

The Feast of St. Ursula

Villa Angela, October 21, 2018

Today many glasses of wine will be lifted in joyful celebration of Saint Ursula and her companions. Here at Villa Angela, we ourselves have been living in anticipation of another opportunity to give thanks for the gift of a most tremendous spiritual anchor. At a time in our world when the frenzied pace of change, the unpredictability of global dynamics and climate chaos create major instability for so many in our world, the need for LIFE anchors becomes indispensable.

Over the years, our ability to identify with and claim belonging to the legacy of St Ursula -- which amazingly connects us to some of the earliest Christians-- offers us an anchor of immeasurable worth. This anchor, which we might sometimes take for granted, has proven to be a grounding for us in the sure hope that the capacity for LIFE to emerge through edges and endings never fails.

As records show, in early Christianity many martyred women's lives ended for having chosen against social conventions in order to follow Christ with singleness of heart. In the midst of ever growing accounts of these "women warriors" as they were known, in 4th century Britain, an unclear church document describing a woman thought to be called "Ursula", became the foundation and catalyst for an unfolding epic. This epic which grew in popularity over time would eventually assure a place for the recognition of women as spiritual leaders in the Church - a recognition which could never be undone. The vocation of St Ursula to claim her identity in and through Christ alone was a radical witness of faith and revealed a new form of consciousness and life orientation which was coming to birth in many of her contemporaries.

In my own process to embrace the legacy of St Ursula and her companions, like reflections on the life of Jesus, the mystery of the Spirit-at-work is most compelling...

To enter into the spaces of the lives of the saints is to open oneself to a liminal experience where boundaries overlap and edges of one reality meet another...in particular the edges between fact and fiction. Being present to liminal spaces is to



contemplate the places where the Spirit is at work. As Scripture teaches, “the Spirit is alive and active, penetrating through where the soul meets spirit, joint and marrow, thoughts and attitudes of the heart”. The word of God penetrates more deeply into our being than any sword or arrow...for nothing in creation is separate from God.

How true in what we know of St Ursula...although an arrow to the heart brought about her death...deeper still dwelt the life of God’s spirit which found new pathways in those who carried on her whole-hearted witness in their own time and circumstances. Ursula’s vision for women in spiritual leadership, did not end at her death, rather her death had the effect of invoking a new form of life to emerge. Ursula embodied what today we call the EDGE EFFECT. In ecology, the edge effect is the point where two ecosystems meet and this point is where the most new life-forms are created.

All around us we can observe new creations resulting from the Edge Effect and today most especially we are united in celebration with the Women Circles in Peru as they meet to transfer leadership and ritualize their own life edge experience. Following in the paths of Ursula and Angela, the women of the circles have been led by the Spirit to establish new models of leadership and community for women. These women also embody the edge effect in their daily lives as guided by the Spirit --they invite their sisters living at the edges of those systems which oppress into alternative systems where the values of equality, mutuality, integrity and freedom abide. In the early years of the Circles many women had no consciousness that pathways out of violence and discrimination existed. However, as the awareness of new forms of liberation began to come to life for them, so too did the dignity, strength, creativity and value of each woman flourish.

When Angela Merici and her first companions called upon the spirit of St Ursula to accompany the community, we can say beyond a doubt they knew what they were doing. Commending their mission to Ursula meant that for all eternity they could count on the inspiration of their holy patroness to ensure the fulfillment of the mission down through the ages. As a wise person once said, “It’s scary and breathtaking living at the edge of your life” and yet as we remember on this Feast Day the legacy and spiritual anchor that St Ursula and her companions represent for us... this living at the edge, **IS** for us life in the Spirit, is our hope for the flourishing of new life.

Happy Feast Day!

Noreen Allossery-Walsh, osu