

St. Angela Merici

Feast Day: January 27

Born: March, 21 1474

Died: January, 27 1540

Beatified: April 30, 1768 by Pope Clement XIII

Canonized: May 24, 1807 by Pope Pius VII

Patron: orphaned, sick, disabled



Angela Merici was born in Italy on March 21, 1474. She lived on a farm with her parents, older brothers and older sister. Angela was a pious child who admired St. Ursula. Angela vowed to give her life to God when she was a little girl. She was 10 years old when her parents died. Angela and her sister were sent to live with their uncle.

Angela's sister died suddenly. She prayed fervently for her sister's soul; afraid she would not be in Heaven since she died without receiving Last Rites. One day, the sky opened and angels and saints appeared. Her sister, who was among them, told Angela that God wished for her to establish a congregation of consecrated virgins. Angela became a third order Franciscan, devoting time to prayer and good works.

When Angela turned 20, her uncle died. She returned to the farm where she was born. In Italy at this time, there was widespread spiritual confusion and lack of morals even among the Church clergy. Martin Luther called out the corruption in the Church, but when he garnered a great following, he turned away from the Church (created by Jesus) to form his own religion. Angela worked to keep people from leaving the Church and to keep them from falling into a life of sin. She believed that the place to start healing society was with women. Spiritually strong women would lead to spiritually healthy families. She taught women to live morally and upright, consecrating themselves to God. In 1516, Angela began gathering a following and was able to establish a community of women who lived separately in their own homes but communed for prayer, education and doing good works. In this way, the women learned proper catechism and were guarded against spiritually bad influences. Already considered saintly, a neighboring town asked Angela to help them develop a similar community for the spiritual direction of women.

As Angela started out on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, she was struck blind. Her companions wanted to return home but Angela insisted that they press on. Reaching the Holy Land, Angela remained blind for the entire trip. Later, she wrote that she "saw these places with the eyes of her soul as if she had seen them with her bodily eyes." As soon as she left the Holy Land, she regained her sight. The experience had a powerful impact which deepened her faith. In 1525, Pope Clement VII heard of Angela's holiness. He invited her to stay in Rome and help establish a hospital. Angela declined, firmly believing her mission was to continue building her community of women.

In 1535, Angela and 28 other women were approved to form the Order of St. Ursuline. St. Angela instructed the sisters to pray and fast frequently. Their daily devotions included the Office of the Blessed Virgin and the 7 Penitential Psalms. Their mission remained to promote family values, do good works and spread the Gospel message through the catechism.

When Angela died at age 65 on January 27, 1540, there were 150 women in the Ursuline Order. The order quickly spread throughout Europe. Initially a secular institute, they became a religious order in 1544 where the sisters take vows and live in a convent. One of the oldest orders in the Church, the Ursuline sisters still continue the mission today throughout the world including the U.S. and Canada.

Angela's body is incorrupt, a sign of holiness. She was buried at St. Afra's Church which was destroyed during WW II. When the church was rebuilt, it was named for St. Angela Merici where her remains are interred today.

In 1580, Bishop Charles Borromeo, who also became a saint, was inspired by the work of the Ursulines to help stop corruption.

"Disorder in society is a result of disorder in the family." ~ St. Angela Merici