

# Angela Merici

**Angela Merici**, or **Angela de Merici**, (21 March 1474 – 27 January 1540) was an Italian religious leader and saint. She founded the **Order of Ursulines** in 1535 in **Brescia**.

## 1 Life

St Angela Merici was born in 1474 at Desenzano del Garda, a small town on the southwestern shore of Lake Garda in Lombardy. She and her older sister, whom she dearly loved, Giana Maria, were left orphans when she was fifteen years old.<sup>[2]</sup> Together they came to live with their uncle in the town of Salò. Young Angela was very distressed when her sister suddenly died without receiving the last sacraments. She joined the Third Order of St Francis, and increased her prayers to God so her sister's soul could rest in peace. It is said that in a vision she received a response that her sister was in heaven in the company of the saints.<sup>[3]</sup> Soon people began to notice Angela's beauty and particularly admire her hair. As by that time she had already promised herself to God, she wanted to avoid the worldly attention. And so she dyed her hair in soot.

Angela's uncle died when she was twenty years old and she returned to her previous home in Desenzano. Angela believed that better **Christian education** was needed for young girls. She then dedicated her time to teaching girls in her home, which she had converted into a school. She later had another vision that revealed to her that she was to found an association of **virgins** who were to devote their lives to the religious training of young girls. This association was a success and she was invited to start another school in the neighboring city, **Brescia**. She happily accepted this offer.<sup>[3]</sup>

According to legend, in 1524, while traveling to the **Holy Land**, St Angela Merici became suddenly blind when she was on the island of **Crete**. Despite this, St Angela continued her journey to the **Holy Places** and was ostensibly cured of her blindness, while praying before a crucifix, at the same place where she was struck with blindness a few weeks before.<sup>[3]</sup> In 1525, she came to Rome to gain the **Indulgences** of the Jubilee year. Pope Clement VII, who had heard of her virtue and success with her school, invited her to remain in Rome. St Angela disliked notoriety, and she soon returned to Brescia.

On 25 November 1535, St Angela Merici chose twelve virgins and started the foundation of the "*Company of St Ursula*" near the Church of St Afra, in a small house in



*Angèle Mérici*

Brescia. She wanted them to be consecrated to God and dedicated to the service of their neighbor, but remain in the world and live a celibate life in their own homes. She thus anticipated the secular institutes that have flourished in modern times.<sup>[2]</sup> On 18 March 1537, she was elected "*Mother and Mistress*" (Superior) of the order. St Angela Merici founded st.ursula's

When she died in Brescia on January 27, 1540, there were some 24 branches of the Company of St. Ursula serving the Church.<sup>[2]</sup> Her body was clothed in the habit of a **Franciscan tertiary** and interred in the Church of St Afra, Brescia.

## 2 Veneration

In life, Saint Angela Merici often prayed at the tombs of the Brescian martyrs at the Church of St Afra in Brescia. She lived in small rooms that were part of what was

then known as the “Monastery of the Lateran Canons.” According to her wishes, after her death, she was interred in the Church of St Afra to be near the martyrs’ remains. There her body remained until the complete destruction of this church and corresponding area due to Allied bombing during the Second World War, on 2 March 1945. This structure and corresponding buildings were afterwards rebuilt and became known as the “*Merician Centre*.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Saint Angela Merici was beatified in Rome on April 30, 1768, by Pope Clement XIII. She was later canonized on 24 May 1807, by Pope Pius VII.<sup>[4]</sup>

## 2.1 Feast Day

Saint Angela Merici was not included in the 1570 Tridentine Calendar of Pope Pius V, because she was not canonized until 1807. In 1861 her feast day was inserted in the Roman Calendar – not on the day of her death, 27 January, since this date was occupied by the feast day of Saint John Chrysostom, but instead on 31 May. In 1955 Pope Pius XII assigned this date to the new feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen, and moved the feast of Saint Angela to 1 June. The celebration was ranked as a Double until 1960, when Pope John XXIII gave it the equivalent rank of Third-Class Feast. Finally, in 1969, Pope Paul VI moved the celebration, ranked as a Memorial, to the saint’s day of death, 27 January.<sup>[5]</sup>

## 3 Legacy

- Parishes are dedicated to Saint Angela Merici Parish in Brea, California;<sup>[6]</sup> Metairie, Louisiana;<sup>[7]</sup> Fairview Park, Ohio<sup>[8]</sup> and Youngstown, Ohio.
- There is a St. Angela Merici Parish and School in Florissant, Missouri<sup>[9]</sup> And Bronx, New York;<sup>[10]</sup> As well as Houston, Texas.<sup>[11]</sup>

## 4 See also

- List of Catholic saints
- Incorruptibility

## 5 References

- [1] *Places in the life of St. Angela Merici*
- [2] “St. Angela Merici (1474 - 1540)”, St. Angela Merici Catholic Church, Missouri City, Texas
- [3] Ott, Michael. “St. Angela Merici.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. 28 May 2013

- [4] • *St. Angela Merici*
- [5] *Calendarium Romanum* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana 1969), pp. 86 and 125
- [6] St. Angela Merici, Brea, California
- [7] St. Angela Merici Catholic Church, Metairie, Louisiana
- [8] Saint Angela Merici Parish, Fairview Park, Ohio
- [9] St. Angela Merici School, Florissant, Missouri.
- [10] Saint Angela Merici School, Bronx, New York
- [11] St. Angela Merici Catholic Church, Houston, Texas

## 6 Bibliography

- Q. Mazzonis, “The Impact of Renaissance Gender-Related Notions on the Female Experience of the Sacred: The Case of Angela Merici’s Ursulines,” in Laurence Lux-Sterritt and Carmen Mangion (eds), *Gender, Catholicism and Spirituality: Women and the Roman Catholic Church in Britain and Europe, 1200-1900* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011),

## 7 External links

- *Founder Statue at St. Peter’s Basilica*
- *Places in the life of St. Angela Merici*
- *St. Angela Merici*
- Ursuline Sisters of Cincinnati follow her teachings: *St. Angela Merici*

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