

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

Vol. 3, No. 7

September 2018

*After our summer break, we are happy to be back with you and to continue our exploration into St. Angela's charism and spirit, and how we are called to live them in the reality of our own lives today. For the next few months we will be reflecting on Angela's **pilgrim spirit**.*

Angela Merici – Pilgrim

Angela was, quite literally, a pilgrim, and amazingly so for the time in which she lived. We are not sure of the exact number of pilgrimages she made, but we do know they included places near (Mantua and Varallo) and far (the Holy Land and Rome). We have many artistic representations of Angela that picture her with her pilgrim's staff; and we know that at the time of her death, she was buried with her pilgrim's walking stick.

We are reminded that to go on a pilgrimage in Angela's time was a long and difficult undertaking. Travel was slow and hard, either by foot or by animal, or by boat on the sea. Pilgrims were in constant danger from sickness, bad weather, or wars that were going on. And yet Angela's conviction and dedication to the pilgrim call were so compelling that she was willing to take whatever risks were involved. Perhaps we can also see in her pilgrimages an outer expression of her own inner journey, a journey of the heart, a journey of faith, as she sought to listen to and follow where God's Spirit was leading in her own life.

As we move into exploring the pilgrim facet of Angela's life and charism, we begin with some reflections on what it means to be a pilgrim. In a Spring, 1992 *Spirituality Today* article entitled "Pilgrims and Tourists: Conflicting Metaphors for the Christian Journey to God," author Doris Donnelly distinguishes between pilgrims and tourists and offers five distinctive characteristics of pilgrims:

1. Pilgrims perceive an internal dimension of the pilgrimage.
2. Pilgrims invest themselves.
3. The focus for the pilgrim is to be affected by the pilgrimage.
4. Both the journey and the arrival are important for the pilgrim.
5. Community is formed for the pilgrim.

*"Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
whose hearts are set on pilgrimage."*

(Psalm 84:5)



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For Those Who Have Far to Travel

(Jan Richardson: *Circle of Grace*)

"If you could see
the journey whole,
you might never
undertake it,
might never dare
the first step
that propels you
from the place
you have known
toward the place
you know not.

Call it
one of the mercies
of the road:
that we see it
only by stages
as it opens
before us,
as it comes into
our keeping,
step by
single step.

There is nothing
for it
but to go,
and by our going
take the vows
the pilgrim takes:

to be faithful to
the next step;
to rely on more
than the map;
to heed the signposts
of intuition and dream;
to follow the star
that only you
will recognize;

to keep an open eye
for the wonders that
attend the path;
to press on
beyond distractions,
beyond fatigue,
beyond what would
tempt you
from the way.

There are vows
that only you
will know:
the secret promises
for your particular path
and the new ones
you will need to make
when the road
is revealed
by turns
you could not
have foreseen.

Keep them, break them,
make them again;
each promise becomes
part of the path,
each choice creates
the road
that will take you
to the place
where at last
you will kneel

to offer the gift
most needed—
the gift that only you
can give—
before turning to go
home by
another way."

"All of us, of course, are on pilgrimage to God. We can expect to be guided by Angela and other spiritual ancestors' characteristic traits: those of recognizing sacred ground, wherever we stand; of hearing God calling us to answer a need of our time with our talents, skills and gifts; of tapping into the blessings we have of courage, steadfastness, and hope in God for the sake of others. We see the evils that cry out to heaven for justice in our day: human trafficking, the plight of immigrants who everywhere are unwelcome, wars tearing at the hearts and lives of so many nations, abuse of our mother Earth and her resources. You can finish the list. *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* defines 'pilgrimage' as 'the course of life on earth.' May we take up our pilgrims' staffs now, boldly and biblically, 'to do justice, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with our God' (*Micah 6:8*). The pilgrim spirit demands it."

(Sue Anne Cole, OSU, St. Louis, MO)



For Pondering

- *What have been my own experiences of pilgrimage? Where have the pilgrimages of my life and of my heart led me? What have I learned along the way?*
- *How am I being called to be a pilgrim in my life now? What challenges me on the journey? What sustains and supports me?*