

# Heartbeats

## The Company of St. Angela in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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*In this issue of Heartbeats, our reflection on Angela's contemplative spirit focuses on the counter-cultural aspect of living contemplatively. In our fast-paced society that encourages busyness and activity that is productive, it is a challenge to foster a contemplative spirit. Tolle Eckhart tells us: "In today's culture we all think too much, seek too much, want too much and forget about the joy of just being." How difficult it is for us to not focus on the past with regret or anticipate the future with anxiety. Living in the present moment is such a challenge. Mother Teresa tells us to "Be happy in the moment, this is enough. Each moment is all we need."*

*Mindfulness is the ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we are doing. It fosters a contemplative spirit that helps us be in touch with ourselves, in touch with our God. Colleen Mc Corry, Head of Counselling at Ursuline Academy in St. Louis, shares with us how she became aware of the importance of mindfulness in her ministry with students and co-workers.*

### A Journey Toward Mindfulness

My journey with mindfulness began roughly two and a half years ago when I received an e-mail from an organization called Mindful Schools inviting me to take an online course. I still have no idea how I landed on this mailing list, but I do know, and readily admit, that I looked up the definition of mindfulness upon getting the invitation. The course piqued my interest and was reasonably priced, so I jumped in. And I loved the program from Day 1.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a founder of the mindfulness movement, defines it as "awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally". Formal daily practices of mindfulness help one to develop increasing "mindful moments" throughout our busy lives.

The first course led to one that included curriculum I could use with students, allowing me to share skills they can use to help them navigate

their stressful schedules and complex relationships as they move toward adulthood.

Mindfulness practice helps our students spend time each day simply sitting and focusing on their breath, on sound, on sending kind thoughts to others. With the immediacy of current forms of communication, it is ever more important to teach our students about taking a bit of time before responding. Mindfulness teaches students to take that moment, take a breath, and then respond instead of reacting without thinking. Students (and teachers) welcome the chance to stop at the beginning of a class and sit in silence, focusing on the present moment, bringing themselves back to it when their minds stubbornly move to the past or the future. It takes practice, and they are willing to undertake the effort. And I'm more than willing to help them.

Colleen Mc Corry  
Certified Mindful Schools Instructor

## Saint Ursula



On October 21<sup>st</sup> we celebrate the Feast of St. Ursula, whom Angela chose as the patron of her Company. Historically we know very little about this woman that came to be called Ursula. Cabrini Durkin, in her book [Angela's Journey of the Heart](#) tells us: "Today it is only through legend, sacred art and institutions dedicated to God under Ursula's patronage that we know something of this Christian woman, virgin and martyr of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and the spirit she engendered."

The basic outline of the legend of Ursula and her companions is this: Ursula was the only child of a Christian king and queen in Britain. She dedicated herself to Christ at an early age. A neighboring pagan ruler sought to annex her parents' realm by forcing marriage between Ursula and his son. Inspired in a dream, Ursula offered a creative plan: delay marriage three years while she and her ten young female companions made a voyage, each accompanied by a thousand girls. Ursula was their captain and leader in faith. She saw this adventure as an opportunity to lead them, and her suiter as well, to Christ. However, two commanders became suspicious of this group of young women as they saw the influence the women were having among others on the ship. The two men plotted to ambush the pilgrims at Cologne, where all the women but Ursula were massacred. The chief spared Ursula and sought her as his wife.



When she rejected his offer, he shot her with an arrow.



As a virgin and martyr, Ursula lived a counter-cultural life, which was fostered by a prayerful spirit. As a risk taker and leader, she attracted many others to Christ and to a new way of life.

Cabrini Durkin tells us that "In countless cities and artistic media, Medieval and Renaissance artists pictured Ursula and her companions, these faith-filled adventurers... She is clearly a leader of brave women of faith, loyal to Christ."

A way of contemplating Ursula would be to reflect on artwork that features her. In the book, [Imaging the Word: Arts and Lectionary Resources](#) Vol.3, we are offered a way of doing this.

There are four phases to this process.

1. Contemplation: slowing down, taking time to calm myself and be at rest.
2. Perception: bringing my eyes, ears, taste and touch to an encounter with a work of art —asking what the work is about, how does it make me feel?
3. Interpretation: what do I think it means?
4. Response: what, if anything does a particular work of art ask of me? What do my heart and emotions feel in the presence of something holy?

The artwork on this page as well as others you know of offer opportunities for this reflection.