



Dear Sisters,

In the heart of this night, May 30, 2018, the Bridegroom introduced to the eternal wedding banquet our sister, who was ready with her lamp prepared,

SR. M. FIORELLA – FRANCESCA SCHERMIDORI
born on November 23, 1949, in Montegaldella (Vicenza).

Francesca, nicknamed Franca, entered the Congregation on July 18, 1959, in Cinisello Balsamo (MI), where she joined the group of pre-postulants – called Immaculatines – and grew in the human and Christian formation. Confirming her decision to continue on to religious consecration, after the novitiate she made her first religious profession on March 25, 1967, in Rome, and her perpetual profession on March 30, 1974, in Montegaldella (Vicenza). She wrote to Mother M. Lucia Ricci, Superior General at that time: *«I gave thanks to the Lord who, once again looked upon me with favor, choosing me to be his forever. Also to you I owe heartfelt gratitude for having accepted me definitively into our Congregation. With the perpetual profession, I assume a great responsibility in the Church as a witness, in the Congregation as an active member, open to the apostolate. The Lord will continue to assist me as he has always done, and I believe that the community life, which I greatly enjoy, will certainly aid me in living my life in joy and service»* (March 31, 1974). Sr. M. Fiorella, as a pious disciple, has truly borne witness to these values: dedication, love for the Congregation and for the Church. After her perpetual profession, celebrated in her native place, she wrote: *«The morning of March 31 (1974) was bright and clean: it could have been a morning like many others. Instead it was very different, not only for my dear ones and myself, but also for all the people in the parish. Everything, even the light seemed to be a gift and a friendly invitation to participate in the common feast. I left my town as a child, bringing with me an offering that was unconscious but pleasing. I returned to offer my gift freely. In that same church God desired that I offer my most beautiful “yes”; I felt the song within my heart: Baptism, First Communion received from my uncle, a priest, who celebrated his first Mass in the parish. In that same place, after many years, I would receive the Eucharist from his hands, precisely on the day of my perpetual profession... At twenty-four years of age I entrusted myself to the Lord forever: I was happy. Everything was a grace!»*.

Last year she celebrated her 50th anniversary of religious profession: she desired to celebrate it in her parish of origin, with the participation of the community. It was an extraordinary event for all the people, who were called to consider the value of a life totally offered to Jesus Master and to the mission of proclaiming and bearing witness to him.

In 1964, Sr. M. Fiorella was assigned to the study of Sacred Music, attending formation courses in the Diocesan School of Alba. In 1969 she attended the School of Sacred Music for religious (AISC) in Rome, and then in Florence. In the meantime she offered her apostolic collaboration in the embroidery and sewing of sacred vestments.

During the 1970's, while she animated the singing in the Community, she attended the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music in Rome. On February 10, 1982, Memorial of St. Scholastica, she defended her thesis: *LITURGY AND SACRED MUSIC in the instruction of Fr. James Alberione to the Pious Disciples of the Divine Master* and continued with a Masters in Gregorian Chant. She wrote: *«The liturgy of the earth is the preparation for the perfect heavenly liturgy. What is done here below for vocation and for mission is valid and meritorious preparation for the contemplation of eternal beatitude, for the perfect song of heaven»* (From her thesis, p. 49).

From 1982 to 1985 she was in Paris, dedicated to various works and services: embroidery, driver, and taking organ lessons. From 1985 she was in Rome in the *Regina Apostolorum* community for the musical animation of the community and in the local Church. Together with other sisters, she dedicated herself to the musical composition of psalms and other liturgical songs, which were recorded and widely diffused by the Saint Paul Editions – Liturgical Apostolate. In the meantime she participated in various ecclesial organizations: in 1995 she was appointed for a five-year term as Director of the Religious

Secretariat, member of the Directive Council of AISC (Italian Association of St. Cecilia). From 1999 until the present she was responsible for the liturgy at USMI (Union of Major Superiors in Italy), and in 2012 she was appointed by the General Secretary of the CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference), as a member of the Committee for Eucharistic Congresses on behalf of USMI. Numerous expressions of gratitude confirm the treasure of her collaboration on behalf of the religious women in Italy. «*Your talents in the area of liturgical animation and song helped the religious experience the Convention week with meaning and with joy*» (2010). «*Your contribution is essential for the Convention. Thank you also for your smile that benefits all of us*» (Sr. Riccarda and all the sisters participating, 2012).

We have in our ears and our soul the voice of Sr. M. Fiorella: fresh, imposing, convinced, full of life and life-inspiring. She often invited the liturgical assembly to sing the praises of God with the urgent invitation: SING! She loved liturgical song and committed herself to choosing songs according to the specific ritual texts, preparing the appropriate leaflet for each Sunday. It can be said that song formed her person even in its incessant rhythm!

She sang a great deal; she made others sing a great deal: many religious at the USMI assemblies and, in these past years, animated the music in the daily televised Masses from SAT TV2000, in Advent and Lent, from the Hospital *Agostino Gemelli*. The choir, for those celebrations, was composed of patients, doctors, nurses! Thus she offered her precious gift to many of the sick who participated in the Eucharistic Celebration through the TV.

The Pauline Family, especially in the liturgical celebrations in Rome, was able to appreciate her service which, for years, contributed to the festive and rich prayer of Christian hope, in the awareness that *the person who sings, prays twice!*

The voice with which she was gifted and educated since childhood was, for her, a human way toward a great apostolate. A voice placed at the service of the glory of God. She composed many songs, inspired by the Word of God, which were recorded and making their way through sound waves to diffuse the Gospel. She was aware of this and, in recounting an experience of animation, wrote to Mother M. Lucia Ricci: «*I saw that the people were very enthusiastic, maybe because we were a group of sisters. How much good we can do with song! Each time I am in one of these occasions I think that with our voices we can convert even one person, and who knows how many others will be left with a desire for God! We returned joyfully and with a great desire to sing God's praises!*» (June 17, 1980).

A woman of prayer, in the first hours of the morning she was before her Lord, unleashing that song of love that would take voice in the community prayer. Generous and available for many community services, she gave her contribution as a local counselor, assisting in a journey of growing awareness. From the USA, Sr. M. Regina Cesarato communicated: «*I greeted her at the end of April, at Portuense, on Sunday after the Eucharistic Celebration of the community. I was with Sr. M. Provvidenza Raimondo and she rejoiced at our presence. In her outlook, though being very weak, she had a lively hope of regaining her strength, according to God's will. We talked about various things...as well as about USMI and the new national president. Since the end of the 1990's, through her singing, Sr. M. Fiorella offered a great contribution in liturgical animation to USMI at the national Assemblies and the other gatherings at various levels. She was known to all the sisters for her dancing and unique style. The Christian life is truly a celebration because Jesus Christ is risen! I can say that she loved our Congregation, in which she entered very young. During the month of September 2017, I was present with other sisters at the solemn celebration of her 50th anniversary in the Parish. I introduced her songs in the Saturday evening concert. She insisted that I be present also because I had written many of the texts of her songs; for special occasions she would ask me for a text and she would put it to music, at times modifying the text according to the requirements of the musical composition. I consider this apostolic contribution as a gift.*

...For her, singing was a true apostolate, and in the 50th anniversary of profession in the Parish she hoped, as she confided in me, that the execution of her songs would touch the hearts of the people and that, perhaps, another young woman might become a Sister Disciple. Our faith in the Lord Jesus, Crucified and Risen, always makes us sing, because the love of a life entrusted to God and transformed by love cannot die, even though it passes through the mysterious transformation of death. It is in this faith that we entrust Sr. M. Fiorella to God, in an act of obedient adoration. Sr M Regina Cesarato».

Afflicted with polycythemia vera since 2010, she followed the progress and evolution of the disease with precision and awareness. This, at the beginning of Holy Week, presented the first signs of its possible evolution: within a short time, its complications caused her death, which took place in the Hospital *Regina Apostolorum* in Albano Laziale where she had been admitted.

The long journey of her consecrated life, her enthusiastic, open and generous offering led Sr. M. Fiorella to say her **yes**. A yes which during the Paschal season prepared her to respond to the question: *Can you drink from my chalice?* With Jesus she went to the eternal Passover, in his Kingdom of light, to sing with Mary and all the saints, the unceasing praise that belongs to those who followed the innocent Lamb sacrificed for us!

Brothers and sisters of the Pauline Family, friends near and far, send their condolences to us and to her large family, and share in our hope for life in the Risen Lord, shared by all who have celebrated the eternal Passover! Sr. M. Fiorella, we accept your invitation that comes to us from Heaven: Sing, praise the Lord with me!

S. H. Paolo Mancini