

Press Release, January 27, 2015

## **Cause for the beatification of Chiara Lubich begins**

### **Bishop Raffaello Martinelli presides over the *Prima Sessio* in the cathedral of Frascati (Rome)**

A fully packed cathedral and more than 18,000 contact points world-wide for a live transmission via internet, set the scene for the opening ceremony of the "Cause of beatification and canonization" of Chiara Lubich, presided by Bishop Raffaello Martinelli of Frascati. The media spread this news as if wanting to confirm a central concept in the thought and mysticism of Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement: *"This is the great attraction of modern times: to penetrate to the highest contemplation while mingling with everyone, one person alongside others"*.

Pope Francis was present through a message signed by the Secretary of State, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and read by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, who attended the ceremony. In his message, the Holy Father reminded those who *"conserve the precious spiritual legacy"* of the founder of the Focolare Movement of *"her luminous exemplary life"*. He invoked *"abundant gifts of the Spirit for those engaged in the postulation"* and *"exhorted to make known to the people of God the life and work of one who welcomed our Lord's invitation and enkindled a new light for the Church on the journey towards unity"*.

Among those present for the ceremony there were several Cardinals, Archbishops and Bishops and also a number of representatives of Catholic and Orthodox Movements and Associations. Some Muslims and Buddhists were also present. Trento, the hometown of Lubich, was represented by members from civil institutions, and so were Frascati, Rocca di Papa and other neighbouring municipalities that considered Lubich as a fellow citizen. The ceremony started at 16.00hrs with the recitation of Vespers, and then continued with the opening session of the Diocesan Inquiry.

Expectation and attention welcomed the words of Bishop Raffaello Martinelli, who described the ceremony as *"an act of praise and glory to God, our Father, because he allows his glory to shine through the life and work of his sons and daughters. We want to render a service to the Church by offering, even to the Church, a testimony of faith, hope and charity through the life and work of one of her daughters"*. He noted that this was not an easy task and that it had to be carried out with serenity and objectivity. Msgr. Martinelli augured that through the process just started *"Our Lord's glory, in which He wanted our Servant of God to participate, shines always more and more"*.

In her address at the end of the celebration, Maria Voce, president of the Focolare Movement spoke of Chiara Lubich's life as a gift to many: *"Chiara, who welcomed the charism that God gave her, did her utmost to encourage people to follow the path of evangelical life. With a constant renewed determination, she helped those whom she encountered to put God in the first place and "to become saints together". Her gaze and her heart were moved by a universal love, capable of embracing all people, regardless of differences, and of aspiring to the realization of Jesus' will: "Ut omnes unum sint". She also recalled the experience of Chiara's first companions "who since the very beginning were able to give witness of the beauty and the possibility of going together, in unity, towards the only goal". She concluded: "We humbly wait for the wise judgment of the Holy Father, while we ask God that the eventual recognition of Chiara's exemplary life may lead humanity and history to discover new developments for peace, unity and universal brotherhood, and we ask this only for God's glory and for the good of many"*.

The opening of the Cause stimulated comments and remarks about the figure of Chiara Lubich. Bishop Felix Machado of Vasai, India made a very significant statement. The Bishop of Vasai, who is presently the president of the Office for Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue of the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), said: *"Asia rejoices for the opening of the cause for the beatification of Chiara Lubich. This step will give a big boost to interreligious dialogue"*.

With the start of the Diocesan Inquiry, the Church gave Chiara Lubich the title *servant of God*. Collecting Lubich's unpublished writings and listening to witnesses will continue. The members of the Tribunal nominated by Bishop Martinelli are: Msgr. Angelo Amati, episcopal delegate, Fr. Emanuele Fawed-Kazah,

promoter of justice, and Dr. Patrizia Sabatini, notary. The president of the Focolare Movement nominated Fr. Silvestre Marques as postulator and Lucia Abignente and Waldery Hilgeman as vice-postulators. During the Tribunal's next session, scheduled for February 12, 2015, Maria Voce is expected to give her witness.

The process to promote the Cause started on December 7, 2013, five years after Chiara Lubich's death, on the seventieth anniversary of the beginning of the Movement, when the president, Maria Voce presented a formal request to Msgr. Martinelli, Bishop of Frascati. Those who hoped that such an act would intensify the spiritual and moral commitment in many for the good of humanity, had already expressed this request on several occasions. The statement made by Piero Taiti, an exponent of the dialogue, promoted by the Focolare Movement, with persons of no religious affiliation, is paradigmatic: "Chiara made possible the possibility of dialogue just because of her radical observance of the Word, in which many of us have found ourselves even though we do not have the same faith. In some way, without any senseless syncretism, we have participated in a broader ecclesia, that potentially embraces the whole of humanity without geographical or cultural boundaries".

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