

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

Vol. 5, No. 6

September 2020

Angela Merici, A Woman of Faith and Hope

Heartbeats is happy to be back after its summer break, and such a different summer it has been for all of us! The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted our lives in more ways than we could have ever imagined; and as we move into another season, we continue to wrestle with the unknowns of what truly lies ahead. With life as it is for all of us, it seems fitting to turn to St. Angela as a woman of faith and hope as our focus for the next several issues of Heartbeats. We hope these issues can be a grounding place for our own faith and hope.

Angela, we know, was no stranger to struggle, uncertainty, and darkness. She knew loss and grief when, as an adolescent, her sister and both parents died – three deaths which, according to tradition, followed quickly on each other. “Nobody has advanced any special reason for this apparently close succession of deaths. There does not seem to have been any plague epidemic at that time, but there were always plenty of endemic illnesses around, just as fatal, which used to result in a whole series of deaths and against which one was powerless. This could have happened to the Merici family” (*Angela Merici, Contribution towards a Biography*).

There was much darkness and struggle in the world in which Angela lived – and her experience of that in Brescia was especially poignant – the darkness of war and all that it left behind – the destruction, death, poverty, illness, despair, and fear which she encountered there.

She also lived at a time of pain and struggle within the Church – a Church of contradictions and seemingly slow to understand and respond to the needs of the people. With her caring heart, she pleaded, “Pray, and get others to pray, that God not abandon the Church, but reform it as God pleases” (*7th Counsel*).

We remember, too, the nearly forty years of waiting that the vision she had had as a young woman – communicating her mission to found a company of

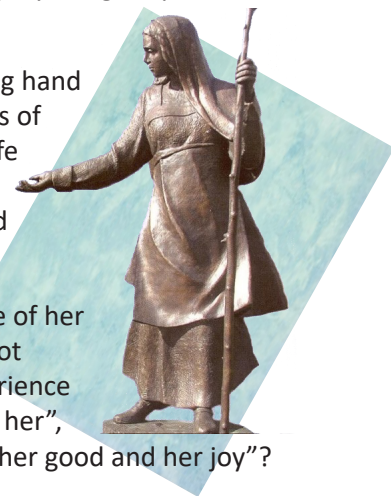
women – would be fulfilled in God’s way and in God’s time...the not-knowing, the uncertainty, the ongoing discernment for the way ahead.

We can ponder, as well, her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the experience she had of some kind of blindness – a physical experience of darkness that perhaps helped her to explore more deeply the other experiences of darkness in her life.

And, finally, by sharing with us her own prayer in Chapter 5 of the *Rule*, we are able to glimpse what she experienced as the contradictions and the struggles in her own heart, the weaknesses and temptations that challenged her and led her to pray “...light up the darkness of my heart.”

It seems, however, that walking hand in hand with these experiences of darkness and struggle in her life was that deep spirit of faith and hope that so characterized her life and her words.

When we reflect on the source of her deep faith and hope, are we not brought back to Angela’s experience of God as “the One who loved her”, as the One who wanted “only her good and her joy”?



In her reflections on Angela in *Also in Your Midst*, Louisville Ursuline Sr. Martha Buser, reflects on Angela's "sureness of God" and says, "Angela was a woman of hope because she knew God's fidelity...If God has been faithful until today, how can we be afraid of tomorrow?"

We know that Angela was deeply touched by the Passion of Jesus which was, for her, the ultimate expression of the fidelity and love of God. There she could join her own darkness and struggle to that of Jesus and, it seems, find the shelter and refuge that sustained her on the journey of her own life.

In these uncertain and challenging times, we pray to be, like Angela, people of faith and hope – women and men who are sure of God because we know God as the One who loves us, at whose feet we find shelter, and who will never abandon us in our needs.



Music Reflection

"The Journey" by Lea Salonga

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqVwhrWBzEM>



To Have Hope

To have hope
Is to believe that history continues open
To the dream of God and to human creativity.

To have hope
Is to continue affirming
That it is possible to dream a different world,
Without hunger, without injustice,
Without discrimination.

To have hope
Is to be a courier of God
And courier of men and women of good will,
Tearing down walls, destroying borders,
Building bridges.

To have hope
Is to believe in the revolutionary potential of faith,
Is to leave the open so that
The Spirit can enter and make all things anew.

To have hope
Is to believe that life wins over death.

To have hope
Is to begin again as many times as necessary.

To have hope
Is to believe that hope is not
The last thing that dies.

To have hope
Is to believe that hope cannot die,
That hope no longer dies.

To have hope
Is to live.

*Missionary Sisters of St. Charles Borromeo, Honduras
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Words of Angela for Praying and Pondering

- Have hope and firm faith in God, for God will help you in everything. (*Prologue to the Counsels*)
- Act, move, believe, strive, hope, cry out to God with all your heart – for without doubt you will see marvelous things... (*Prologue to the Counsels*)
- ...I am continually among them with my Lover, or rather ours, the Lover of us all, provided they believe and do not lose heart and hope. (*5th Counsel*)
- ...you will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ. (*7th Counsel*)
- ...and with a lively and steadfast faith to receive from God what you have to do for love of God. (*Prologue to the Testament*)
- Believe it, do not doubt, have firm faith that it will be so. (*Last Legacy*)
- Let them hold this as most certain: that they will never be abandoned in their needs. God will provide for them wonderfully. They must not lose hope. (*5th Counsel*)
- I have this firm and unquestioning faith and hope in infinite divine goodness... (*Prologue to the Rule*)