

Foundation Day, November 25, 2023

Pondering over Angela Merici's founding of the **Company of St. Ursula** on November 25th in 1535, allowed me to review what this day evokes. Firstly, it highlights two women mystics, Ursula, after whom Angela named the community and secondly, Catherine of Alexandria, on whose feast she chose to honor its Founding. That day, Angela also dictated the rule to a Brescia notary, Gabriele Cozzano.



Credit: www.bridgemanart.com

All of this happened during the 16th c. Renaissance period in Italy. Angela had been meeting with these virgin companions for some years as she brought about amazing changes in their lives, inspiring them with a whole new perspective of what it was to be a woman and a consecrated one. She modeled tremendous changes for these women, giving them the ability to define their own female identity: the possibility of being virgins in a secular world and to stand out in their personal development and their own human relationships. By her death in 1540, the Company had grown from 28 virgins to 150.

In that Renaissance period in Italy, women began creating innovative roles for themselves, overcoming former cultural limitations, no longer obliged to be so submissive to men, keeping their own names, their own responsibilities and powers. Spirituality also became a way to perceive their reality and their ability to change as they adapted to their circumstances.

As for our 21st century adaptations, many of us have become more inclusive of the laity who decide to live and share their last years at St. Angela's Meadow Retirement Lodge, here in Chatham.

Marie-Anne osu