

The Most Reverend Thomas John Paprocki
Ursuline Sisters of the Roman Union
Alton, Illinois

The Memorial of Saint Angela Merici
27 January 2011

My dear Sisters,

We have gathered here, at the altar of the Lord, because we long for the presence of God, the source of our life in Christ Jesus, “who became for us wisdom from God (I Corinthians 1:30). This is the natural desire of every human heart, though some do not recognize it for what it is and seek to satisfy this longing with the things of this world.

With the Apostle, Saints Timothy and Titus, whose memorial we celebrated yesterday, made themselves “co-workers in the truth” to help Saint Paul proclaim the good news of salvation to every people (III John 3). Because of their encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ they were filled with a truly great missionary zeal; they wanted all people to see Christ, knowing that whoever sees him sees the Father (cf. John 14:9).

It was this same missionary desire that led your Foundress, Saint Angela Merici, whose memorial we celebrate today, to devote her life – and the lives of those women who gathered around her – to the support and

education of young women. Through the care and teaching of her Sisters, the lamps of many young souls would be cleansed and allow the Word of God to become a lamp unto their feet and a light their paths (cf. Psalm 119:105). The Gospel of Saint John tells us that this word is truth and that we are consecrated in truth by Jesus Christ (cf. John 17:17).

Our souls are much like an aged lamp, which houses a candle enclosed within four panes of glass. When soot and smoke is left on the panes of glass the light still shines, but only dimly; if soot and smoke cover the panes of glass the light does not shine and would like placing the lamp “under a bushel basket or under a bed” (Mark 4:21).

In a similar manner, if our souls are covered with the soot and smoke of sin the light of Christ will not shine brightly through the witness of our lives and we will not easily lead others to look upon the face of God. For this reason, the Book of Sirach encourages us to “cultivate wisdom, to make wisdom our prized possession, so that we can declare God’s praises” (Sirach 51:14, 21-22).

The Lord has given us the grace of his sacraments so that the windows of our souls might not be covered with the stain of sin. Let us, then, receive the sacraments in a worthy manner, that the light of Christ

will shine through each of our lives. In living in such a way, we, like Saint Angela, will be able to help others let the light of Christ shine through their lives.

This most important and vital task of helping others live in the light of Christ is given to every member of the faithful, but in a particular way to you, dear Sisters, who have been drawn together by the example of Saint Angela (cf. Psalm 119:105). In the words of the great Pope John Paul II,

The consecrated life, which you have chosen, is a privileged path in the Church to express the prophetic and eschatological dimension of the Gospel message: it "reveals more clearly to all believers the heavenly goods which are already present in this age, witnessing to the new and eternal life which we have acquired through the redemptive work of Christ and prelude to our future resurrection and the glory of the heavenly kingdom" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 44). I encourage you to deepen this prophetic dimension for the contemporary world and to make the signs of the kingdom to come visible by your taste for prayer, which is always the source of our Christian life, by your fraternal life, which is itself prophecy in action (cf. *Vita consecrata*, n. 85), by your explicit witness and by your missionary concern.¹

By living in this way, through your work of education and your life of communal prayer, you will bring "grace and peace from God the Father

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Letter on the Occasion of the Centenary of the Roman Union of the Order of St. Ursula*, 10 November 2000.

and Christ Jesus our Savior” to everyone you meet, as your Foundress did so well (Titus 1:4).

I am deeply grateful for your dedicated teaching and service within this Diocese of Springfield in Illinois for more than eighty years and I am happy to be present with you today. I urge you, in the words of Saint Angela, to

live in harmony, united together in one heart and one will. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, treating each other with respect, helping one another, bearing with one another in Christ Jesus; if you really try to live like this, there is no doubt that the Lord our God will be in your midst.²

I look forward to experiencing the numerous graces the Lord will grant to this local Church through your unity and devotion.

Lastly, my dear Sisters, pray with Jesus that all may be one as Jesus is one with His Father, so that our unity may be complete and that the world will that God loves us (cf. John 17:21-23). As you take up the Lord’s cross through your individual and communal daily living, may the Lord inspire many young women in this local Church to follow you in following Saint Angela. May the fruits of your labors for the Gospel increase your

² Saint Angela Merici.

congregation, strengthen the faithful of the Diocese and bring us all to look upon the face of God forever.

May God give us this grace. Amen.