

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew visits Chiara Lubich's tomb

"We will always remember you, unforgettable sister"

Maria Wienken and Diego Goller

On October 20th, 2020, in commemoration of the centenary of Chiara Lubich's birth, the ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew, visited Rocca di Papa (Italy) to pray at the tomb of the Focolare Movement founder and visit the house where she had lived as well as to meet with members of the Movement's General Council. Accompanied by Metropolitan Emmanuel of France, Bishop Cassanos, patriarchal deacon Iacovos and the under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Mgr. Andrea Palmieri, the Patriarch was welcomed by President Maria Voce and co-president Jesús Morán.

It was a powerful moment. After songs in Greek, several minutes in meditation and the placing of a large bouquet of flowers in front of her tomb, Patriarch Bartholomew wrote in the visitors' book: *We will always remember you as a person of God, unforgettable sister, Chiara, tirelessly committed to the consolidation of God's Kingdom on this earth; for love, peace, and unity, especially among Christians still divided even now. We give thanks for her work for the glory of God and for the good of humanity. In prayer to God with all my strength, Bartholomew, Ecumenical Patriarch.*

In a brief speech in the auditorium of the Movement's international center, he then expressed his gratitude to God, *"for having permitted her presence here with us for a long time, but above all for showering her with his dazzling grace that could be summarized in that sentence for which we are reminded here: 'And we believed in Love'."* And he continued: *"How many other things our Chiara would have done if she were still among us! But it is not the years that give meaning to life, it is not the quantity, it is not the length. It is how we use the talents that He has offered us. It is the quality of a life lived in witness to He who is the Life."*

Recalling the fruitful works of the first Cappadocian Father, St. Basil, he continued: *"In much the same way, our Chiara . . . left us a legacy, one which we have still much to reflect upon. She left us the multifaceted charism of unity [...] through her life and her writings, a message which we cannot ignore."*

Turning to the outgoing president, Maria Voce, the Patriarch then said: *“During these years she knew how to be like the good servant in the Parable of the talents. [...]. Having reached the end of your mandate as President, we also want to thank you for your great contribution to the Movement.”* And he presented her with a precious icon.

As the visit concluded, he extended heartfelt wishes for the Movement’s upcoming General Assembly: *“May God, in his immense mercy, grant to this Work that is pleasing to Him, a worthy successor, one who is once again able to surprise and amaze us and all of you, enlightening every people with the power of Love that triumphs over all things, because ‘to love, a Christian must do as God does: Rather than waiting to be loved, be the first to Love.’ (Cit. Chiara Lubich)”*.

