

**Blessed Umiliana De'Cerchi**  
born 1220, Florence, Italy  
died 19 May 1246, Florence, Italy

In an age in which marriage was all about property and power, Umiliana's father negotiated her marriage to a moneylender with great attention to economics, but little thought to compatibility. Her only consolations were the births of two daughters and the support of her sister-in-law Ravenna. The older, more sophisticated Ravenna ran their extended family's household and provided cover for Umiliana's charities.

When Umiliana's much older husband died, she settled his debts and returned to her father's house. Custom dictated that she leave her daughters with her in-laws. Fortunately, Ravenna saw that they remained close to their mother. Umiliana was only twenty and her father was eager to arrange another marriage. When Umiliana refused, he banished her to an attic room. She resolved to live in abstinence, and eventually became a Franciscan tertiary, devoting her time to prayer and good works. Umiliana was blessed with a gift for miracles, but she was also beset by devils, one of whom appeared in the form of a serpent, wrapping his tail around her feet and leaning his head against her cheek.

As she lay dying, tormented by thirst and demons, one servant grew tired of her constant pleas for water and hit her on the head with a pitcher. Umiliana's friend Gisela brought her an image of the Blessed Mother with Christ on the cross and placed it where Umiliana could see it. She also burned incense and sprinkled Umiliana's body with holy water. The demons fled, leaving her to die in peace at the age of twenty-seven.

Immediately there was a call to make her a saint. Among those who went on the record about Umiliana's sanctity were three brother's-in-law, her grandmother, and three household servants (we do not know if the pitcher-tosser was one of them).

**The Genius of Umiliana De'Cerchi:**

Blessed with a gift for friendship, Umiliana found an important ally in her sister-in-law Ravenna, and she later overcame her father's oppression through her network of women friends.

**Reflection:**

*"Every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."*

Luke 14.33

From [The Big Book of Woman Saints](#), written by Sarah Gallick, page 151