

Saint Angela Merici

born circa 1470-75, Desenzano del Garda, Italy
died 27 January, 1540, Brescia, Italy

Angela was born into wealth in the Brescia region of northern Italy, but by the time she was twenty-six God had taken most of her family. She grieved most for the younger sister who had been her best friend, and resolved to live a life of prayer and good works until she discovered why God had spared her.

At about this time, Angela had two remarkable visions. In the first, the skies opened and Ursula and her Companions descended to earth. In the middle of the company was Angela's lost sister. Not long after that, Angela had the second vision: an infinite number of young women all wearing crowns, being led by angels up a ladder to heaven. As Angela watched, a voice told her that she too would establish an army of virgins.

Angela devoted herself to good works. She was an expert horsewoman and rode whenever she was needed, whether to teach catechism of nurse plague victims. Angela's reputation spread and in 1525 Pope Clement VII asked her to take charge of all of Rome's charitable institutions. Afraid, Angela declined, explaining that God had another plan for her back in Brescia. Angela was nearly sixty when she had a vision in which Christ rebuked her for neglecting her vocation. She knew that she could delay no longer. She gathered twelve women from all of Brescia's social classes. This Society of St. Ursula committed to a chaste life and serving their families and society in prisons, hospitals, and the poorest neighbourhoods.

It is almost impossible to imagine how radical Angela's concept was. The Society needed no convent because they continued to live in their own homes. They wore no habit, but the simplest street clothes. The Ursulines are regarded as the first female teaching order, and they played a major role in Catholic education in the United States.

The Genius of Angela Merici:

"Do not lose heart", Angela tells us, "even if you should discover that you lack qualities necessary for the work to which you are called. He who called you will not desert you, but the moment you are in need he will stretch out his saving hand."

Reflection:

*"And suddenly this rivulet of mine became a river
then this stream of mine, a sea.
Thus do I send my teachings forth
shining like a dawn
to become known afar off."*

Sirach 24.29b-30