

# **Memorial of St. Angela Merici**

## **Homily of Bishop Barres**

### **St. Agnes Cathedral**

**January 27, 2021**

Today we celebrate the Memorial of St. Angela Merici (1474-1540) from Brescia, Italy, the foundress of the Ursuline Sisters. Many of us are aware of the great legacy of the Ursuline Sisters at Ursuline Academy in both New Rochelle, New York and Wilmington, Delaware and the recently closed College of New Rochelle and many other locations such as Youngstown, Ohio.

The Ursulines have had a beautiful charism historically for the education of young women so this morning we give tribute to the Ursuline nuns and all religious women who have dedicated themselves to Christ the Teacher and the Parable of the Sower.

The Parable of the Sower from the Gospel of Mark exhorts us to cultivate a rich soil of the soul that can enable us “to hear the word and accept it and bear fruit thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”

In *Verbum Domini*, Pope Benedict XVI asks us to read, meditate, pray, contemplate and live the Sacred Scriptures. He emphasizes that silence is critical to receiving the Word of God. Silence cultivates the rich soil of the soul to receive the Word.

Pope Benedict writes: “The word can only be spoken and heard in silence, outward and inward. Ours is not an age which fosters recollection; at times one has the impression that people are afraid of detaching themselves, even for a moment, from the mass media. For this reason, it is necessary nowadays that the People of God be educated in the value of silence. Rediscovering the centrality of God’s word in the life of the Church also means rediscovering a sense of recollection and inner repose. The great patristic tradition teaches us that the mysteries of Christ all involve silence. Only in silence can the word of God find a home in us, as it did in Mary, woman of the word and, inseparably, woman of silence.” (66)

Great and magnanimous saints like St. Angela Merici with large and long-lasting ecclesial missions are able to be the instruments of the Holy Spirit because they

invest deeply in *lectio divina*. They invest in prayer. They invest in silence. They sacrifice deeply to pray deeply. In an Ignatian sense, there is a beautiful harmony between their action and contemplation, their contemplation and action.

In the Office of Readings from the Liturgy of the Hours today, we are presented with a section from the Spiritual Testament of St. Angela Merici. She writes to her community: “Mothers and sister most dear to me in Christ: in the first place strive with all your power and zeal to be open. With the help of God, try to receive such good counsel, that led solely by the love of God and an eagerness to save souls, you may fulfill your charge.”

That stretched openness to God is the rich soil that inspires great saints, women religious, mystics and missionaries to receive the Word of God, to bear fruit and to humbly bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth.