



Roman Martyrology: St. Angela Merici, virgin, dressed first the habit of the Third Order of St. Francis and met several young people to educate them in charity. Later, she instituted an order of women, the Company of St. Ursula, in order to live a life of perfection in the world and teach the ways of God to the teenagers.

Etymology: Angela = Related to Greek origins meaning messenger of God.

Canonization date: May 24, 1807 by Pope Pius VII .

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Angela Merici was born on March 21st, 1474, at Desenzano on Lake Garda; when she was left an orphan at the age of ten, she was brought up by her uncle and on his death went to live with her brothers. She was a devout girl and, having joined the Third Order of St. Francis (now known as the Secular Franciscan Order), she lived a life of great austerity, wishing, like St. Francis, to own nothing, not even a bed. She devoted herself to teaching children, Angela even has the double distinction of founding the first teaching congregation of women in the Church and what is now known a “secular institute” of religious women.

As her work became known, she was asked to go to Brescia where a house was put at her disposal and a number of women came to join her where they devoted themselves to every sort of corporal and spiritual work of mercy; but the particular emphasis was on education. Angela’s charming manner and good looks complemented her natural qualities of leadership and her methods were far removed from the modern idea of a convent school; she preferred to send her associates to teach girls in their own families. One of her favorite sayings was “Disorder in society is the result of disorder in the family”, so it was by educating children that she strove to effect an improvement in social conditions.

She eagerly took the opportunity for a trip to the Holy Land. When they had gotten as far as Crete, she was struck with blindness. Her friends wanted to return home, but she insisted on going through with the pilgrimage, and visited the sacred shrines with as much devotion and enthusiasm as if she had her sight. On the way back, while praying before a crucifix, her sight was restored at the same place where it had been lost.

At 57, she organized a group of girls to help her in catechetical work, she formed them into the Company of St. Ursula (patroness of medieval universities and venerated as a leader of women) for the purpose of re-Christianizing family life through solid Christian education of future wives and mothers. The “secular institute” existed until some years after Angela’s death.

Angela Merici died in Brescia on January 27th, 1540.