

## NOVENA NO. 1

### THE TESTAMENT of Mother Foundress

#### *Historical background*

Rosalia Batacchi, a grandniece of the Mother Foundress, writes: *“When the personal belongings of Mother were sorted out after her death, a closed letter with various seals was found. It was written several years earlier and addressed to her Daughters to be read after her death.*

*After the death of the Foundress, this letter – as her last will and testament and remembrance – was read to the whole community by the Confessor, Fr. Federico Serafini of the Congregation of the Mother of God. It moved everyone to tears and even the priest who read it could not hold back his tears. This letter is kept in the archive of the Nursing Sisters, like a precious treasure. (Batacchi (pp. 162-167).*

#### *Introduction*

Mother Foundress writes the Spiritual Testament for her daughters, ten years before her death, that is, on 27 September 1859. It is a written document that came from the heart of a mother, from which flows out affection for her beloved daughters and the desire that each of them would live according to their vocation and mission. It is a passionate letter in which Mother manifests her last will, presents her counsels, declares her recommendations, expresses her desires. It is a precious text that is well suited for a novena in preparation to the liturgical feast of the Blessed Foundress because it helps in reflecting, meditating, reinvigorating the zeal for the charism and making decisions for a renewed journey of faith and love in one’s vocation.

The letter testament is subdivided into nine paragraphs, each of which will give light to a specific day of the novena.

## FIRST DAY

### Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph

**“Whenever I would leave you, even for a few days to go on a trip or for some other purpose, I saw your displeasure, your pain, which fully reverberated in my heart, already deeply affected and moved by such,**

though brief, a separation. Now that the moment draws near when I must separate myself from you, not for days but for all the time God alone knows, during which we shall no longer see each other on this earth, what will be my affliction, what will be yours? As I see I'm about to leave you, I try with the help of God to prepare myself with resignation, so much so that I think more of your sorrow than of mine; and it is for this that I dedicate to you these desires of mine, these final counsels. Desires of a Mother who loves you very much, counsels of a friend who wishes all the best for you.”

A moment of silence

Commentary

These first lines of the letter of Mother can be considered a true and proper introduction to her letter testament. She reflects on leaving this world and imagines her suffering and that of her daughters in her separation from them. She affirms that with the help of God, she wants to dispose herself in welcoming serenely the passage from death to eternity. She declares that the purpose of the letter is that of manifesting her desires and counsels to her daughters.

She explains to her daughters that her desires are those of “*a mother who loves you so much,*” and her counsels are those of “*a friend who wishes all the best for you.*”

Two words are deeply striking in this introduction: the two titles with which the Foundress wants to be considered by the daughters — Mother and Friend.

**Consider:**

- Even Jesus needed the love of a *mother* from Bethlehem to Calvary.
- Even Jesus wanted to call *friends* his disciples: “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but *I have called you friends*, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” (Jn 15:12-16).

**Reflect**

- How do you live in your life the spiritual maternity of the Foundress?
- What sentiment is provoked in you when you hear that the Mother wants to be your friend?
- How do you live your spiritual motherhood in your relationship with your sisters, with the sick?

Sharing

Final Song to the Foundress

## SECOND DAY

Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph

**“Don't be too much afflicted, my dear Daughters, for my departure from you. Think that death is a tribute we all must pay, that I have had a long life (would that I had made better use [of my years] to sanctify my soul, to fulfil with perfection the grave obligations I took upon myself, because of God's will). We must die, beloved Daughters, but in order to live again eternally in Heaven. If the Lord will be merciful to me, we shall be reunited there where death cannot penetrate and where we shall be always happy in God and without fear of ever again going far from Him, our only love.”**

Moment of Silence

Commentary

With a clear and sure language, coupled with gentleness and firmness, Mother proclaims her desires and counsels.

*Don't be too much afflicted, my dear Daughters, for my departure from you.*

This is her first counsel. She does not want that her daughters be afflicted for her departure and she explains the motives:

*“death is a ‘tribute’ that we must all pay.”*

With a sound realism, Mother teaches that death is part of life, it is a natural event that happens to every person here on earth.

*“We must die...in order to live again eternally in Heaven.”*

Death is not an end in itself, Mother teaches, but the goal is to live eternally in heaven.

*“We shall be reunited there where death cannot penetrate and where we shall be always happy in God and without fear of ever again going far from Him, our only love”*

Death is an obligatory passage to the resurrection. Love will be victorious over death!

## *Reflect*

Paul says: “*For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain*” (Phil 1:21).

Mother lived her life for Christ *and* dying for her was certainly to be with the Lord, her “*one and only love*.”

- What does your own death represent to you? That of your dear ones? That of the sick that you assist?
- How do you prepare yourself in your lifetime to live the event of death as a passage to *join our one and only love*?
- How do you accompany the dying at the moment of death, as a passage to the fullness of life and perfect happiness?

## Sharing

### Song to the Foundress

## THIRD DAY

### Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph

**“Never forget that life is given to us only to gain heaven; that it is necessary to suffer, and suffer virtuously to become worthy of heaven. It is fitting that we follow our divine model walking not along a path of roses, but on one covered with thorns, in the footsteps of our Master and Redeemer, Jesus. He suffered and loved throughout the course of his mortal life. He suffered only because He loved us. How much He suffered can be understood by the one who reflects on his painful passion, his ignominious death. But who can ever comprehend, or penetrate the extent, the immensity, the depth of love shown us in the institution of the Most Blessed Sacrament? Oh, the human mind is not capable of conceiving a correct idea of this and it gets lost in this endless ocean of boundless love; a tried effective love, affective in all circumstances.”**

### Moment of Silence

### Commentary

*“Never forget that life is given to us only to gain heaven.”*

The purpose of life, Mother says, is to gain heaven, that is to possess the Lord in eternity. But in order to reach this, a particular conduct of life is necessary, which Mother describes in this manner:

*“Follow our divine model walking not along a path of roses, but on one covered with thorns, in the footsteps of our Master and Redeemer, Jesus. He suffered and loved throughout the course of his mortal life.”*

Mother presents two proofs of the tangible love of Jesus:

- His passion and death on the cross;
- His remaining with us through the institution of the Eucharist

The Blessed Foundress is in love with the Eucharist and she affirms that human mind is not capable of understanding fully this gift of *boundless love*.

## **Reflect**

*There is no other way to reach the eternal possession of the Lord but to follow Jesus up to Calvary, to the point of giving up one's life.*

- Am I following Christ in my life?
- Am I walking with love along the path, at times full of thorns, that leads to Him?

*The Eucharist is the greatest gift the Lord has left to us.*

- What space does the Eucharist occupy in my life?
- During the day, do I find time to adore and contemplate Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament as required by the Constitutions (cf. art. 82)

## **Sharing**

### **Song to the Foundress**

## **FOURTH DAY**

### **Song to the Holy Spirit**

From the Letter Testament, 4<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**“You, therefore, my dear Daughters, follow this generous divine example; suffer willingly; love God with all your heart; love his children, especially those who are needy, or sick and dying. Recognize in them Jesus who awaits your service, your care, your sacrifices. Remember that in the Divine Judgement not only all your actions will be reviewed, but also your thoughts and desires. Therefore, be not content with doing [your work], but do everything in the most perfect way, and with the right intention of pleasing God. In order that you succeed in doing this, first of all, with great confidence ask for it of God, the generous giver of all graces without which we can do nothing in our own strength.”**

## Moment of Silence

### Commentary

*“You, therefore, my dear Daughters, follow this generous divine example...”*

Our Mother, through four clearly imperative phrases, leaves us in her testament a programme of life:

- Love God with all your heart
- Love His children, especially the needy, the sick and the dying
- Recognize Jesus in the sick who awaits your services, care and sacrifices
- Be not content with doing [your work], but do everything in the most perfect way, and with the right intention of pleasing God.

This programme of life is the heart of the vocation and charismatic mission of the Sister Ministers of the Infirm.

### Reflect

*The project of life that Mother entrusts to us in her Testament is clear and demanding! She begs that we do it and we do it straight away.*

- How do you live the charism with the sisters in the community?
- How do you live the charism in the mission with the sick and the suffering?

## Sharing

### Song to the Foundress

## FIFTH DAY

### Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**‘To make easier for you the journey to perfection and to facilitate your entrance into heaven, meditate at the sacred feet of Jesus Crucified, and examine yourselves, your inclinations, your tendencies, your passions. As you see yourselves defective, be not dismayed but with filial confidence have recourse to Jesus, to our loving Mother, Mary most holy, to St. Camillus, our Protector. Ask for help, aid, strength, generosity, and perseverance to combat and conquer yourselves. Strive, with divine help, to win each day some victory. And happy will you be, my dear Sisters, most happy if in doing this, that is combating and winning every day, you**

**will be able to triumph over yourselves, to be mistresses of your hearts, of your passions in order to direct them all to the service of God, for the benefit of your soul. This practice, most useful to you, is recommended to you by that Mother of yours who loves you very much, and whom you love; and she recommends it to you as her final counsel. Don't ever forget it, my dear Sisters."**

**Moment of Silence**

**Commentary**

To facilitate the journey of her daughters, Mother proposes two ascetic means:

- *Meditate at the feet of Jesus crucified and examine yourselves*
- *Strive, with divine help, to win each day some victory*

The second ascetic means is considered by Mother as "*A most useful practice*" so that her daughters may become masters of their own hearts and may know how to guide their own passions for the purpose of doing everything for the service and glory of God. It is an exercise which is very close to the heart of Mother who strongly recommends it: "*Don't ever forget it, my dear Sisters.*"

But Mother knows that the path taken is not easy and she does not want that her daughters lose heart in the falls and difficulties that there might be, so she exhorts them to run with filial trust to Jesus, to Mary our Mother, and to our holy protector, St. Camillus.

***Reflect***

*Today, we seldom hear about asceticism, even in religious life. Asceticism, instead, is a necessary commitment in Christian life and, much more so, in that of special consecration.*

Which of the two ascetic means proposed by Mother do you consider more important for you? Why?

**Sharing**

**Song to the Foundress**

## SIXTH DAY

### Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 6<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**“Oh, how everything passes and disappears! God in his mercy has granted me a long life during which I could have gained much merit. I've spent many years... but how? You know it, oh, my God! And how many years remain for me on this earth? [Only] a few in relation to those I have lived! And what shall I do to make amends for the evil done, for the bad example I have given you whom I was obliged to edify with good example, with an irreproachable and holy life?**

**Oh, pardon, my God! May these lines, which I write for my most loved Daughters, of whom I ask forgiveness for not having edified them with good example and holiness of life, count also in your sight to obtain for me mercy and pardon, and to fill my spirit with a firm hope that you have forgiven me. May I be in your grace, and may the short span of life remaining to me be [a period of] amendment, a tribute of sincere penance. And already by now, for that time, I offer you the suffering which will accompany my final illness and my death, united to the merits and the passion and death of Jesus, in expiation for my sins.’**

**Where shall I be when my daughters read this paper? I hope in Divine mercy, in the infinite merits of Jesus, in the protection of our common loving Mother, Mary most holy, Our Lady of Sorrows, of St. Camillus de Lellis, of St. Joseph, and of all the saints and of my Guardian Angel, that my soul will be in a place of salvation. But who knows how long it will have to remain in purgatory to atone for my faults?**

**[My stay in] Purgatory, even if prolonged, will be an act of mercy from God; few people, like me, have deserved hell. But to be kept from being united with my God, with my Divine Redeemer and loving Father, to be impeded from embracing my loving Mother, Mary most holy, oh, at the mere thought of it I shudder and tremble. I'm well aware that these thoughts afflict the hearts of my loving Daughters. Oh, don't cry, I beg you. May this thought serve not to cause you shed useless tears for my death but to incite you to pray for my soul. Be sure that I won't forget you, that I will love you then with greater perfection, and I will pray for all my dear Daughters more efficaciously than I was able to do while living among you on this earth.”**

**Moment of Silence**



## Commentary

These paragraphs are dedicated by Mother to some personal reflections.

### ***“Oh, how everything passes and disappears!”***

Mother reflects on her life which has been blessed with many years and she asks: “how did I spend those years?” In her profound humility she reads her life from which the following questions arise: “*What shall I do to make amends for the evil done, for the bad example I have given?*” From here arises the need of Mother to ask for forgiveness from God and from her daughters.

### ***“Oh, pardon, my God! ... I ask forgiveness from my most loved daughters.”***

Mother asks for forgiveness from God and even from her daughters for “not having edified them with good example and holiness of life.” She offers to the Lord the remaining years of her life, together with the pains and sufferings that will accompany her final illness, as a penance for her sins.

### ***“Where shall I be when my daughters read this paper?”***

To this question which Mother poses to herself, she herself answers trustingly: “*I hope in Divine mercy... in a place of salvation*”. She entrusts herself to the merits of Jesus, to the protection of Mary Most Holy, of St. Camillus de Lellis, of St. Joseph, of all the holy men and women and of her Guardian Angel.

### ***[My stay in] Purgatory, even if prolonged, will be an act of mercy from God.”***

Her profound humility makes her consider Purgatory as an act of mercy of God for her. Her suffering, however, will be that of delaying her union with Jesus and her most loving Mother Mary, because of her stay in purgatory. For this she asks her daughters to pray for her soul.

### ***“I will love you then with greater perfection, and I will pray for all my dear Daughters more efficaciously than I was able to do while living among you on this earth.”***

Mother assures her daughters that from heaven she will always pray for them, rather, more efficaciously, and she will be united to them with a stronger bond of love.

## **Reflect**

- Which of these points of the personal reflection of Mother strikes you? Why?
- Mother asks for forgiveness from the sisters for “not having edified them with good example and holiness of life.” Nowadays, in community life, we are losing an important praxis: that of asking for forgiveness from one another. What do you propose with regards to this?

- Mother assures us that her prayer from heaven will be more efficacious. Do we truly believe in the intercession of Blessed Mother Maria Domenica? Do we recommend her intercession to our sick and suffering brothers and sisters?
- Do we take to heart the canonization of our Mother?

Sharing

Song to the Foundress

## SEVENTH DAY

Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 7<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**As you read these lines, let each one of you imagine that your Mother is speaking to you personally, stating to you her last will, as she desires that it remains always alive in your minds and hearts. The last will, the last counsels and recommendations made by parents have always been sacred to their children. I do not doubt, rather I am consoled in the certainty that you, my dear Daughters, will fulfil my desires, my most ardent wishes. Love God above all else; prefer death rather than displeasing him. Love the state of life in which, out of his mercy, God has placed you, and fulfil promptly and readily all your duties. Love one another, bearing each other's defects with charity."**

Moment of Silence

Commentary

In this paragraph, Mother expresses her last three desires and begs that they be welcomed and lived with filial love.

**Her last three desires:**

- Love God above all else; prefer death rather than displeasing him.
- Love the state of life in which, out of his mercy, God has placed you, and fulfil promptly and readily all your duties.
- Love one another, bearing each other's defects with charity.

These three recommendations are a compendium of Love! They are the synthesis of the vocation and mission of the daughters of Maria Domenica of all times.

## **Reflect**

*The first recommendation of Mother: “Love God above all else” reminds each one of us of the primacy of God in our religious life. All the documents of the Church emphasize it and our Constitutions declare it explicitly (cf. art. 18.73).*

An inevitable question: Does the Lord truly occupy the first place in my life? Is He my supreme love?

*The second recommendation of Mother refers to our vocation as Sister Ministers of the Infirm. She recommends to love the state of life we embraced, and to fulfil faithfully our duties.”*

Is my love for my vocation alive in me? Do I feel the joy and enthusiasm to live my consecration every day and in its fullness?

The third recommendation of Mother concerns community life. Mother asks seriously: “Love one another, bearing each other's defects with charity.” This request of Mother is a reminder that we all need constantly.

What do I propose to do to improve my fraternal relationship with the sisters?

In what aspect must I engage myself more: to love the sisters, respect them, understand their defects?

Sharing

Song to the Foundress

## **EIGHTH DAY**

Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 8<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**“Be humble, patient, mortified, obedient, and in that way you will live a tranquil life. Yours will be the death of the just and you will enjoy in Heaven the reward promised to the true followers of Jesus Christ, who have imitated Him in his humility, charity, obedience to his Eternal Father, even to die as a culprit on the cross.**

**May this model of perfection (I am glad to repeat it) be ever before your eyes, and more so, engraved on your hearts. And fear not. His mercy will always be ready to help you in all your spiritual and temporal needs.”**

Moment of Silence

## Commentary

Mother expresses once again a recommendation: *“Be humble, patient, mortified, obedient.”* Humility, mortification, and obedience are three virtues very dear to the Mother Foundress and are fundamental to Christian life. She often speaks about them in her letters, explaining their asceticism and spirituality. She knows, however, that such virtues are not easy to live out, thus she leaves her daughters a sublime model to look up to.

The model is *“Jesus Christ, who lived in humility, charity, obedience to his Eternal Father, even to die as a culprit on the cross.”*

This model, Mother affirms it, must always be before the eyes of her daughters.

However, in the effort of living out the virtues indicated above, there must never be - according to the thoughts of the Foundress - neither tension, nor sadness, nor fear, because the Lord's mercy is always ready to come to the aid of each sister. With exquisite human sensitivity, Mother reassures her daughters that divine mercy will not only be there to assist their spiritual but also their temporal needs. The spirituality of Mother is neither rigid, nor is it disincarnated; for her, the material needs are also important and they must be satisfied for the person's equilibrium and growth and for the exercise of the ministry.

## Reflect

*The virtues of humility, obedience and mortification are necessary in the life of one who follows Christ.*

How do I live the virtue of humility?

What is my attitude in living out obedience: to God, to the Church, to the Constitutions, and to the superiors?

Am I able to keep an eye on my senses so that they don't prevail over my will?

What do I propose to improve these aspects?

## Sharing

## Song of the Foundress

## NINTH DAY

### Song to the Holy Spirit

From the Letter Testament, 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph

**“Farewell, my most loved Daughters. My most ardent desires, my last wish, is to see all of you again, united in blessed eternity; and I hope for it from the mercy of God, through the merits of Jesus, under the protection of Mary most holy, Our Lady of Sorrows. May the Eternal Father, the Divine Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one and triune God, bless you. May the most holy Mother of Jesus and our most loving Mother bless, protect and console you. May our Protector St. Camillus de Lellis also bless you and guide your steps.**

**Receive and appreciate the last farewell and a tear which, at the thought of being separated from you, escapes from the eyes and more so from the heart of your most affectionate Sister and Mother in Jesus Christ.”**

Maria Brun Barbantini  
Unworthy Servant of Mary Most Holy,  
Our Lady of Sorrows

### Moment of Silence

### Commentary

In the conclusion of her Letter Testament, Mother expresses three realities:

- she extends her farewell to her daughters
- expresses the desire to see them again in eternal bliss
- formulates her most beautiful and solemn blessing:

**May the Eternal Father,  
the Divine Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
the one and triune God, bless you.**

**May the most holy Mother of Jesus  
and our most loving Mother bless,  
protect and console you.**

**May our Protector St. Camillus de Lellis  
also bless you and guide your steps.**

**The formula of Mother’s blessing** is: solemn, theological, charismatic and pastoral.

*Solemn:* in its form and content

*Theological:* in the first place, she turns to the Trinity, calling each of the divine Persons by name and with divine attribute pertinent to each one of them.

*Charismatic:* after the Trinity, the Foundress turns to Our Lady calling her, “the most holy Mother of Jesus and our most loving Mother;” asking her not only to bless the daughters but also to protect and console them.

To protect and to console are verbs bound to the charism of the vocation of the Sister Ministers of the Infirm. Mother invokes the Virgin, for her daughters, protection and consolation, because only the one who is protected and consoled can give protection and consolation!

*Pastoral:* the solemn blessing of Mother concludes by turning to St. Camillus who is called “our protector.” She asks him to bless her daughters and “to guide their steps.”

We may ask ourselves “why does Mother entrust to St. Camillus a task so important such as guiding the steps of her daughters? Where will he lead the Sister Ministers of the Infirm? Certainly along the path of pain, beside the dying, to those afflicted with communicable disease, to those who are abandoned.

### ***Remember and reflect***

The blessing of Mother is given to the daughters of every time! It is not a pious custom, but a gift and a commitment. Let us welcome it every day with love and devotion.

Sharing

Song to the Foundress