

Dear Sisters and Friends:



“On November 25, 1535, when Angela was 61, she gathered her twenty eight companions together for a simple ceremony to consecrate themselves with her to the service of God. From then on, they were known as the ‘Company of St. Ursula’ under the patronage of the legendary fourth-century martyr who was revered as a heroine, protector and champion of young women. By the end of the year, the community numbered sixty, and would continue to grow.”

Celebrating Women Witness, Angela Merici Woman of Vision

In many ways the life of St. Ursula is shrouded in mystery. Yet, this fourth century British princess has left a lasting legacy through her connection with the company of St. Ursula whose members gather from across the globe to celebrate her feast today. The testimony of her courageous decision to follow Jesus with singleness of heart gives evidence that women in those early years of Christianity were inspirational leaders. They *chose* a simple lifestyle dedicated to the service of God and others. Simple but at the same time revolutionary and counter cultural in the experience of their contemporary reality.

What do we know about the connection between Angela and Ursula? One was a British princess, martyred for her faith, the other an old Italian woman searching to fulfill her purpose in life. They lived many centuries apart. Angela was alert and awake to the world around her. She travelled, listened to advice, prayed and discerned. She observed the life circumstances around her, and she was open to and influenced by the reality of her day. Renaissance Italy provided her with, “The Golden Legend” - the life of the saints, which we know were read to her by her father. Surely she encountered Ursula in those loved readings. Ursula and Catherine of Alexandria inspired Angela and perhaps shaped her spirituality and confirmed her vision. Much of the artwork of the time reflected the life of Ursula and her virgins, and appealed to the population of Angela’s time. It seems natural for Angela to choose Ursula as the guardian of the company that was so dear to her.

As we situate ourselves now in our reality and gather to celebrate our abundant blessing, can we hold in our hands and in our hearts “the trouble and beauty” that is within, around and among us. As daughters of Angela, friends and companions of Ursula may we continue to make the journey by walking.



Joan Stafford