



Dear Sisters,

Today, December 11, 2023, at 9:10 AM, the Divine Master, as Spouse and Lord, visited our Congregation once again and, from the community of Sanfré (Italy), he definitively called to himself our sister,

SR. M. GRAZIA – CHIARA LEONARDI
born on January 23, 1936, in Spezzano di Fiorano (Modena - Italy).

The sixth of twelve children, the infant was brought to the baptismal font in the Parish of S. Giovanni Evangelista in Spezzano on the day of her birth and received the name of Chiara. She grew up in a large family, animated by the Christian faith, by the essential nature of farm life and by active participation in the life of the parish. Through the grace of the vocation to the consecrated life, five children embraced religious life: Sr. Agnese, sjbp, Francesco, isga, Sr. Cecilia, fsp, Sr. M. Francesca Rosa, a Cappuchian sister, and Chiara. In fact, at the age of twenty, on November 18, 1956, Chiara entered among the Sister Disciples of the Divine Master in Rome, in the community *Regina Apostolorum*. After completing the regular novitiate, on March 25, 1959, she made her religious profession in Rome and five years later on March 25, 1964, she made her perpetual profession, also in Rome.

During the years of temporary vows, she obtained a diploma in community nursing and then received various ministries in the Italian communities. It is difficult to synthesize in a few lines the dynamic missionary life of Sr. M. Grazia, but she never abandoned the characteristic of joyful availability. After the two years (1966 – 1968) spent in Athlone (Ireland) she accepted the missionary mandate to the Extreme Orient and arrived in Seoul (South Korea) where she remained until 1975. It was the time of the consolidation of our presence and the need to construct a house suitable for the community that was growing in number. She followed the work, dealt with the architects and the authorities, and in dialogue with the Pauline Brothers who prudently accompanied us in the complex enterprise. The Korean sisters remember her for her faith, her missionary spirit which enabled her to accept aspects of the Korean culture that were very different from her Emilian habits: the food, language, lifestyle, etc. But what always helped her to overcome the geographic and cultural differences was the love for the Congregation, the trust in God and in Divine Providence, and a healthy sense of humor that enabled her to overcome the difficulties, which at times were insurmountable. They testify, in fact, that in the moments of greatest difficulty she sang *Credo in unum Deum* as a liberating hymn of trust, obtaining the desired results.

From Seoul, she returned to Rome for some years (1975 – 1982) and then left for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Also from this period, her writings contain important testimonies. In dialogue with Sr. M. Arcangela Brugiolo and the Superior General, Mother M. Lucia Ricci, she dedicated herself to the acquisition of the land and of the house in Lubumbashi, thus giving a new perspective for the presence and the mission in the Congolese land. Lubumbashi and Kinshasa, in the different communities, saw her working and inventive in apostolic charity, devout in the Pauline and Eucharistic prayer, animated by the joy of watching the growth of the new generations of the Sister Disciples.

Returning to Italy, she collaborated for some years in the Liturgical Apostolate Centers in Rome, in Rimini and in the International Liturgical Center (CIL) in the General House. In light of her missionary experience, in 1994 she was assigned to the Vatican to assist at the Vatican Telephones (1994 – 2017). In the international community, of which she was a member, she was a presence of mediation, of understanding and of humor, affectionately supporting the sisters in moments of discomfort or nostalgia.

These were the years in which, due to her specific service, she had the opportunity to enter into contact with the Catholic, that is universal, reality of the Church. During the papacy of St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis her missionary spirit enabled her to know realities that were otherwise unknown to sustain them with the liturgical prayer and intercessions in the Eucharistic Adoration.

Then she was transferred to Turin, to Albano Laziale, and to Bordighera where she undertook various services in the communities, according to her possibilities. Transferred to Sanfré some months ago, there she consumed her earthly life facing the illness that led to her death with dignity and faith.

Sr. M. Paola Gasperini who, as Provincial Superior, accompanied her in the last years, testified of her: «I knew her many years ago and I remember her humor and the joy in singing and in fraternity. But in the last years, I discovered the sensitivity of her soul. She loved to contemplate nature, to walk and to praise the Lord: during the last years spent in Bordighera she had a great thirst for infinity and for beauty. Along the years she went through the nights of the spirit combined with the fragility that came with the decline in her strength: she suffered, she entrusted herself to the Lord, but it always remained in her like a thorn in the flesh. What characterized her was the constant SEARCH for what the Lord was asking of her and how to continue to live even in the hours of darkness. She always concluded: *«I want only one thing: to do the will of God wherever it leads me»*. She was aware of her edgy character, she suffered and worked with courage and faith to soften it. Even in advanced age she never gave up, convinced that she could continue to improve until the end.

Now from Paradise, Sr. M. Grazia, you can finally join your voice to that of the angels signing *Gloria in Excelsis Deo et in terra Pax hominibus!* Intercede for us who, pilgrims on the earth, walk toward the goal. Obtain for all of us, especially for the new generations of Sister Disciples, the gift of a *burning heart and feet walking toward* the coming of the Kingdom of God in the world.

Sr. M. Micaela Monetti'