

Turin, 16 March 2012

*"In old age they still produce fruit;  
they are always green and full of sap"* (Ps 92: 14)

Dearest Sisters,

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March our dear Sr. Ilda, who had lived a life of fidelity and fecundity, like a century-old tree was transplanted into the garden of Heaven. Together with Sr. Ilda, another piece of our history has passed away, but we are certain that we can count on her in Heaven. She was the oldest Sister of our Congregation. Next June she would have been 103 years old and in the month of August would have celebrated the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of her Religious Profession!

**Sr. Maria Ilda** (Luigia Galvan), was born on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1909 in Borgo Valsugana (Trento), a small town in Trentino Alto Adige, which developed along the banks of the River Brenta. A Church dedicated to St. Ann was also found there. On 19<sup>th</sup> October 1929, she entered our Congregation in the Mother House at Turin, where she celebrated the events of her formative journey:

her Vestition on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1930  
her First Profession on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1932  
and her Perpetual Profession on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1938.

In 1932, she was transferred to the Community of Rome-Via Buonarroti as a student, pursuing her Teacher's Training Certificate. In her diary, Sr. Ilda wrote thus, about those years: *"I studied, prayed, and for about two hours, I assisted during the recreation of the children. I was creative, imaginative and the children used to listen to me and follow me. I cherish that experience of community, religious and intellectual life. Four years filled with real wealth!"*.

The first field of her true and proper apostolate was Grosseto, where she was sent in 1935, remaining there for 16 long years as Directress of the Boarders. In the Chronicles of the Community we read: *"In the morning, Sr. Ilda taught Religion and did various substitutions; in the afternoon, she was busy taking care of the Boarders, a tedious work, because they were about 50 in all, and they all had to go to school with their homework done. Aside from that, she devoted herself to the Boarders who had difficulty in comprehension, explaining the lessons to them once again. When this was not possible in the afternoon, because no one could relieve her, she did it in the evening after supper"*. She herself thus, remembered those years: *"With the Boarders I feel at home. Each one knows that she can count on me, at anytime. I placed all their problems in my heart"*.

In 1951, she took up the same task in Rome and the following year, in Acireale. In 1961, she went back again to Rome where, aside from being Directress of the Boarders, she also taught Religion in the Middle School for seven years. In 1968 she was sent to Viù Colonia as Superior and in 1971 she was transferred to Turin-Via Massena as Mistress of the semi-boarders. In 1973 she was in Acireale once more as Directress of the Boarders. Taking care of their growth was the fundamental mission of Sr. Ilda.

A convinced educator, sincere and upright, she took to heart the good of each girl. This is the advice she gave to herself and to others: *"Do you want to be a real Lady, that is, in control of your own thoughts, of your interior self? Never allow others to manipulate your ideals and principles. If you want to be a real Lady, never raise your voice, never raise your voice in order to be understood: pause and look at the one you are speaking to, remember: she who knows how to conquer herself, wins"*.

She followed up the human and spiritual growth of the young girls entrusted to her, as well as their family situation. She felt the need to update herself in order to be up to the situation and be able to help the girls in their studies. Behind a seemingly frail physique, she hid a determined and firm character, capable of directing and being obeyed. She was exigent with the Boarders, but she loved them much and they loved her in return.

*"I remember her as a small person, but with exceptional strength – one of the ex-boarders of Acireale wrote about her - I learned many things from her... During recreation she used to lead us in a circle making us sing. In Church, she used to make us pray, always on our knees, and I felt the Lord's closeness through her"*

vibrant voice. I told her about the first time I fell in love... When my mother died, after the final examinations, I wrote to Sr. Ilda and in her, I found the strength to help my father and my brother. Her example has guided me all my life.”

Sr. Gianna Vendoni, ex-boarder of Rome, remembers her, thus: *"In the boarding, she used to make us toe the line and was very keen that we were always presentable, with well combed hair, polished shoes and neat clothes. It used to annoy me, but on growing up, I understood how right she was. When I entered the Congregation, she always showed me all her love which, as a girl, maybe I had not understood... Now, I cherish in my heart all that she taught me and feel that she wanted the best for each one of us so that we might find our fulfillment in life."*

Between 1980-1989, she carried out her service as Superior in Rome. Hence, called to leave her educative service, she wrote thus: *"O God, how I miss school! The school drives one to read, to update oneself. Every lesson requires commitment and effort in order to move higher. You must level up to what you say and live accordingly. The day you stop reading, you stagnate, your thoughts are less bright and your words less convincing"*.

She carried out her service as Superior, first in the Community of Viale Marconi, then followed by two years in Foyer Paul VI. In 1988 she was Superior in Via Giusti for one year. After some years in this Community, in 1992 she was transferred to Pianezza where she took up again the charge as Superior.

In 1998 she was in Turin-Mother House, as Vicar. In 2001 – at the age of 92 – finally “she took rest” and stayed in the Infirmary of the Mother House. Her presence was always serene and her answers were witty and quite funny. Her age didn’t show, she was always alive and lively, a good company. When the Sisters would visit her, her eyes lit up and she welcomed everyone with a beautiful smile. On 6<sup>th</sup> June 2009, to the joy and gladness of all, she celebrated her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Her body slowly became more and more thin, she was gradually fading away. The earthly life of Sr. Ilda, so rich with experience, turned towards its final destination: the encounter with her Spouse and the Lord of Life.

Towards the end of February, we noticed an ever greater decline. Then, on Friday evening, 9<sup>th</sup> March she took a turn for the worse and without agony, she died out like a little candle at **1:45 a.m. on 10<sup>th</sup> March**.

The funeral Mass was held on Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> March in the Chapel of our Mother House in Turin. The celebrant of the Holy Eucharist was Fr. Giovanni Binda, nephew of Sr. Ilda, who arrived in Turin together with other relatives (her sister-in-law and two nieces). Present were the Sisters of the two Communities of the Mother House, our dearest Mother Clelia and some Sisters from the nearby Communities. In his homily, Fr. Giovanni gave a brief profile of his Aunt, our dear Sister, stressing that *"the words of Paul seem also true for her: «I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith». In this Chapel she began and concluded her Religious Life after her educative mission. She prayed, she renewed her “Yes”, the journey of her long life is over. For Sr. Ilda, too, the embrace of God will dissolve the defects which every person carries as baggage"*.

Sr. Francarita, Superior of Betania Community, bid her goodbye with these words: *"The greatest gift you made to us was during this last stretch of your life: your loving tenderness, as limpid as that of a child, your amusing remarks filled with wisdom; you knew when it was the right moment to have your say. But what will remain in our hearts is your ability to say “THANK YOU” for every little gesture of attention given to you as a little and great person. Thank you for having loved us! A special thanks and embrace comes to you from India, from your dearest and most beloved Sr. Josephine. We are sure that you will continue to love us from heaven. On our behalf, ask the Lord for the grace of a stronger and more profound sense of belonging to our Religious Family, to the Church and above all to the Lord"*.

With this prayer which we make our own, we too say goodbye to our dear Sr. Ilda, whose body now rests at the Monumental Cemetery of Turin, beside Sr. Marina, Sr. M. Grazia and our other departed Sisters.

Dearest Sisters, while I wish you with much affection, I also ask your prayers particularly for all the Sisters of the different Communities in Turin, recently tried so much by the experience of illness and death. May the spiritual unity of our Religious Family be the source of our strength and consolation.

Fraternally,

  
Mother Franceschina Milanesio, Provincial Superior