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Mother Rosetta Marchese, Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, was Superior General from 1981 to 1984. She received many graces from Providence that sustained her on her path of service to the Congregation and led her to make an offering of herself for the salvation of souls, an offering that God appreciated.

The Servant of God Mother Rosetta Marchese was born in Aosta on 20 October 1922 to Giovanni and Giovanna Stuardi. She is the eldest of three daughters: she, Anna and Maria Luisa. She was born in a nice house in the suburbs. Rosetta attended nursery school and the first three primary classes at the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. From 1928 to 1938 (from the age of 6 to 16) she was a regular and active attendee at the Oratory and a member of Catholic Action. The Salesian environment was lively, serene and it was there that her vocation blossomed.

At the age of almost 16, on 15 October 1938, Rosetta entered the Mother Mazzarello House in Turin as an aspirant. On 31 January 1939 she was admitted to the Postulancy. She was a simple, joyful young woman of prayer and sacrifice. On 6 August she entered the Novitiate. On her small table in the study it is written: 'He who spares himself does not love, loves himself'. On 5 August 1941 she made her first profession. She applied to her superiors to leave as a missionary, but due to the raging war she did not receive a positive response. Immediately after her profession, Sr Rosetta was sent to Turin and Vercelli to prepare for her baccalaureate and to assist the schoolgirls.

At the age of 21, from 1943 to 1947, she was a student at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan at Castel Fogliani (Piacenza). From 1947 - the year she made her perpetual profession - to 1957 she was destined for the Mother Mazzarello Missionary House in Turin as a teacher, assistant to the educande, in charge of the oratory and of the former pupils.

In 1957 (at 37) she left Turin to go to Caltagirone in Sicily as headmistress and remained there until 1961. Her meeting with Bishop Monsignor Francesco Fasola, Servant of God, was fundamental and helped to bring out latent intuitions and graces from her soul. On the day he took possession of the diocese of Caltagirone (22 January 1961), she sensed the holiness of the Bishop who would guide her spiritually for 23 years, until his death. Her relationship with Bishop Fasola threw further light on the mystery of the priesthood, so much so that on 2 August 1961 Sr Rosetta offered herself for the holiness of the bishop and later for the

Church, for the holiness of priests and for religious souls. In the meantime, she supported many sisters as a teacher of the interior life through spiritual accompaniment and correspondence. From 1961 to 1965 Sr Rosetta was superior at the Gesù Nazareno Institute in Via Dalmazia in Rome. Her service coincided with the celebration of the Second Vatican Council.

From 1965 until 1971 Mother Angela Vespa, Superior General of the FMA, entrusted Sister Rosetta with the large Roman Province of St Cecilia. From 1971 to 1973 she was superior at Lecco Olate. Then she was entrusted with the government of another large Province, the Lombard Mary Immaculate Province. At General Chapter 16, on 17 October 1975, she was elected Visiting Councillor.

From 1975 to 1981 she visited the Provinces of Belgium, Sicily, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), France, Germany and Piedmont. In 1981, on the centenary of the death of Mother Mazzarello who offered her life for the Institute, from 7 to 10 October, Mother Rosetta had a mysterious experience in the founding house of the Institute in Mornese. A voice in the village parish and in the Cofounder's room told her: "Accept, accept!" On 24 October 1981, at General Chapter 27, she was unanimously elected Mother General.

In Turin, on 24 May 1982, a high fever was the first symptom of the illness that would consume her: severe leukaemia. In her notebooks and epistolary she notes that she offers her life for the holiness of the Institute, priests and young people. They all mobilised with unceasing prayer and also the willingness to give blood for transfusions. Sister Ancilla Modesto relates that the Sisters in Portugal ask Sister Lucy of Fatima if she can implore healing from Our Lady. Sister Lucy of Fatima had a Salesian nephew, Father Valihno, who, on 14 January 1983, went to visit the Mother at Gemelli, bringing the statue of Our Lady of Fatima and a message from Sister Lucy: "The offering was pleasing to God." In her last days, she confided to her vicar, Mother Leton Maria Pilar, that in that little room in Mornese she had intuited her election as Mother General and her death for the holiness of the sisters and priests. In fact, Mother Rosetta was born to Heaven on 8 March 1984 at the age of 61.

The figure that emerges by interweaving her personal notebooks (1962-1982), her epistolary (1961-1983) with Bishop Francesco Fasola (also a Servant of God), together with some other letters, is that of a profoundly mystical woman, an authentic Salesian educator, fully part of the socio-ecclesial context of Council and post-Council Italy.

Aware of the complex reality of her time and open to the gift of grace, with her experience of God, she gives, in a certain way, "confirmation" of the great truths of the Catholic faith on the Eucharist, Our Lady and the Church, which were

called into question in the widespread de-Christianisation typical of the Italian twenty-year period 1958-1978 and in particular in the 1968 crisis with its prolonged reverberations. Her life became a call to the essential and unchanging in the fluctuating and complex experiences of her time, in a special way for the Church, for priests, for her Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and for the laity of the Salesian Family.

Mother Rosetta has a specific mission: to draw a “reparative and affirmative” line with respect to the truths of faith impoverished by the de-Christianised culture and to re-present them with strength and beauty.

Faced with materialism and the de-Christianisation of culture, Mother Rosetta had a strong and vivid experience of the Trinity. She perceived the first Trinitarian reminders from the earliest years of her religious life (1944 in Castelfogliani; 1951 in Turin at Mother Mazzarello House; 1959 in Caltagirone), as she herself recounts in detail:

“I have in front of me the stages of this path traced out by Him: the Exercises for triennial vows, when reading and meditating on the Gospel of St. John, I was all caught up in the sentiments of Jesus towards the Heavenly Father and it was the beginning of my slow work of removing myself from myself to throw myself into the Heart of Jesus, seen in this way. Then around the age of ten years of profession, Jesus’ words to Philip: ‘he who sees me, sees the Father’, opened me up to the Mystery of the Trinity and Jesus led me into the joy of Their presence in me, but very imperfectly experienced and understood by me. Then six years ago, Our Lady opened me wide to the Holy Spirit and then the Mystery of the Trinity became more and more familiar to me. On 24 July ‘65, while saying the Gloria during Holy Mass at the expression ‘Son of the Father’, I felt how all the Father’s tenderness poured out on my soul and from that moment on Jesus gave me a more intimate participation in his feelings for the Heavenly Father. Since then, every day my invocation to the Holy Spirit has always been this and I think I can say that I have always lived with this unique passion to identify myself with Jesus in his love for the Heavenly Father!” (Marquis Rosetta, Typewritten text).

Faced with the crisis among priests and the faithful over faith in the Eucharist, Mother Rosetta lived an intense Eucharistic life from which she drew strength and light for even complex daily living.

“Now, we say many things, but I am convinced that only one would turn the

Congregation upside down: to be able to nail the sisters ten minutes every day before the Tabernacle in silent prayer of contemplation and union with His Will. All problems would be solved there. Let us begin by being faithful so that they may all get there” (Mother Rosetta Marchese, Letter to Sister Elvira Casapollo, Mornese 19 August 1978).

From 1979 until her death she experienced the mystical phenomenon of the Eucharistic indwelling, or the Real Presence of Jesus, as a permanent and continuous Presence within herself after Communion. Mother Rosetta carried within herself a burning Eucharistic furnace into which she immersed her sisters, young people and lay people:

“It seems to me now that my task is to continuously take all souls and immerse them in the fire of love that is the Heart of Jesus which I carry within me. I would like to be able to repeat it to him a thousand times a day, always... and then I let myself get caught up in the work and the difficulties it entails; but this continual testing of my weakness does me good and increases my confidence; the smaller and more miserable I am, the easier it is to lose myself in the Heart of Jesus” (Mother Rosetta Marchese, Letter to Bishop Fasola Francesco, Feast of the Archangels 1980).

Faced with the crisis of a Mariology threatened by secularism and unattractive to the people of God, Jesus gave Mother Rosetta a lively filial relationship with the Virgin Mary, woman of the *Fiat* and the *Magnificat*, and gave her a living experience of Our Lady’s gaze. With this intensity she proposed to the young people and lay people of the Salesian Family her love for Mary Help of Christians. In fact, she writes:

“At the beginning of the spiritual exercises, almost suddenly, I felt as if penetrated by an interior gaze of Our Lady and as if subjugated and taken by this gaze [...] I glimpsed how my presence in Mary, remaining in Her, abandoned to her, like Jesus after the Incarnation, would be the surest way to let the Spirit in Jesus act freely (I don’t know if I am expressing myself well)” (Mother Rosetta Marchese, Letter to Fr Giuseppe Groppo, Rome 4 May 1963).

As the crisis of the institutions (church and society) worsened, Mother Rosetta experienced the whole Council and post-Council experience *cum Ecclesiae* and invoked the constant presence of the Spirit upon it. On the day the Council

opened, following the event on television, she wrote to Bishop Fasola describing it as a new Pentecost:

"I felt the greatness and holiness of the Church of God, so alive and palpitating; it seemed to me that I was almost sensitively experiencing the presence of Mary and the Holy Spirit in that immense holy cenacle" (Mother Rosetta, Letter to Bishop Francesco Fasola, Rome, 13 October 1962).

Faced with an activism that renders the apostolate among youth sterile, she pointed to the secret of the grace of unity: living the duty of the present moment in union with God, rooted in a relationship with Christ her spouse.

"Behold, dear Sister, in this way you begin contemplation and action: when your action is done only for him, seeking his glory, doing the best you can with the children to find a good moment to talk about him; when you approach the parents with the sole thought of saying a word to help them better educate their children; when, after school, you assist these children with the intention of making them feel the goodness, the affection, the care of the Lord who sends you to replace their parents who cannot follow them; when you try to be good and patient with your sisters despite work and tiredness; all this is seeking God and union with Him! You can then say that truly the Lord reigns in your life, and there is unity between action and contemplation." (Letter from Sister Marchese Rosetta to Sister Boni Maria Rosa, Rome, 21 January 1980).

"The Holy Trinity in me, me in the heart of the Blessed Trinity, through all the love of the Holy Spirit; possessed by Jesus as a bride; lost in him in praise of the Father." (Mother Rosetta Marchese, Notebook, 10 November 1967).

Faced with an often formal and detached style of government, typical of the pre-conciliar period, she chose the 'mysticism of governing':

"To serve souls, I must move in the Peace of God; in Jesus to intuit them, love them, discover the Father's will for them, in the Holy Spirit. Remain immersed in Jesus, to breathe in the Holy Spirit and stay with peace and love beside each soul: everything else is immensely secondary." (Mother Rosetta Marchese, Notebook, 1 December 1971).

Her testimony and Salesian spirituality, so fascinating and prophetic, sheds light on our life of faith, our relationship with the Lord Jesus, and reinvigorates our

apostolate among the youth with a new beauty and depth. She encourages the sisters:

“Do everything to save souls and let no effort seem too great when you think that it serves to save souls, especially youthful souls.” (Report of the extraordinary visitation of Mother Rosetta Marchese, Munich, 20-24 November 1978, 3/3).

Truly Mother Rosetta Marchese is a complete Salesian in whom the *“Da mihi animas cetera tolle”* of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello among youth, especially girls, is rooted in a deep inner fire, in a profound union with God.

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