Nirvana", with a new documentary video on dialogue with the Buddhists of Thailand; the dialogue with Muslims, with the video of Chiara's address at Harlem; and the eumenical reality of Graz, with the spirituality of unity which Chiara proposed as being suitable for fostering reconciliation among the churches.

During these three days much room was given to interior life, to silence, to remaining alone in order to enhance a direct relationship with God, but Chiara also invited each one strongly to verify relationships of mutual love, "our uniform", which had to shine forth among all.

This supernatural atmosphere brought about a crescendo of joy, which Chiara described as the characteristic of this month of October.

The following days, one zone after another was put into light through the meetings with the centres and the conversations with Chiara. Each one, with its patrimony of fruits and sufferings, bore witness to the fact that not only the spirituality but also the entire Opera, with its physiognomy and its development, comes from the Holy Spirit.

In a span of two weeks Chiara looked into 39 zones in the continents of America and Asia and also the Middle East.

In the meeting with the zone of **Argentina**, which Chiara will visit next April, and she will be seeing for the first time the little town of O'Higgins, the priority which the Opera wishes to give to the little towns was discussed. Chiara says that this year we must develop our growing little towns. "When God calls me to Himself, I want to leave everything in order. Therefore even if in some zones a focolare continues to exist with just three focolarini, but a little town is beginning, I am happy, because in this way the structures remain.

"We say that there are 20 little towns, but how many of them are like O'Higgins? Luminosa, Araceli, Tagaytay, Fontem, and that's about all. All the others are just beginning. So this year we want to give a push towards this direction".

Lia and Vittorio described the latest developments of the Mariapolis Andrea. There are now 240 people living there, 95 on a permanent basis and 145 in the schools of formation. This year 25,000 people came to visit.

Olga and Benedetto of Cordoba spoke about the 5 hectares of land they had acquired to build a Mariapolis Centre, and of another 7 hectares they had received for free.

Brazil. During the meeting with Araceli, there were two pieces of news: the Cidade Nova Publishing House of São Paulo has moved to the little town and the "La Rosa" little house of the gen 4 girls has been opened. It is attracting the 500 inhabitants of the little town and its visitors. They have just concluded their first week-long stay and having learned to prepare meals, the gen 4 girls offered to cook for Chiara when she comes to Brazil in May, 1998.

A recurring theme that came with immense joy in many meetings was the new and deep commitment of everyone in the zones to live mutual love. This thrust brought about abundant spiritual fruits and a growth in the life of the zone.

Here we would like to remember Magda, the Austrian focolarina of Luminosa who left us recently, offering her life, among other things, so that this unity may be fully achieved.

In the meeting with the zone of **Columbia**, Márta described the Mariapolis Centre Gioia as a luminous point where the voice of Jesus within us becomes stronger due to the loudspeaker

of unity. Carlos spoke of vocations to the focolare among the gen 3 boys, a phenomenon which has been emerging in some zones especially after the Supercongress.

Chiara's visit to **Mexico** last June highlighted even more the contribution that the Opera can give towards inculturation. With Fiore and Guido, the idea of a School for Inculturation was discussed.

After the conferment on Chiara of the doctorate *honoris causa* in Philosophy, two students of the La Salle University are preparing their theses on Chiara's philosophy applied to politics and economy.

Always with regard to inculturation, the problem of settling in a place where there is a close to frenetic life was discussed with Vanna and Michele of **Korea**. At this point Chiara shared her personal experience on living the seven aspects of the focolare. One way of inculturizing ourselves could be through recreation: "Perhaps you could go to the theater, a good one, or to a play, or you can listen to some music... This is recreation, but it is also inculturation."

Many zones spoke about the new channels of communication which have been opened with the communications media and how this came about thanks to the Supercongress and the press releases of the Centre's Information Service with regard to the public events of Chiara's trips.

Also a focolarina of Buenos Aires, collaborating with a well-known producer, came up with 6 television programs presenting a series of experiences of New Humanity. It was quite successful.

Chiara commented that nowadays we must use the means of communication as we once used a pencil for writing.

In the meeting with **Thailand**, Chiara gave the name "Regola d'oro" (Golden rule) to the rising little town, while the focolare of Chiang Mai will be called "Dialogo" (Dialogue).

In the **little town Pace** there are 9 business enterprises of the "Economy of Communion" which have doubled their profits last year. Chiara explained that lay people become saints remaining in the world. Therefore it is understandable that they feel a kind of vocation to the "Economy of Communion", producing in order to love, to give.

There is a continuous effort, even in zones such as **Peru** and **Chile**, to obtain the sum that is needed in order to help our 5000. Chiara is certain that also this year we will reach our goal.

There are also many fruits of having asked our Father in heaven, united in the name of Jesus. His response has been as concrete and immediate as those of the early days!

At **Montevideo**, contacts with Jews have begun.

In **India** a way is being opened for the development of dialogue with Hinduism.

In the meeting with **Pakistan, Hong Kong and Japan**, Chiara pointed out the "little paths" to be followed in order to have a particular "specific scope", a scope to aim at in order to bring ahead the dialogues of the Opera.

For the **United States** Chiara proposed a school of interreligious dialogue and also a school for gen from ages 16 and up, with lessons on morals, politics, etc; but they should be expressions of the 7 aspects, so as to help young people to avoid having negative experiences.

The zones of the **Middle East were** viewed, from Morocco to Turkey. The construction of the Mariapolis Centre of Lebanon was approved. It will be built in the future little town, "La Sorgente", which is already made up of about a hundred persons.

An initial approximative count was also given (there are still some figures missing) on the members and adherents of the Movement today.

The members, as well as the men and women adherents number around 2,212,000. Another 2,300,000 are regularly nourished by our spirituality through schools and ecclesial structures. There is a slight decrease - because a more precise criterion has been used - in the number of people linked to the structures and an increase in the so-called third track. The sum total of 4,5120.000 is quite positive.

The latest meetings were marked by something new: Chiara shared what she had been reading in the book "*Verso una teologia cristiana del pluralismo religioso*" (Towards a Christian Theology of religious pluralism). This book explains the historical development of the Catholic Church's thought on the problem of salvation in religious pluralism.

The message she received from those responsible for Australia and Canada, after their meeting with her, makes us intuit something. They say:

"Thank you for having filled us with so much happiness. You looked at our zones with infinite love, shedding light on every small detail. And then, the marvelous lesson you gave us this morning! From the "Theologian's chair" you fascinated us with the Wisdom that unveils history step by step, illuminating it with the very new light of the charism. We are overjoyed to have been born in this century with you."

During these days Chiara is going ahead with her meetings with the zones and - let's hope - with these precious lessons! We will continue with this topic in the next Collegamento!

"The epiphany of the family" in Rio de Janeiro

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: the second World meeting of the Pope with families, from October 1st to the 5th. There were three phases: a theological-pastoral Congress, a meeting of celebration and witness, and the concluding Mass.

As for the first World meeting for families in 1994, the Pontifical Council for Families was counting on the vivid collaboration of the Focolare Movement. The central secretariat for the New Families and especially Alberto and Anna Friso were working hard along with the New Families Movement in the world and especially in Brazil.

Called to participate in the theological-pastoral Congress (2,800 delegates from every nation) were Danilo and Annamaria Zanzucchi (in charge for the New Families in the world and members of the Pontifical Council for Families), and the focolare families Linard of Australia and Marques of Lisbon. In the Congress, theological values were restated and problems regarding families today were discussed.

At the conclusion the Pope defined the family as a domestic Church and as a human and divine architectural structure devised for the harmonious growth of every newly born life here on earth.

On October 4 there were 115,000 people present at the festival at Maracanà stadium. Sixteen families were invited to give their witness, including 11 of the Movement, all chosen from various countries to express the universality of the Church. There were also several well known singers.

John Paul II often improvised, talking personally with the families and musicians, in an atmosphere of participation and enthusiasm on the part of all.

The climax came with the Mass on Sunday, October 5, in the Aterro do Flamengo, with more than two million people present. The Pope truly won the hearts of all Brazil. We were able to witness this on a world-wide TV network thanks to RAI International (which the New Families were able to engage) and a pool of Brazilian stations.

Back in Rome, in the general audience the following Wednesday, John Paul II said, "The meeting of Rio was an eloquent Epiphany of the family. From Maracanà which had become like a huge cathedral, a message of hope was launched to the world, a message supported by experiences of life: it is joyful and possible, though very demanding, to live a love that is faithful and open to life; it is possible for families to participate in the mission of the Church and in building society".

Angels amidst the ruins

Beginning on September 26 an earthquake hit the zones of central Italy called Umbria and the Marche, for the presence and the message of St. Francis and St. Claire, and also for the priceless artistic heritage. There are also several deaths.

In the hardest hit areas the population (about 40,000 in all) had to leave their homes and sleep in the open in tents or trailers. Also the homes of several of our members were damaged more or less seriously. Luckily no one was hurt.

Laura and Riccardo tell us: "Within a few short hours we had a picture of the situation and there was a flowering generosity. After bringing their own family to safety some stayed in the city to guarantee hospital service to others; someone else finally got a trailer after several nights sleeping in his car and this gave him the added chance to be in contact with others and get people to help one another.

Many came running to help from the cities of Perugia, Arezzo, Pistoia and Florence.

In Nocera Umbra, which was completely devastated, the Civic Protection Service has set up huge tents for some 400 persons.

Twenty gen and Youth for a United World are there, guaranteeing the restaurant service which furnishes 1,500 meals a day. In the midst of paper plates and cups they can give a word of comfort or courage. "We weren't pitied, but loved". people said. "Angels amidst the ruins" was the title of the TV special on the earthquake.

This atmosphere continued to grow to the point that many people hope the contacts can continue in the future. Several volunteers of the Civil Protection Service, surprised and themselves becoming involved in loving said: "We've never seen anything like it. Your presence is a presence of joy every day".

Also Assisi was badly hit: 80% of the churches were damaged. The people are strong and full of dignity. Among them is Fr. Egidio Canil, Franciscan of the Opera in the Basilica of St. Francis, who gives assistance, help and support to the remaining population.

Chiara's greeting, affection and concrete aid, to which other sums have been added, was gratefully received. The members who have lived this experience of "everything crumbling" have remained in the certainty of God's love.

Magda

Magda Gehberger, focolarina of Luminosa (USA) was "born" to Life last October 12. Chiara's first reaction was this: "We have an angel in heaven, a new, authentic angel".

Magda was born in Austria but lived in America since she was 13, and she had lived in the focolare centres of Washington, Chicago and Boston. She had been ill for some time and as her health declined in the last few weeks, she was hospitalized in Boston.

"I offer everything for Chiara" and "My name is Thank you" were words she repeated to the very end, heroically faithful to her name, Magda of Jesus Forsaken. Last May there was the very great joy of her personal and deep encounter with Chiara during her visit to the USA.

At the moment of her death she was surrounded by focolarine, her sister, and a doctor who cared for her in the final stages and who said: "The entire hospital has been conquered by her life and by the mutual love at her side".

The wake was a sacred time, with many persons present, including Cardinal Law of Boston who expressed to all his gratitude for this pioneer of the Focolare in his diocese. It was like a big Mariapolis in which even several people we hadn't seen for quite some time came back and in which everyone recalled moments of Magda's special, personal love.

Her body now lies in the tiny cemetery of Mariapolis Luminosa.

Enrico Torquato Cavallini

At La Spezia, on the day of his funeral (October 7), the news placards announced in block letters the death of this "doctor of desperate cases" and expressed the suffering of the whole town.

Enrico was loved for the good he had always tried to do to everyone, and also for having been able to improve health services.

Indeed he had very much at heart what Chiara had told him during the meeting of the St. Luke Center in the early '70's on the "clarification" of the world of medicine. He felt it was a life program and he tried to put it into practice. He wrote that "he was clearly aware that the only way to heal Christian society and to save humanity from destroying itself, is through the Ideal".

He suddenly felt ill and, as a doctor, he was fully aware of what he was going through. He asked for a priest. After a lengthy confession and after having received the Eucharist, another heart attack and... the meeting with the Father. He was 71 years old.

The last farewell, in church, was a stupendous moment of God, which unveiled Enrico's life and the source of his love: his consecration to God in the Opera as a married focolarino. In there was the secret and the source from which he drew the strength to soothe many sufferings and the dedication which allowed him to save hopeless cases.

A serene atmosphere surrounded his wife and children, who were enveloped by the love of the community.

Reception in Hollywood

During her visit to Luminosa last May, in answer to a question, Chiara affirmed: "God must become in fashion again, and He can return to the homes of people and in every environment through the television, the theater, the newspapers, books, interviews, everything that has got to do with the world of communications".

These words moved the focolarine to organize a meeting in which about 60 persons participated: producers, actors, musicians, writers, television technicians and others who work in these fields, and who want to transmit true values, even going against the current.

This took place on September 21 in Los Angeles in a villa right near Hollywood.

The reception began with the presentation of Chiara's address in Bangkok during the conferment of the doctorate *honoris causa* in Communication Arts, which the participants

followed with great interest. Then, three professionals gave their different viewpoints with regard to the role of the communications media in the world today: Ralph Sario, for many years vice-president of a famous film studio and at present president of "Catholics in Media"; Pat Shea, writer, together with her husband, Jack, president of American producers; Dr. Ananda Guruge, writer and Buddhist scholar.

After a profound exchange, everyone went home bringing with him or her a copy of Chiara's address at Bangkok, and wishing to meet once again in order to go ahead together.

Meeting with representatives of the great religions

In her capacity as honorary president, Chiara was invited to participate in the International Council of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (WCRP) which was held in Hildesheim, Germany, towards the end of September. She entrusted to Enzo the task of representing her in this meeting.

Many of the participants were adherents or big friends of the Movement, for example, the secretary generals and Dr. Vinu Aràm, main director for the youth section and daughter of Dr. Aràm. She wants to do everything she can to realize the wish of her father, who died some months ago, to make Chiara and her Movement known to top level people in India.

Many new contacts have been established. Among these is the meeting with Dr. Wahid, one of the presidents of the World Conference and head of a Muslim movement in Indonesia, with about 40 million adherents. He is very interested and is expecting the focal point in Jakarta in order to present the Movement to his collaborators.

On October 10 at Rocca di Papa, Chiara met the venerable Sugitani, president of the Buddhist Denomination Tendai (the oldest form of Buddhism in Japan), who had been wanting to get to know her for many years now. In the profound conversation the Venerable Sugitani explained some salient points of the Buddhist faith. A dialogue was unexpectedly opened and will surely go deeper in the future.

Elections in Poland

After the fall of the Communist regime, Solidarnosc crumbled. Many of its directors became leaders of small parties, which during the elections 4 years ago did not reach the minimum 5% of the votes necessary for entering Parliament.

Thus the ex-communists returned to power and they put their people back into the key positions of society. Their attitude towards the Church became even more hostile, up to the point of boycotting the ratification of the agreement with the Holy See.

In this situation, the recent elections of September 21 acquired a decisive value. Catholic politicians were able to unite themselves in two coalitions, the strongest of which, the Solidarnosc Electoral Action, won. Among those elected was prof. Adam Biela, very much esteemed for his transparent life without compromises, well known for his competence in the economic and social fields. Attracted by the Ideal of the Movement, he saw in it a "copernican revolution" for society. Also a woman adherent was elected senator and is now president of the Senate, while two volunteers have become the mayors of Piekary and of Katowice. Chiara had met all of them at the University of Lublin during the conferment of the doctorate.