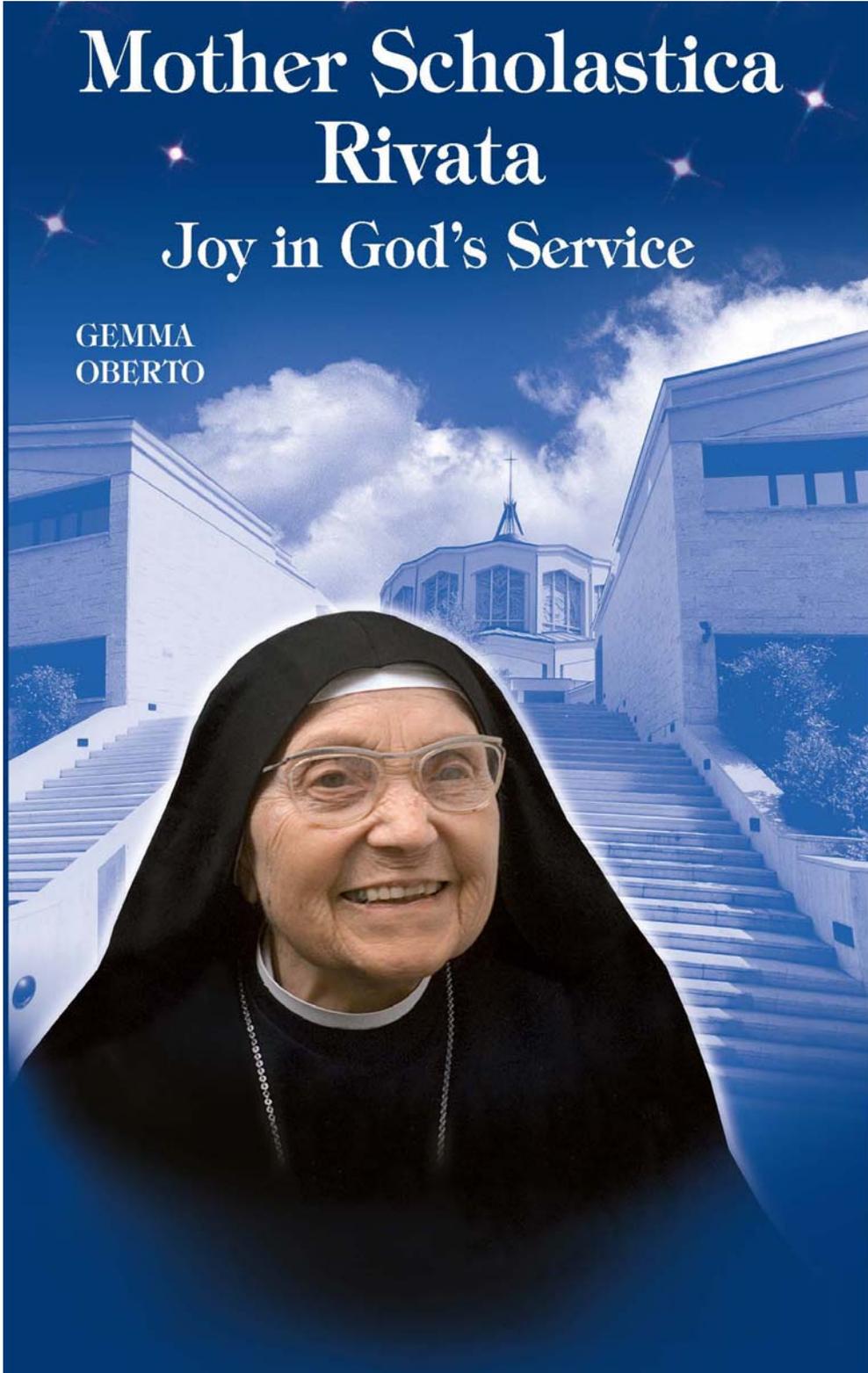


# Mother Scholastica Rivata Joy in God's Service

GEMMA  
OBERTO



Gemma Oberto

MOTHER SCHOLASTICA  
RIVATA

*Joy in God's Service*

Sr. M. Joseph Gemma Oberto, a member of the Congregation of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, which was founded in Italy on February 10, 1924 by Blessed James Alberione with the collaboration of Mother Scholastica Rivata, is dedicated to research on the history of the Congregation and the causes for canonization.

The Pious Disciples of the Divine Master form part of the single project of the Pauline Family: established to live and communicate Jesus Christ, the Way, Truth and Life of humanity today with the fastest and most efficacious means provided by human progress. Like Mary, the Mother of God and the women in the Gospel who were transformed by their encounter with the Risen Lord, the Beauty which saves the world, they are sent, as apostles among the apostles, to proclaim, celebrate and serve him.

Their apostolate, directed to the glory of God and peace to humanity, springs from the love of Jesus living in the Eucharist, in the priesthood and in the liturgy.

In the spirit of the Apostle Paul, who made himself all things to all people, they receive the values and traditions of the various nations with discernment and dedicate themselves to ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue for the proclamation of the Good News.

*Cover:*

*The Church of Jesus Master  
housing the mortal remains  
of Mother Scholastica Rivata*

*Rome, Via Portuense 739*

### *Presentation*

God continues to smile through the face of Mother Scholastica, who followed Jesus Master as his disciple.

A humble and ardent woman, she bore witness to the wonder of remaining with God. This is the secret of the beautiful smile Mother Scholastica retained over many years, while keeping her many sufferings hidden in her heart. Her joy arose from that faith by which she confidently placed herself in God's hands.

Mother Scholastica traversed the desert of transformation. From her first choice, which caused her to exclaim: *Lord, you alone are enough*, to the consummation of her offering, she recognized the lasting joy which comes from donating one's entire life in service.

Even in the most difficult trials, Mother Scholastica chose not to be sad, not to complain nor consider herself as a victim. She allowed the dynamism of Christian joy to fill her heart and radiate from her face.

The secret of this lasting joy, the mature fruit of the Holy Spirit, lies in love offered for the life of others through the apostolate.

It is wonderful to contemplate the beauty of the life of this woman consecrated to God which maintains its value because it draws from the source of light coming from the Eucharist and clothes her with simplicity and beauty.

Are we still attracted by this Gospel joy today?

*Sr. M. Regina Cesarato*

*Superior General, Pious Disciples of the Divine Master*

### *“Yes” to life*

It is April 16, 1896. From the Church of St. Martin of La Morra, which faces the Belvedere Plaza, overlooking the great mountain chain of the Langhe, exit a young bride and groom: Lucia Alessandria and Antonio Rivata. They do not have a honeymoon planned and, after a frugal but festive dinner prepared in the bride's house, they travel through the city of Alba to reach their house in Guarene, located at Via Luccio 24.

A few months after their first wedding anniversary, they welcome their firstborn daughter on July 12, 1897. At her Baptism, celebrated the day after her birth, she received the name Orsola in memory of her paternal and maternal grandmothers.

Orsola came into this world during the year in which Therese of Lisieux died (September 30). Mysteriously these two lives would become intertwined. St. Therese exercised a strong attraction for Orsola, who read the “Story of a Soul”, and she would be a point of reference at the beginning of the Congregation of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master. 1987 is also the year of the birth of Giovanni Battista Montini (September 26), the future Paul VI. In an audience in 1974, Mother Scholastica would proudly remind him that they were the same age.

### *Guarene: an inspiring angle of Piedmont*

The surroundings of Guarene offered inspiring images to little Orsola. Upon the highest rock stands the imposing and harmonious structure of the Castle, a reminder of the nobility which influenced the life of the town for centuries. The castle chapel, dedicated to St. Teresa of Avila, would be the frequent goal of walks and periods of prayer for young Orsola. The numerous bell towers bear witness to a religious spirit deeply rooted in the souls of the people which could not be stifled, not even by the Saracen invasions. The horizon extends from the Roero in the Langhe and leads the gaze to the Alps; below one contemplates the fertile valley of the Tanaro and the towers of Alba.

The land, worked by the sweat of the brow, is not greedy and offers the hard workers of Guarene the resources for a dignified, and simple lifestyle. The kindergarten, run by the Sisters of Cottolengo, and the schools up to the fifth grade foster the care and literacy of the new generations.

For two years Orsola enjoyed all the attention of her mother and father, before the arrivals of Giuseppina (1899), Clotilde (1900) and Giacomo (1903). The family was growing and everything seemed to be proceeding with the simple happiness of every family that is united and open to life.

### *The first great suffering*

The joy at the birth of Giacomo was soon overshadowed by that which Orsola would always remember, even into advanced age, as “the first great suffering in my life”. On July 3, 1903 her mother, Lucia, died and Orsola, who would no longer relish her kiss for her sixth birthday, found herself in the dual roles of daughter and older sister. The games, songs and squeals of joy which filled the house were silenced and her father

Antonio faced a difficult trial. He was assisted by relatives, but the responsibility for the four small children left by Lucia was all his.

*“I was still a young child, - Mother Scholastica would write in 1941 – and life seemed to be all roses and flowers. Loved by good parents, and surrounded by the most attentive care, the happy days passed quickly. With my silver voice, I filled the house with joyful squeals and tormented mother with many questions. Oh! Beloved mamma! Those days were too beautiful, and trials came to visit this little thoughtless creature. And the first came, what a great suffering! ... After a brief illness, my beloved mother died. What suffering! Who can understand it? Only those who have experienced it can understand this intense pain, this misfortune, to lose someone so dear! This is a wound which will never heal, no matter how many things may follow in life with the passage of the years. And it pleased God, in his infinite goodness and wisdom, that I would be visited with this difficult trial at a very early age...”*

Orsola, who would begin elementary school in October, soon returned home with her father, strengthening a special bond with him during this time. The little brother Giacomo went with the nurse and the younger sisters remained in the house of her maternal grandmother. A lively and intelligent child, Orsola enjoyed learning to read and write. This softened her pain and prepared her to look confidently toward the future. As her mother taught her, she went trustingly to the Madonna who adorned a beautiful altar in the parish church and also smiled down upon her from a large picture in the house.

In 1904 her father Antonio decided to bring a new mother for his children into his home. During the month of April he married Giuseppa Bertolotto, a strong woman of Christian principles even though she was very different in appearance and character from mother Lucia. Little Giacomo died at only 10 months and, since there were no children from the second marriage, the house remained with three little sisters.

Orsola had difficulty accepting “mamma Gepa”, who took the place of her own mother, but she committed herself to following her example, admiring her dedication in raising her and her sisters, caring for them not only physically but also spiritually.

#### *A little angel and full of pep*

She was remembered by her classmates as being at the top of the class. She studied. She was always well prepared for the lessons and often received the award bearing the image of the King and the tricolor ribbon attached to her apron for seven consecutive days.

The beautiful little girl, who “seemed to be an angel”, as she grew, also appeared as a “girl full of pep, vivacious, habitually joyful, active. She knew how to get along with her companions. She sang well and she was a sincere and upright girl. She had an uprightness that left no room for wavering”.

#### *Parish and spiritual journey*

Her meeting with Jesus in the Eucharist in First Communion on May 1904 gave new wings to the life of Orsola. The sacrament of Confirmation, which she received in 1909

from the hands of Bishop Giuseppe Re, Bishop of Alba, strengthened her in the Christian commitment.

The parish of Sts. Peter and Bartholomew is very active and the priests, who in the flourishing Seminary of Alba, received a great love for the Eucharist, transmitted this through the promotion of the frequent reception of Holy Communion accompanied by catechesis and pastoral care for all ages and groups of people. They organized the special feast days with homilies entrusted to the priests from the Seminary of Alba, among whom was Fr. James Alberione. Orsola was actively involved in the *Schola cantorum* (choir) which enhanced the beauty of the celebrations.

Even the Church building itself, especially its interior, is well maintained. The pastor, Fr. Giovanni Agnello, undertook a careful restoration and had the artists Lorenzo and Costantino Mossello of Monta paint angels adoring the Blessed Sacrament, Sts. Peter and Bartholomew, and St. Lawrence on the ceiling. Naturally, also Orsola would have followed the creation of these images which would foster her prayer. Often she would gaze upon the tabernacle door depicting Jesus telling his disciples: “*Venite ad me omnes/ Come to me, all of you*”, feeling the attraction of this invitation of the Divine Master.

### *Work and friendship*

Orsola grew, and in this harmonious atmosphere of nature and grace, her personality was gradually formed. Guarene is a small town but it is open to the spiritual and cultural life of the nearby city of Alba.

Despite her thirst for knowledge and learning, Orsola was not offered the opportunity for further studies beyond the elementary grades, but she busied herself with reading for a continuous formation which was not restricted to the religious sphere. The time available for reading is only in the night and she makes use of the oil lamp, sometimes earning the scolding of her stepmother: “You read all night and the smoke even remains on your nose!”

In her adolescence and youth she experienced various types of work environments, besides the domestic experiences, which put her in contact with various social realities and which contribute toward her maturation.

Work in the fields, with its natural cycles and beauty, left her with a marked “ecological” interest, which would remain with her until the last years of her life. She also experienced the fatigue and constancy which the earth requires to bear fruit and, not least, the total surrender to divine providence in those occasions in which, through natural disasters, the entire harvest was ruined in a short time by hail storms.

The seasonal work in the De Fernex silk factory in Alba brought her in contact with the labor disputes between employers and employees, in a context in which the social movements of the beginning of the XX century were prevalent, as documented in the chronicles of Alba from that time period.

During her work at the textile mill, which seasonally hired young people from the surrounding areas, offering meals and overnight accommodations from Monday to Saturday, she met Eufrosina Binello, a young woman who would enter the group of Fr.

Alberione before her, and, like the first disciples called by Jesus, she would hear the invitation: “Come and see”.

The domestic service for a wealthy family in Alba would bring her to live as a domestic helper, a common occupation for many young women even to this day.

### *Choice of lifestyle*

Father Antonio was proud of his three beautiful daughters who grew and began to be noticed by the young men of the town. Following the financial burden of acquiring a new house in Via Luccio 22, he began to gather his savings for their dowries. His desire was that they find good homes and happiness. He kept vigil over those who looked at them and one day he called Orsolina, his eldest daughter, who according to custom was to be married first. He told her that a certain Andrea had asked for her hand. “He is a good young man – her father stated –and he also has means; you may have a happy life with him”. As a good patriarch, he invited her to reflect and made the proposal but he did not impose his will. He wanted the best for his daughters and he was especially sensitive to Orsolina, who resembled Lucia so closely. The proposal of her father Antonio was like lightening which parts the clouds and provoked Orsolina’s first major decision. After the Sunday Mass, she looked at Andrea, who was not a stranger to her, but was now a person to consider spending her life with. He is truly a good and handsome boy. But she suddenly felt deeply disturbed and hurried down the hill leading to Via Luccio 22. The memory of that event, written over forty years later, was eloquent:

*“...after the Mass, upon my return home, I experienced a sudden fear. Entering the house, I hurried to my room in which there was a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart ... I stood before the Sacred Heart and told him:*

*Lord, you alone are enough.*

*I descended the stairs and went to my father to tell him: no, I will not accept his hand.”*

Lord, you alone are enough! She gave her “Yes” to him who had chosen her first and who, from this moment onward, asked to be “the One and Only” in her life, “in joy and in sorrow, in health and in sickness, in the homeland and in exile...”

Now the way was clear and her lifestyle took on new meaning:

*“From that moment onward I changed my activities considerably. I was no longer satisfied with the mortifications, constant prayer, daily Mass, weekly Confession and Communion. I discovered a book under the staircase: Pratica di amare Gesu Cristo (Exercises in the love of Jesus Christ). It helped me in the orientation of my prayer life. I also read the Story of a Soul which was of great benefit to me. It instilled in me a strong desire to enter the religious life”.*

She felt that her life must be offered completely to God even though she did not know how or where. By now she was no longer a minor, but her decision caused an uproar in the family. She accepted this as a trial which served to strengthen her resolve and her observance of the fourth commandment.

### *Meeting Fr. Alberione*

She continued in her efforts to learn always more. Her passion for reading and search for “good books” lead her to a meeting with the great apostle of modern times: Fr. James

Alberione. After searching for the requested book and a brief dialogue, he said to her: “When are you coming to St. Paul?”

On that same Saturday, among the market stands in Alba, she once again met Eufrasina, her friend from the factory. She was already a member of the feminine group founded by Fr. Alberione; and with contagious enthusiasm, invited her to visit.

Another light shone on the pathway for Orsola. Already twenty-four, she felt obliged to dispense with further delays and the opposition of her family, which seemed however to intensify when she expressed her desire to enter at St. Paul, since the work of Fr. Alberione was only at its beginning and there were no clear horizons or guarantees for the future..

### *Following the Master*

Orsola set a date: at the conclusion of the summer harvest. When the difficulties were finally resolved, on July 29, 1922, accompanied by her father, she began the adventure which would lead her through the unsearchable ways of the Lord.

Fr. Alberione, who in 1914 had begun the Pious Society of St. Paul with two boys, already had a considerable group of Apostles of the Good Press, who lived in their own house in Alba. Since 1915 there was also a group of young women who only the week before, on July 22, with the profession of private vows and the nomination of Tecla Merlo as the Superior General, were officially established as Daughters of St. Paul.

Orsola had before her the program given by the Founder for the entire project: “Glory to God, peace to all humanity”, to spread the Gospel using the modern means, which at that time consisted primarily in the press. It is certain that “in House”, every occupation, whether cleaning vegetables, cooking, washing and ironing laundry, was directed toward this purpose: the fact of being one body in Christ lead all to the same goal.

### *A new family*

Perhaps already at the time of the meeting with Orsola in the bookstore, Fr. Alberione had already felt, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, that the time had come to expand the family.

When this young woman, at the mature age of 25, entered St. Paul he gave her a book to read: “*Le donne del Vangelo*” (*The Women of the Gospel*), as a means of preparing her for the future ministry. Fr. Alberione sought to diffuse the Gospel through the press and future means, but he was convinced of the need for persons who would proclaim the Good News with their lives and influence on others, like the women who followed Jesus in his earthly pilgrimage and who were present on the morning of the resurrection; women who with the treasure of their femininity and offering would sustain and accompany the modern apostles. The word of his spiritual director, Canon Chiesa, also resounded in his ears: “*Before undertaking any project, assure yourself of a suitable group of souls who will pray and, if necessary, offer their lives for this work; if you want it to bring life*”.

### *Orsolina and Metilde*

On November 21, 1923, with a solemn gesture reminiscent of the community of Antioch in the selection of Paul and Barnabas (cf Acts 13:2), although the place and means in Alba seem very poor (we are in the kitchen and the pedestal for the proclamation is a wooden crate), Fr. Alberione said:

*“Set aside Orsola and Metilde for a mission I will entrust to them”*. The project is not clear yet, but he knows how to begin this work of the Spirit. To the logical question of Metilde: *“What will we do?”*; he answered with a triple command: *“Observe silence, silence, silence”*, as if to say: *you must listen, listen, listen* to the Lord’s message and that the Presence speaking to us is not found in the earthquake, nor in fire, but in the murmur of a light breeze, in silence (cf 1Kgs 19:11-12).

Orsola heard her name called together with Metilda Gerlotto from the group of young women living in a single house in Alba for a new work to which they would abandon themselves to God’s plan and which would be revealed through the Founder. She was chosen as the head of the group and, in January of 1924, Fr. Alberione gave her the task of choosing from among the young candidates, together with Maestra Tecla Merlo, some companions, *“especially those more inclined toward Eucharistic piety”*, thus defining the fundamental characteristic of the new group.

### *A living candle*

As the group of the first eight members was being formed, Fr. Alberione began his *“pastoral work for vocations”* for the future Pious Disciples. He sent a letter dated January 24, 1924 to all the parish priests of Italy:

*“I have enclosed a draft of the rule of life for an institute of young women dedicated to the continuous adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. I await an adorer from you, that is, a vocation from your parish. She will be like a living candle which burns and consumes itself before the Good Shepherd for yourselves and for your parish. Many thanks be to God. Humbly submitted. Devoutly in the Lord, Fr. Alberione James”*.

Many pastors went to Alba to accompany their *“living candle”*.

### *A new name, a new mission*

On February 10, 1924, the feastday of St. Scholastica, she was chosen by Fr. Alberione to begin this new foundation with the first nucleus of eight members, who the following March 25, feast of the Annunciation, would have its official manifestation with the investiture of the religious habit and the profession of vows. The eight also receive a new name and Orsola became Sr. Scholastica of Divine Providence.

The same day they began their *“primary work”*: the Eucharistic adoration in two hour turns, which some months later, exactly for the feast of the Assumption, with the arrival of new members, would be extended throughout the night.

They must “provide for the needs of the Divine Master and his ministers”: the love for Jesus Master lead Sr. Scholastica to live as a sister and mother beside the Priests and Disciples of the Society of St. Paul in unlimited self donation which would extend to all of the priests in the Church.

Sr. Scholastica was 28 years of age, filled with enthusiasm, and the light she received daily in the school of the Eucharistic Master accompanied her in a role which would require increasing amounts of prudence and creativity. She is responsible for the new family growing beside that already consolidated of the Daughters of St. Paul, guided by Venerable Tecla Merlo, who was constantly at her side to welcome, interpret and fulfill the project of the Founder and bring, through a difficult journey, the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master to their recognition within the Church.

### *The first Mother*

From this point onward it is impossible to follow the story of Scholastica without following that of the Pious Disciples step by step. If every person is to be understood in the environment in which they live, she who was chosen to begin a new congregation beside the extraordinary charismatic figure of Blessed James Alberione, must be understood in the context of a continual process of change which does not destroy the identity of the person, but transforms her into the incarnation and communication of that particular lifestyle.

It is not by chance that, when a young woman asked Fr. Alberione how to be a Pious Disciple in those first years before the existence of a written rule, he would respond: “look at Sr. Scholastica”.

The Pious Disciples, developed and, guided by Mother Scholastica, managed to overcome many difficulties and maintain their identity even through those moments after 1929 until 1947 when they were juridically included in the approval of the Daughters of St. Paul, although maintaining their specific formation. These were years in which the exchange between charism and institution enables one to touch the action of the Spirit who guides and corrects decisions which are good in themselves, but sometimes based only on human wisdom. There is the observance of the canonical rules for the official acts, but Mother Scholastica, in creative docility to the directives of the Founder, continues to nurture the Pious Disciples according to their specific vocation and mission centered on the Eucharist, the Priesthood and the Liturgy, while awaiting their complete manifestation.

### *Mission in Africa*

Trials lived in God’s light, always lead to broader horizons. Humanly speaking, the decision of Fr. Alberione to request, in 1936, that Mother Scholastica leave her position as leader of the Pious Disciples and transfer first to Rome as assistant to the novice mistress, and then to Africa, is incomprehensible.

It was November of 1936 and, with Sr. Elia Ferrero, she left for Alexandria, Egypt with the objective of exploring the possibility of foundations in western Africa and in the Holy Land. In Egypt they found themselves within the ethnic minority in the midst of a Moslem population among whom they strive to live side by side and establish a dialogue.

Her manner, always accompanied by a smile, was well received and she was called the “good lady” by all who lived in the area. For the diffusion of the Gospel, she did not hesitate to wear secular clothing to obtain permission to board ships passing through the area in order to bring the “good press” to the passengers.

### *The return from Egypt*

The group of Pious Disciples of the Divine Master, by now numerous, suffered without the guidance of the Mother, but with determination, it also showed that the seed of their specific charism had taken root. It has strengthened and was not confused with that of the Daughters of St. Paul, beautiful as it is. The Founder, after less than two years, recalled Mother Scholastica from Egypt to resume her ministry of leadership and maternal presence also for the brothers of the Society of St. Paul, and to prepare the soil for the recognition of the Institute in the Church.

For Fr. Alberione this is still a period of foundational creativity. In 1936 the horizons are opened for the pastoral ministry in the parishes and he gives life to the Sisters of Jesus the Good Shepherd, also called the “Pastorelle” (Shepherdesses). In the meantime he became aware of the need to secure the appropriate juridical permission for the rapidly developing institutions of the Pious Disciples and the Pastorelle. Once again, at least for the feminine branches, he does not want to give up the concept of “one family” with a single approval for the three branches dedicated to various apostolic expressions. It was difficult, however, to reconcile the desires of the founder with the canonical regulations. In this case there also emerges the strength of the charisms which cannot be fused into one reality. The difficulties of this journey, then, enhance the manifestation of God’s plan.

During the Second World War the Pauline Family received two important seals from the Church with the pontifical approval of the Society of St. Paul (1941) and that of the Daughters of St. Paul (1943), while the project involving the three feminine Congregations under a single approval was rejected.

### *Looking toward the future*

From the moment she returned from Egypt, Mother Scholastica attentively scrutinized and sought to provide a solid foundation for the future generations. She recognized Sr. M. Lucia Ricci, barely 25 years of age, as a suitable person for the direction of the novitiate. Cultural formation was also important and, with the collaboration of Blessed Timothy Giaccardo, the first priest of the Society of St. Paul, who was entrusted by the Founder with the care of the Pious Disciples, she organized study programs at the various levels.

In 1938 a new apostolic activity was introduced which forms part of the mission of the Pious Disciples and which would provide the necessary means for sustaining the Institute, that is, the liturgical activity, called “Domus Dei”. Mother Scholastica enthusiastically promoted the production of holy cards, painting, sacred art, embroidery, sewing vestments, and also sent sisters out for artistic and technical formation in the various areas.

The external works are useful and necessary, but Scholastica is aware that the source of stability is the total offering of one's life. It is in this same period that Jesus Master began to guide her toward the path of an offering that would profoundly mark the rest of her life. On the feast of the Transfiguration in 1941, the day in which we contemplate Jesus directed toward his Hour, she wrote:

*"Today, August 6, Feast of the Transfiguration of Jesus, I offered my life for the Congregation of the Pious Disciples. I will accept everything the Lord wishes to send me for this purpose, in reparation for all my shortcomings and to obtain the grace to die in a perfect act of love for God. All of this with the assistance of Jesus and Mary."*

### *Living in the Church*

There were other sisters more culturally prepared, but in 1945, when the time came to write the Constitutions and especially the text for the practical directives for the Pious Disciples, Fr. Alberione called Mother Scholastica. Before beginning to write, she visited each community and listened to each sister in order to prepare a detailed report.

The recognition of the Church was a dream Mother Scholastica never set aside. She was aware of the fact that, as the communities expanded geographically and became more numerous, it would be ever more difficult to reconcile the two levels: juridically being called Daughters of St. Paul and in fact, in their daily life and activity, being Pious Disciples. This clear sense of belonging and of identity needed to be officially recognized. This "legal" situation as opposed to the actual one was not a problem for the first generations, but now it became insupportable and she, as Mother, in obedience to the word of the Founder and sustained by the maternal wisdom of Maestra Tecla Merlo, felt obligated to work for the stability of this way. In order to maintain unity and foster the development now that the Pious Disciples numbered more than three hundred and the houses were established in various regions of Italy and other continents, it became necessary to have their own Rule of Life written and approved rather than relying on an oral tradition..

On July 9, 1945, the request for the approval of the Pious Disciples was presented to the Holy Father, together with the Constitutions prepared by Fr. Alberione, with the specific inspiration of Mother Scholastica.

Everything seemed to be in order, in accordance with the time required for these procedures, and Fr. Alberione, at the end of December 1945, left with Maestra Tecla Merlo for an extended visit to the communities of North and South America.

In Rome, Fr. Timothy Giaccardo and Fr. Federico Muzzarelli were vigilant regarding the relations with the Holy See but, in particular, Mother Scholastica's heart and eyes were anxiously waiting for this juridical birth; for the seal of the Church upon the work the Founder had established since the beginning as the seed deposited within her, that she might accompany its germination and growth.

### *Hope for life and the storm*

We are now in the spring of 1946 and those examining the paperwork are perplexed since it does not request, as prescribed, the approval of a new institute, but the recognition of

the group of the Pious Disciples, currently juridically Daughters of St. Paul, as an institute of Pontifical rite. Canon law does not provide for this solution for a situation which is already in existence. The request is thus understood as an attempt at a split and the request was placed on file.

Mother Scholastica understood this. In the absence of the Founder, she felt personally responsible. After having prayed and fasted, requested the advice and prayer of her sisters, she decided to ascend the Vatican hill to foster the cause of the Pious Disciples.

She thought that perhaps the deposited forms did not explain the situation well. Who better than she could clarify any doubts? She who from the beginning had received the seed of life of the Pious Disciples and made it grow, protected in the midst of serious difficulties, could manifest this? She is aware of her littleness, of her lack of understanding of canon law, of not possessing diplomatic skills, but she is confident that manifesting the motives of her heart and life, the experts will know how to translate these into law.

Certainly it is not easy to communicate, and her warm and passionate plea to not disregard the request for approval of the Pious Disciples did not make a good impression on the authorities at the Holy See. Her manner of speaking sounded like that of a person who was stirring up division or rebellion, and seemed to pretend to assert that it was certainly the will of God and that only Fr. Alberione, in this case, was the man of God who could pronounce the final word.

For Mother Scholastica this is the beginning of a particular conformation with Christ in his Paschal Mystery, exactly during the time in which the liturgy observes the Passion of the Lord. She and the Pious Disciples would be asked to wait a year before seeing the light of the resurrection.

Mother Scholastica was 49 years of age and, in her journey of conformation with Christ, she is like the mature head of grain: in order for life to continue, the seed must fall to the ground and die.

### *Exile*

April 15, 1946 is Monday of Holy Week. It is the day in which the liturgy contemplates Mary anointing the feet of Jesus of Nazareth with aromatic nard at Bethany. It is also the day on which Mother Scholastica broke her alabaster vase in accepting a disposition that penetrated deeply into her being. In fact, by disposition of the Congregation for Religious, she is removed from her role of governing the Pious Disciples. We read in her writings:

*“...when I was alone, in my soliloquy with the Lord, in the turmoil of my thoughts and the anguish that was breaking my heart, I offered all to the Lord out of love. It was truly pure love, pouring from a bleeding and almost agonizing heart, like that of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, but also accompanied by a peace, serenity and hope which accepted and offered everything in thanksgiving to God, to whatever he willed, for the perseverance of the Pious Disciples in their vocation.”*

At the beginning, in 1923, she was “set aside” to become the root of the Congregation, now she was “set aside” to continue being the foundation of the building already raised,

to live, like the Divine Master, in love to the supreme sign with the offering of her life. A touching word of the Founder reaches her in these circumstances:

*“You must be like the material used for the foundation of the House. It is unseen but the value of the building lies in the firmness of its foundation. Others will make a good impression as the whitewashed and painted walls and they will be given praise, but before God it is the one who is hidden in the foundation, sustaining the entire building. He will strengthen her in virtue and humility”.*

She never doubted that the Pious Disciples would exist in the Church and that the Spirit would enlighten the hearts of the men of the Church. Initially, it seemed that the “small flock” of the Pious Disciples, left without a leader, would disband, scatter, or become disoriented, but this is only for a short while... Mother Scholastica, transmitting what she received from the Founder, formed persons with a strong sense of identity and the “little flock” regrouped stronger than ever. To Fr. Angelico d’Alessandria, the Capuchin friar sent as the Apostolic Visitor to remove any sign of autonomy from the group of the Pious Disciples, the sisters demonstrated such a solid resolve and determination that the able diplomat was forced to change his stand. His decisive *“I have come to bury the Pious Disciples”*, pronounced in mid October 1946, was to become a journey of resurrection by December which would be undertaken with the assistance of Blessed Timothy Giaccardo and the expert canon lawyer, Fr. Federico Muzzarelli.

Mother Scholastica did not become depressed. She forgave and prayed for those who “brought this punishment” upon her. Living in hope and surrender, she listened ever more attentively to the voice of her Master and Spouse. She shuddered for her suffering daughters and, whenever possible, she continues to offer her support through letters and words. She is also in need of consolation, but she is the one to console the others. She lives in a special silence in which she communicates without violating the terms imposed upon her.

In the footsteps of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, the disciple Scholastica shares the lot of her Master in his Hour of trial and repeats: “Lord, you alone are enough”.

### *The Light of life*

On Monday of Holy Week in 1946, Mother Scholastica accepted her exile as perfume to be poured upon the feet of the Master. On the Monday of Holy Week of the following year, almost dancing with joy, she would excitedly leave Nice (France) for the community of Bordighera and then proceed to Alba, where the first light of resurrection was dawning for the Pious Disciples.

On April 3, 1947, Holy Thursday, the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master are approved by the Church through the decree signed by the bishop of Alba, Msgr. Luigi M. Grassi. Mother Scholastica is recognized as the first ex-superior general and the Founder requested that she be treated with filial acknowledgement, respect, devotion, love and that she be taken seriously in her teaching, advice, directives, and prayer.

In the house of St. Paul, in Alba, she would be the first of the sisters who, as the witnesses relate, hurried with a luminous face to the place where, before the bishop’s

delegate and Mother M. Lucia Ricci, nominated Superior General, she would pronounce the formula of profession: “*according to the Constitutions of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master*”. Finally! Mother Scholastica experiences the joy of the woman who forgets her suffering once the new life appears (cf Jn 16:21).

What is she experiencing on this day? Some of her emotion is evident in this letter to the Founder:

*“I have only one desire remaining, to live in the Lord’s house all the days of my life, fulfilling my daily tasks in silence and hiddenness, and anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Spouse and the eternal wedding. ...I think I have given everything to Jesus... Every day, with the help of his grace, I want to offer him generously and with perfect love all he desires from his miserable creature...”*

1948 would mark another important step for the Pious Disciples. Only 9 months after the diocesan approval, on January 12, they receive the pontifical approval, welcomed by Mother Scholastica with great exultation:

*“we received the beautiful news of the approval. You can only imagine the explosion of joy that erupted in the hearts of each of us! It seems like a dream. Also today I offered the adoration for this grace. What a grace! It does not seem real. This evening we sang the Te Deum with our entire hearts and with whatever voice we had. The Lord has truly shown us his preferential love...”*

#### *A second homeland*

By this time the Congregation had all the necessary documents to progress rapidly and Mother Scholastica leaves her native country to begin anew in Latin America, and specifically, in Argentina, where she arrived on October 2, 1948.

She left her country, her elderly beloved father whom she would never see again, the sisters, and the closeness to the Founder, all of which cost her a great deal. But Fr. Alberione had said that moving to another house, or country, is like moving to another room. Mother Scholastica received this new assignment in this spirit. In a difficult socio-political situation, she began working first of all for vocations, for the young women for whom she prepared a welcoming environment. She provided zealously for the development of the apostolic works, making use also of the local resources.

#### *Without attracting attention*

After remaining in Argentina for 15 years, she was invited to return to Italy in 1963. The Congregation is on the threshold of its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of foundation and, in order to respond to the request of the new generations to come into contact with the treasure of the origins, the Superior General, Mother M. Lucia Ricci, asked Mother Scholastica to write her “memoirs”.

In Italy she lived as a sister among sisters without calling attention to herself. She also accepted humiliations, as she continued to nourish the roots. She prepared vestments and liturgical decorations, continually perfuming them with prayer as she worked. Her smile and her amiability were penetrating and communicative, like the sun which reaches all without expecting thanks; simply happy to provide light and warmth.

She lived the season of the Second Vatican Council with joy and active participation, perceiving it, together with the Founder, as a seal of the Holy Spirit upon the Congregation.

#### *Her gaze and heart for the world*

She had a lively desire to participate in social events in order to bring them to the Divine Master in the Eucharistic adoration. In one of her notes she said:

*“Read the newspapers, listen to the radio and television in order to be aware of the needs of souls and to pray for all the needs of the country, of the Church, of the souls of all humanity”.*

The theologian, Bruno Forte, speaking of Christian contemplation before the Eucharist and the Word, that is, of mediation which is historical, concise, strong, precise, and underscoring that the person who is more contemplative by vocation must be more rooted in history, recalled that *“the rich and beautiful icon, Mother Scholastica, who would go to her Eucharistic adoration with the newspaper under her arm,...thus bringing all of history to glory...”* The prayer, in particular circumstances, also gives rise to concrete actions. For example, when the laws regarding abortion and divorce were being promulgated, she wrote to Hon. Fortuna in 1976 and to the President of the Republic, Hon. Leone in 1978.

#### *Investing in youth*

During the years 1973 to 1981, while living in Rome at the heart of the Congregation during a period of many social changes, Mother Scholastica maintained a special relationship with the young women in formation through letters and dialogue. She made herself little with the little ones in order to spread a good word or to warn them of dangers. She communicated and exhorted them on things she had not learned from books but from her experience of life with Jesus, the Book of Life. She always repeated “only He is my All”, and that “my only dream is to love Jesus, my only Love, my All”.

To an ever greater extent, she manifested the desire to go to her beloved Spouse by whom she was greatly loved. Her constant repetition, “obtain merits...become saints” was nothing other than a practical way to follow the invitation of Jesus to “accumulate treasure for the kingdom of heaven”, and have no other treasure (cf Mt 6:21; Lk 12:34).

#### *Nostalgia for Paradise*

Mother Scholastica had already seen many of the sisters with whom she had begun her journey depart for paradise, but on November 21, 1971, the death of the Founder would be incisive in her life. The father, guide, man of God who had accepted and accompanied her for more than 50 years in the mysterious ways of the Divine Master concluded his earthly pilgrimage and the nostalgia for Paradise heightened in her.

From 1981 onwards, the parable of her earthly life gradually went toward its conclusion. She would participate in the III General Chapter and on April 8, 1981, meet John Paul II, receiving from him the “kiss reserved for the little ones”. Then, as her strength continued

to decline progressively, she was transferred to the house in Sanfre (Cuneo) where she would spend the last six years of her life.

### *Silence and fulfillment*

While the physical strength of Mother Scholastica was declining, the fire within her remained alive and continued to spread.

From 1984 she is deprived of the ability to speak but, even without making a sound, she carried on lively non verbal communication through her expressive gaze and the movement of her hand. These are years in which her small room becomes a place of encounter, a place in which the first Pious Disciple of the Divine Master instills in the hearts of the numerous sisters from the five continents who surround her, a precious heritage; that to which her entire life bore witness: "Lord, you alone are enough!"

She was the first Blessed James Alberione chose to give life to the new foundation, and the last of the first nucleus of eight sisters to close the foundational arch.

On March 24, 1924 the eight who were chosen lived the emotional vigil of their investiture which would take place on the Feast of the Annunciation. On March 24, 1987, as the community sang the first Vespers contemplating Mary's "yes", the Disciple Scholastica pronounced her final "yes" upon the earth, "*ready and adorned to celebrate the eternal wedding with the Divine Master*".

### *The gift continues...*

On March 13, 1993, in Alba, the diocesan process for the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Mother Scholastica Rivata began. It is advancing through the process of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

On April 3, 2008 the mortal remains of Mother M. Scholastica Rivata were transferred from the cemetery of Alba to the Church of Jesus Master in Rome, Via Portuense 741.

*Prayer*

*O Jesus, our sole Master Way, Truth and Life, we praise and bless you for your Disciple Sr. Mary Scholastica Rivata. Sustained by the Holy Spirit and with the strength of the Eucharist, in the joys and sufferings of her daily life she accepted the Father's will. In the footsteps of Mary, your and our Mother, she offered herself joyfully in the service of God and of her neighbor. May her example help us to choose the way of the Gospel in every circumstance of our lives. Through her intercession grant us the grace we ask....  
Amen*

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### Presence of the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master around the world



"Today you commemorated the day in which the first Pious Disciples made their investiture. At that time they were eight. How many are you now? Much progress has been made! You have followed the Master, who preceded you. He has sustained, consoled, and sanctified you".

*Blessed James Alberione, February 10, 1962*

"Go forward! The Lord has blessed you and continues to bless you. You now have numerous houses and you are spread in many nations. Strive to reach 80 nations!"

*Blessed James Alberione, May 21, 1964*

