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**Prot. MG 225/20**

**Dear sisters,**

today the Lord has called to His presence the dearest sister Sr. M. Catherine Vose, in our Mother House in Tortona.

Sr. M. Catherine's departure to Heaven is striking us in a particularly painful moment due to the dramatic situation that we had to live in Tortona and beyond, due to the pandemic that is affecting the whole world. Her departure is part of this special "*climate*" that we have been experiencing in these recent months, especially in Italy.

This departure has certainly found us in a state of greater sensitivity. Her death, together with that of the other 11 sisters, which happened in these last two months in Italy, and also, a few days ago, that of the dearest Sr. M. Cristina Muñoz in Chile, is questioning us. They are leaving us with anguish and discouragement, testing the solidity of our faith, the strength of our hope, the unconditionality of our trust in Divine Providence, our capacity of looking forward to the future... It is, I would say, normal that it be so! We have been sailing for weeks the rough sea in the night of a pandemic that nobody could ever imagine and nobody had been prepared for! And we often identify our feelings with those of Psalm 41, prayed many times but now experienced: *"My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long: 'Where is your God?' My soul is downcast within me... I say to God my Rock: 'Why have you forgotten me?'"*

However, dear Sisters, we cannot forget that, this time has taken us also in the "*climate*" and in the "*reality*" of Easter, a very different Easter, but always Easter: Jesus is Risen and has conquered death and darkness! With this certainty darkness is the womb of light, death is pregnant with life, pain is permeated with hope, anguish is the dawn of new resources and new choices: *"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world"* (Jn 16:33).

It is Jesus who tells us in the rough sea of this time: *"This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it"* (Jn 11: 4).

**Dear Sisters**, this is the message that Sr. M. Catherine has left us through her life, but especially through her illness and her death: *"take heart... Jesus has overcome!"*

We cannot deny the pain of detachment, the sadness of these weeks of suffering, the pain of handing her over to the Father... but hers has been a "*death*" for "*life*". Even from the bed of pain, Sr. M. Catherine has been a missionary, because this was her first and unique vocation.

Her serenity and strength, her sweetness and firmness, her sympathy and seriousness were the characteristics with which Sr. M. Catherine gave her life in the 15 years of mission in Kenya, in the following years in Italy at Bellocchi, at Cusano Milanino, at Anzio...

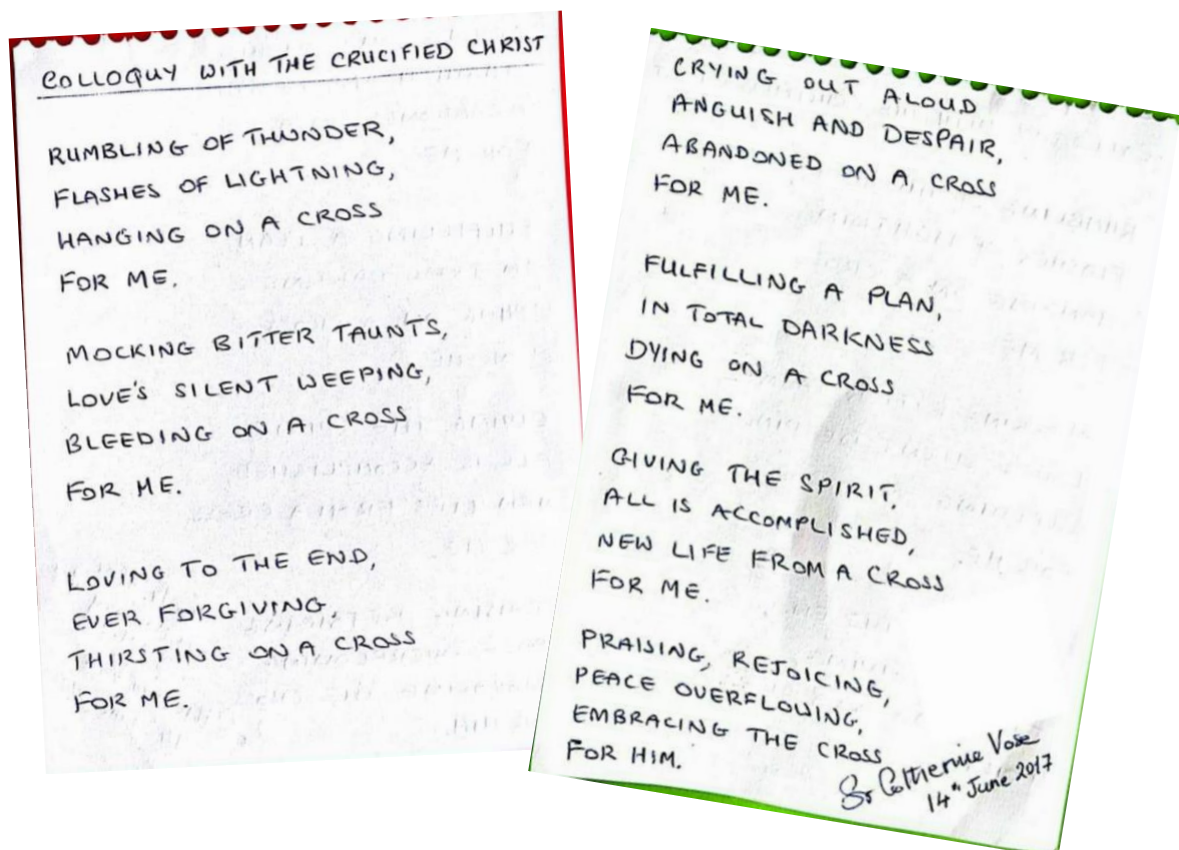
With the same integrity she has welcomed the disease that usually comes like a lightning in the least imagined moment. She fought and won the first battle, the one that allowed her to fulfill her hidden dream of leaving for the mission: she could leave for the Philippines, where she spent a very happy, gifted, peaceful year... her last achievement "*ad gentes*" who has not let her great missionary heart to remain still and barren...



But she has accomplished her last "mission" from the Cross of disease and pain, at Mother House, *"taking care of herself and of the sisters"*... fighting to win this last battle, but always missionary, now among the elderly and sick Sisters, to the very last moment, as long as she has had the strength, working hard as the epidemic broke out in Tortona: her last mission...

Sr. M. Catherine will remain forever as a missionary soul, a worthy daughter of San Luigi Orione, with a big and boundless heart like his.

Sr. M. Catherine has left this in a poem that she wrote in the short period spent in the Philippines, during the spiritual exercises of June 2017, and that I have copied here below, because I think they are the words that she herself would like to tell us in this moment:



**Dearest sisters**, I have wanted to share this beautiful and touching poem, because I believe it describes the strength and spiritual stature of our dearest Sr. M. Catherine. I believe that, retracing the words that sprang from her heart before the Crucified Christ, who gave his life "**for her**", we can understand where she has found the strength and serenity to stay on that Cross, later, "**for Him**"! So simple... so deep... so mysterious... so salvific!


**Sisters**, let's look up and get back on our feet, the suffering and losses that this time has inflicted on us are the prelude to a new time. They are an opportunity that the Spirit has offered us to shake the dust of sadness, pessimism and discouragement, which may paralyze our path. Let's get back stronger on our feet, because from the Cross, embraced with love and faith, we can certainly come out stronger, more determined, more creative.

Our dearest Sr. M. Catherine has taught us this, she has witnessed this to us in these last days and she has come out victorious and prolific to her meeting with the Lord. From Heaven she will now be a companion and intercede for us, so that the mission that she has accomplished with dedication and generosity till the end, may continue, forward, always forward, rising from sadness and recreating ever new forms of announcing the love of Christ to those who suffer today, like us, the consequences of this time.

If "*Caritas Christi urget nos!*" we must start again, with the awareness of the time lived and yet to be lived, but with the strength of those who know in whom they have put their hope, such as Sr. M. Catherine has done!

I greet you with these words of Don Orione that animate us to live always strong in faith and firm in hope: "*What I recommend to you in the Lord is to always trust a lot in the heart of Jesus, and not to be discouraged. There must be no discouragement in the servants of God and not even any sadness: it is improper to lose courage under such a master: our hope, our trust, our courage, our very life, is founded entirely on our God!*".

Fraternally united in the Lord, and in prayer at this time, I embrace you with affection.

  
Sr M. Mabel Spagnuolo  
Superior general

Rome, Generalate House, May 23<sup>th</sup>, 2020