

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint Angela Merici

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: January 27

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IN BRIEF

Saint Angela Merici

Consecrated laywoman from Lombardy, foundress of the Company of Saint Ursula, from which the Ursulines descend.

Feast day	January 27
Born	c. 1474, Desenzano del Garda, Lombardy, Italy
Died	January 27, 1540, Brescia, Italy
Canonized	1807, by Pope Pius VII
Era	16th century
Patron saint of	educators, loss of parents, the sick

In this booklet

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Novena to Saint Angela Merici

Sanctuary of Saint Angela Merici in Brescia

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint Angela Merici

Saint Angela Merici was an Italian laywoman of the Renaissance who, in 1535, founded the Company of Saint Ursula in Brescia, from which the Ursulines descend. A Franciscan tertiary, a pilgrim and a much sought-after counselor, she imagined a way of life that was new for her time: women consecrated to God without enclosure, without a habit and without public vows, remaining in their families and their own surroundings. She died on January 27, 1540, was canonized in 1807, and is celebrated on January 27.

Who was Saint Angela Merici?

Angela was born around 1474 in Desenzano, on the southern shore of Lake Garda, in Lombardy. Her father, Giovanni Merici, was a minor country nobleman who farmed an estate called Le Grezze; her mother, Caterina Biancosi, came from a respected family of Salò. In the evenings her father read the lives of the saints to his children, and these readings left a deep mark on the little girl. Italy at that time was ravaged by wars, epidemics and famines.

When she was about fifteen, Angela lost her father, her mother and one of her sisters within a few months. A maternal uncle then took her in at Salò, where she discovered the life of a small Renaissance town, enlivened by the reformed Franciscans. The old accounts of her youth mix history and legend: even the exact date of her birth is unknown, and historians place it between 1470 and 1475.

Key dates in the life of Saint Angela Merici

- **c. 1474**: Born in Desenzano del Garda.
- **c. 1489**: Death of her parents; she goes to live with an uncle in Salò.
- **1490s**: She joins the Third Order of Saint Francis.

- **1516**: Sent to Brescia to comfort a widow, she settles there.
- **1524**: Pilgrimage to the Holy Land.
- **1525**: Pilgrimage to Rome for the Holy Year and audience with Pope Clement VII.
- **1529**: War forces her to take refuge in Cremona.
- **November 25, 1535**: Founding of the Company of Saint Ursula in Brescia.
- **January 27, 1540**: Dies in Brescia.
- **1544**: Pope Paul III approves the Company.
- **1807**: Canonized by Pope Pius VII.

A vocation glimpsed at Le Grezze

Back on the family estate after her uncle's death, Angela received, according to the traditional account, a vision that shaped her whole life: a ladder reaching up to heaven, on which young women were going up and down. She understood that God was asking her to found one day a spiritual family of women at the service of the Church. Yet she would have to wait nearly forty years to carry out this plan.

In the meantime, she chose a path that left her free: at about eighteen, she entered the Franciscan Third Order. This allowed her to consecrate herself to the Lord while remaining a laywoman, and to receive the Eucharist more often, which was rare at the time. She lived a life of fasting, prayer and service to others.



Saint Angela Merici, painting.

The comforter of Brescia

In 1516 her Franciscan superiors sent her to Brescia to stay with Caterina Patengola, a woman who had lost her husband and sons in the war and had lost the will to live. Angela stayed with her for two years, then decided to remain in the city. She lodged for fourteen years with a man named Antonio Romano, then with Agostino Gallo, and finally in a small room near the church of Saint Afra.

Her reputation grew. People came to her to be comforted, advised and reconciled; theologians questioned her about Scripture, and the Duke of Milan, Francesco II Sforza, asked her to be his spiritual mother. A circle of fervent lay people formed around her, women of the nobility as well as of the common people.

A pilgrim

In 1524 Angela set out for Jerusalem. During the voyage she was struck by an eye infection that left her almost blind: in the Holy Land she had to be guided around the places of the Passion. She recovered her sight on the way back, in Crete. This experience made the Passion and Resurrection of Christ the heart of her spirituality.

The following year, in Rome for the Holy Year, she was received by Pope Clement VII, who invited her to stay in the city. She respectfully declined, convinced that God was waiting for her in Brescia. Between 1529 and 1532 she also went to the Sacro Monte of Varallo, whose chapels recall the life of Christ for those who cannot travel to Jerusalem.

The Company of Saint Ursula

On November 25, 1535, twenty-eight young women attended Mass and then, in an oratory, gave themselves to the Lord by writing their names in a register. So was born the Company of Saint Ursula, placed under the protection of Saint Ursula, a martyr very popular at the time.

Its members wore no habit, did not live in enclosure and took no public vows. Each one remained in her family or her place of work, prayed, lived chastely and served those around her. They met regularly for the Eucharist and to encourage one another.

Angela left her daughters a Rule, Counsels for those in charge, and a spiritual Testament, in which she insists on gentleness, respect for each person and trust in God. She died on January 27, 1540; Pope Paul III approved the Company in 1544.

From Brescia to the world

After the Council of Trent, the Ursulines mostly adopted enclosure and became teachers of girls. Saint Charles Borromeo brought them to Milan, and from there they spread to France and as far as Canada. Ursuline schools later opened throughout the English-speaking world, from New Orleans, where the Ursulines arrived in 1727, to Ireland, Britain and Australia.

Why is Saint Angela Merici a patron of educators?

Angela Merici knew how to invent. At a time when consecrated life for women was lived almost only in convents, she sensed that women could belong entirely to God in the midst of the world. Her daughters, the Ursulines, became one of the great teaching orders of the Church, which is why she is invoked by teachers and educators.

Her holiness is made of patience, since she waited decades before founding her Company, of listening, and of delicate attention to each person. She is prayed to for educators, for young people, for women seeking their vocation, and for those who lost their parents when they were young, as she did.

To pray with her, see the prayer to Saint Angela Merici and the novena to Saint Angela Merici, from January 18 to 26.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint Angela Merici in art

- **Dark clothing and a veil**: the simple dress of a Franciscan tertiary, not a nun's habit.
- **A ladder**: the vision in which she saw young women climbing to heaven.
- **Young girls around her**: the members of her Company and, later, the pupils of the Ursulines.
- **A book**: her Rule, or the Scripture she loved to meditate.



Saint Angela Merici honored in Desenzano del Garda, her hometown.

Where to pray to Saint Angela Merici

- **Brescia** (Italy): the shrine of Saint Angela Merici, the former church of Saint Afra, where her body rests.
- **Desenzano del Garda**: her hometown, on Lake Garda.
- **Salò**: the town of her adolescence.
- The many Ursuline chapels and schools around the world.

PRAYER

Prayer to Saint Angela Merici for Young People and Educators

Saint Angela Merici left her daughters three short writings: a Rule, Counsels and a spiritual Testament. No prayer of hers has become universally known, but her spirituality of trust, gentleness and inner freedom lends itself naturally to prayer. Here is an original prayer inspired by her life, for young people and for those who educate them.

The spirit of Saint Angela

In her writings, Angela asks those in charge of the Company to guide each member with gentleness rather than harshness, to respect the personality of each one, and never to lose confidence, because it is God himself who willed this work and he will not abandon it. She also insists on unity: her daughters are to remain united among themselves, of one heart.

Prayer to Saint Angela Merici for Young People and Educators

Saint Angela, you who lost your parents so young and found a Father in God, pray for children and young people who grow up in grief or loneliness. May they meet adults who welcome them and guide them.

You who waited patiently for many years for the hour to carry out what God had shown you, teach me not to lose heart when my plans are delayed, and to stay faithful in small things.

You who comforted the sorrowful, reconciled enemies and counseled the learned and the humble alike, give me a heart that listens and words that bring peace.

I entrust to you educators, teachers and parents, and all women seeking how to give their lives to God in the midst of the world. I also entrust to you my intention: (name it in silence).

Obtain for us the grace to live united, of one heart, and to keep our trust in God, who always completes the work he has begun. Amen.

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On January 27, the feast of Saint Angela Merici and the anniversary of her death in Brescia in 1540.
- At the start of a school year, or before a difficult conversation with a child or a student.
- For a young person who has lost a parent.
- When discerning a vocation, especially consecrated life lived in the world.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint Angela Merici, and read the life of Saint Angela Merici.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint Angela Merici

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and writings of Saint Angela Merici, foundress of the Company of Saint Ursula. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of her feast on January 27, begin on January 18; it then ends on January 26. You can also pray it at any time of the year, for example at the start of a school year or when a long-awaited project seems stuck.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The small act suggested for each day helps you carry the prayer into your daily life. Angela insisted on gentleness: if you miss a day, do not be discouraged, simply continue.

Day 1: Faith received at home

In the evenings at Le Grezze, Giovanni Merici read the lives of the saints to his children. It was at home that Angela first received a taste for God. Families remain the first school of faith. A story told at bedtime can plant a seed that bears fruit decades later.

Prayer: Lord, bless the families who pass on the faith, and help me to pass it on in my turn.

Today: Read or tell the life of a saint to a child.

Day 2: Passing through grief

As a teenager, Angela lost her parents and a sister within a few months. This grief did not draw her away from God: it made her more attentive to the sufferings of others. The wounds we carry can become a place of compassion.

Prayer: Lord, comfort those who mourn a loved one, especially children who have lost their parents.

Today: Reach out to someone who is grieving.

Day 3: The ladder to heaven

In her vision, Angela saw young women going up and down a ladder joining earth and heaven. Every life can become a path toward God, and no one climbs alone. Angela waited nearly forty years before this vision took shape, but she never forgot it.

Prayer: Lord, show me the path you have prepared for me.

Today: Pray for vocations, especially for someone you know who is discerning.

Day 4: Giving yourself freely

By becoming a Franciscan tertiary, Angela consecrated herself to God without leaving the world. She was already living, for herself, the freedom she would later offer to her daughters. Holiness is not reserved for the cloister: it can grow in an office, a kitchen or a classroom.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to belong entirely to you where I live and work.

Today: Offer the work of your day to God in the morning.

Day 5: Comforting

In Brescia, Angela stayed for two years with a widow who had lost the will to live. Her first mission was a mission of presence. Often the greatest help we can give is simply to stay, to listen without hurrying, and to let the other person speak of their sorrow.

Prayer: Lord, make me a comfort to those who are downcast.

Today: Visit or call a lonely or discouraged person.

Day 6: Walking in the footsteps of Christ

In Jerusalem, almost blind, Angela let herself be guided around the places of the Passion. She saw nothing there, but she met the suffering and risen Christ. Her sight returned on the voyage home, and from then on the Passion and the Resurrection stood at the center of her prayer.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, when I can no longer see clearly, take me by the hand.

Today: Meditate on one station of the Way of the Cross.

Day 7: Knowing how to say no, even to the pope

Pope Clement VII invited her to stay in Rome. Angela respectfully declined: she knew God was waiting for her in Brescia. To discern sometimes means turning down an attractive offer. Faithfulness to a call is not always the most prestigious path.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, help me to discern your will and give me the courage to follow it.

Today: Take a moment of silence before a decision you have to make.

Day 8: Leading with gentleness

Angela asked those with responsibility to guide others with gentleness and respect, without harshness. She believed in the strength of kindness, and her Counsels remain a small school of leadership.

Prayer: Lord, bless educators, and give me gentleness toward those entrusted to me.

Today: Encourage someone instead of correcting them.

Day 9: Keeping trust

Angela waited decades before founding the Company, and she died five years later, before it was approved. Yet she left her daughters in trust: the work belonged to God, and he would not abandon it. History proved her right, since the Company she founded with twenty-eight young women grew into a family present on every continent.

Prayer: Lord, I place in your hands the intention of this novena. Through the intercession of Saint Angela Merici, keep me in trust. Amen.

Today: Entrust to God a project that is slow to come about.

Closing prayer

Saint Angela Merici, at the end of these nine days, I entrust to you the intention I have brought before you. Pray for young people, for families and for all who educate. Obtain for us the grace to live united, of one heart, in the service of God and of our brothers and sisters. Amen.

To go further, read the life of Saint Angela Merici and the prayer to Saint Angela Merici.

PILGRIMAGE

Sanctuary of Saint Angela Merici in Brescia

In Brescia, in Lombardy, the sanctuary of Saint Angela Merici is the former Church of Saint Afra, near which the saint spent the last years of her life. She was buried there after her death on January 27, 1540, and it is there that Ursulines from around the world and the people of Brescia come to pray to her.

A church at the heart of her life

Having arrived in Brescia in 1516, Angela lived there for nearly a quarter of a century, staying in turn with several friendly families. Toward the end of her life she settled in a small room next to the Church of Saint Afra, then entrusted to canons. It was in this city that she gathered the first twenty-eight members of the Company of Saint Ursula on November 25, 1535. At her death, her body was laid in the Church of Saint Afra, which has since become the sanctuary that bears her name.

Over the centuries the church has been altered and restored. Above all it remains the place of her burial: the saint's body is displayed for the veneration of the faithful. For the spiritual families that spring from Angela (Ursuline sisters, members of the Company living in the world, and lay associates), it is the place of origin.

Visiting the sanctuary

The sanctuary is in the historic center of Brescia, a city rich in churches and monuments, including its two cathedrals and the Santa Giulia monastic complex, a World Heritage site. Visitors can pray before the saint's shrine and

attend Mass. On January 27, her feast day, and around November 25, the anniversary of the founding of the Company, special celebrations are usually held here.

Praying on site

Before your visit, you can read the life of Saint Angela Merici. Before her shrine, you can entrust young people, educators, and families to her, then say the prayer to Saint Angela Merici. It is also fitting to pray for unity, which she urged so strongly on her daughters. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Saint Angela Merici

- **Desenzano del Garda**: her birthplace, on the southern shore of Lake Garda, and the surrounding area where the family estate of Le Grezze stood.
- **Salò**: the small town on Lake Garda where she lived with her uncle after her parents died.
- **Varallo** (Piedmont): the Sacro Monte, where she went on pilgrimage.
- **Cremona**: the city where she took refuge during the war of 1529.

Practical information

Brescia is easy to reach by train from Milan and Verona. The sanctuary can be reached on foot from the city center. Opening hours, Mass times, and feast-day celebrations should be checked with the sanctuary or the Diocese of Brescia before you come. Modest dress is expected.

CREDITS

Credits and sources

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