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| Mary Cabrini-Durkin, from the United States, is a member of the Company of St Ursula. She is an Angela scholar, and has spent many years researching Angela’s life. On the screen you will see the front of an excellent book she has written, and she has another one being published on Angela’s leadership this month. The script of this presentation is adapted from the transcript of the three videos Mary Cabrini kindly allowed us to film in March 2019, when she came over to attend the Ursuline Conference. All schools have a copy of the three clips and the full transcript.She begins the first clip with a very special message for you:“I am so happy to be able to share some of my joy in our Madre St Angela with you today.”There are three important phases of Angela’s life**Meet Angela The Faith-Filled Child**Angela was born in Northern Italy, near the city of Brescia in the Province of Lombardy.Let’s take a closer look at the location of Lombardy, as it turned out to be very important in Angela’s development, where she lived and the journeys and pilgrimages she embarked upon in the course of her life.We begin our look at St Angela’s life- who of course was not St Angela then-when she worn in the then small town of Desenzano, a very beautiful town on the shores of Lake Garda in 1474. Today in Desenzano, you can see the window of the room where Angela was born; and some of her belongings.You can visit the houseLast year, there was an Ursuline staff trip to Desenzano, and Fr John Jesus posted this lovely tweetThis faith-filled child with her family moved to a farm in the neighbourhood of Le Grezze when she was quite small. A faith filled family produced this faith-filled child. Angela experienced loving and healthy family life there on the farm in Le Grezze with her parents, Caterina Biancosi Merici and her father Giovanni Merici who brought up a family of two girls and three boys on the farm. It was surely a happy family because Angela herself, when she later formed her Company of St Ursula in 1535, she shaped it as a loving, spiritual family.One of the beautiful features of their family life, was in the evenings after they had had their meal, and before they went to bed, Papa Giovanni read to the family from the Book of Saints, The Golden Legend it was called. Now it is quite striking that this farm family had a book, only 20 years after the publication of the Gutenberg Bible, - a printed, bound book which was the new technology of the age. The book was dedicated to forming the family in faith. These lives of the Saints gave the young Angela models of heroic courage and adventure, and a spiritual idealism and these cultivated in her what would eventually become some of the great passions of her life, certainly her dedication to Jesus. As she listened to her Papa reading the stories of great Saints who had given their lives as martyrs, as witnesses of faith, she learned all about the people who, in earliest Church times, had stood up for faith and for their loyalty to Christ- and this became a hallmark of her own life. She became very devoted to these martyrs of the early Church; and later on, as we know, she would choose one of them, St Ursula, as the patron for the group that she began, The Company of St Ursula.This book also gave her a window unto a wider world, and we know that Angela, although brought up on the farm, could imagine a world beyond the farm.She could imagine what was not - but could be. She was not limited by either time or space.And this all flowed into her gift, her bequest to us: the Company of St Ursula, the Order of St Ursula, the Ursuline Sisters - all coming from the seeds that were planted in a young girl on a farm in a small village in Northern Italy.Angela realised very early in her life as a young girl that she had a special calling from God- she didn’t know what it would be or how she would live it out- but she knew that God was calling her to a special intimacy with him.Into this world of joy and growing faith came some great sadness. When Angela was about 13-14, her older sister, her only sister, died quite suddenly and Angela experienced deep grief - and also, great anxiety. She worried that her sister would not have gone to heaven because of some of the pranks and mischievous activities that they had got up to together- trespassing on other farmers’ land, letting the animals get out and nibble someone else’s crops- things for which her father had had to pay fines to the civic authority, might have even imperilled her sister’s soul. But we now know that that that kind of depression and anxiety was a natural outcome of her grief. Then sadly, a very short time after that, both her parents died. Angela was an orphan with her brothers, and because she and the younger brother were too young to be on the farm without adult parenting…..they had to leave her beloved Le Grezze. They were taken to a nearby town of Salò to live with her mother’s brother and sister-in-law, the Biancosi family.It was a time of great sadness for Angela- she had not only lost of her dearest and nearest, but she had also lost her home. She’d gone to a very different world from the life on the farm, she now lived in a city and in a different class of society as well. It was a very difficult transition and to make things more complicated, she and her Aunt and Uncle had a certain amount of conflict over her calling. They felt the best thing they could do for her was find her a husband and get her married and settled in life- and they were determined. But she knew that God had called her to another way of being with him – and she was equally determined. I think it would be fair to use the word “stubborn”: Angela was pretty stubborn. Her friends, people in Salò, would say; “Oh Angela, you’ve got such beautiful blonde hair, you’re going to get a man easily!” So, what did Angela do? She took ashes out of the fireplace and rubbed it in her hair. She was not going to be forced to marry: she knew that she had another calling – but it was a very difficult time. She was also very decisive about certain spiritual practices. One day, there was a social event with lovely picnic, with beautiful salad etc. and Angela took some sand and tossed it in the salad to show that she was going to live a penitential life. Well, eventually she matured, with the help of the Franciscan Friars who were the pastors of her Aunt and Uncle’s church. Being a secular Franciscan meant that she could attend more church services and receive communion more often than she as a mere young girl would be allowed to do.So, Angela eventually found a softer, gentler way which was frankly more true to her own personality and upbringing. This was also the time when she also began to be so gently loving- she was the little Mama to her younger brother and later on, when people would call her Madre, it was because of this loving, motherly care for others.All this period of suffering and bereavement also taught her compassion and later in life people would turn to her because they knew that she understood suffering and that she had the loving gentleness to help them in their times of suffering.**The Discerning Pilgrim**With her aunt and uncle accepting that she was determined to pursue a religious life, things became calmer in Salo – and so began the next phase of her lifeGod blessed Angela with a great consolation after the death of her sister and this period of worrying, discouragement and anxiety. One day she had a deep spiritual experience, you might call it a vision- she could see her sister, accompanied by angels, assuring Angela that she was happy in heaven. This joyful sense of the glory and the happiness that awaits us stayed with Angela throughout her lifeAngela returned from her Aunt and Uncle’s home in Salò to the family farm in Le Grezze, now being run by one of her brothers. There was also a small vineyard that she herself owned – Angela was living a call that was deep and yet still reaching forward. Something in her was searching: how am I called to be and to live? She began to discover that, through the simple activities of daily life, as a worker on the family farm, and cultivating the vines in her own little vineyard, she began to experience how God was with her in these days and places of ordinary life. One day when she, like all the other young farm women, was gathered with others in the olive harvest in a place called Brudazzo, the group had the noon time meal and took a little period of rest. During that time, something deep and visionary happened in Angela’s soul once again. This time, she saw a ladder stretching between earth and heaven and on that ladder were young women and angels going up and down. This connection between her ordinary life, the place where she was at work and heaven gave her a new sense of her future, and that her call would be in some way connected with leading women to heaven.This was, of course we know, to become the Company of St Ursula and later the Ursuline Order- but Angela didn’t know that - and she spent years seeking, and working, and living deeper and deeper into what that call might be. Life took her to the big city of Brescia, when she was 40. She was asked to go console a bereaved woman, Caterina Patengola, who had in a very short space of time, lost her husband and all three of her children. The Franciscan Friars knew Angela well, knew that she was the one with the compassionate heart that could comfort Caterina. And Angela answered the call.As she settled in Brescia, she gradually she came to realise that this was the place where she was going to be able to fulfil her call. She became famous as a marvellous mediator, a marriage counsellor – if anyone in Brescia had a problem, they brought it to Madre Angela.Having been living for many years as a single woman, she had come to realise that there were other single women who also felt a call to God – she was not alone. Women began to come to her and seek to learn the secret of her joy, the secret of her dedication and what love meant in her life.With that experience, she was getting a little closer to realising the meaning of her vision, but she still didn’t have a full understanding of what God intended for her. She herself was a seeker, as were these other women, and so she went on the road with her seeking. We think of her a woman of pilgrimage, in fact, she’s often shown with a pilgrim staff that she used when she walked on these long journeys. One of them was to Mantua, to the tomb of Osanna Andreasi. Angela had something to learn from her and from the encouragement that this woman’s life gave. She visited Rome for the first timeLater, Angela decided to go further afield to the Holy Land, following the footsteps of Jesus, along the Way of the Cross. She boarded a boat in Venice and started this long and perilous journey. The boat stopped off in Crete. Angela suffered a kind of eye difficulty, we don’t know exactly what it was, and she could not see. Some of her companions wanted her to stay in Crete and that they would collect her on their way back, but she insisted on going on.She had to follow, as her friends would later say, seeing the holy places with the eyes of her heart, because of her blindness. However, it was there as she fell upon the stones of Calvary, in worship, and weeping and feeling very, very close to the sufferings of Christ. On the way home, the blindness left her as quickly as it had arrived.Upon her return to Brescia, she made another pilgrimage to Rome in the Holy Year of 1525 and there in Rome, she visited the tombs of the martyrs, people who had been her models of fidelity to Christ. She also met the Pope. She showed both tremendous courage and an astonishing degree of faith in what God was calling her to do when she said no to the Pope.And finally, she made two trips, two pilgrimages to the holy mountain, as it’s called, of Varallo in Northern Italy. There, various scenes from the life of Christ had been replicated in artistic depictions. It was on the last of these journeys that Angela must have been gaining greater clarity about her call, because the pilgrimage she made in 1532 was the last one she went on, and among her companions on that pilgrimage were several of the women who would join with her in beginning the Company of St Ursula in 1535. At last, through the course of traveling and just living, finding that God was present to her in the very ordinary circumstances of life, she knew what her call was.Her call took shape in the formation of a company of single lay women, dedicated to Christ, called the Company of St Ursula and on November 25th 1535, in the Church of St Afra, the first 28 women and Angela dedicated themselves to Christ in companionship, a sisterhood of communication and communion with each other and with the Lord- it was the fulfilment at last of what she had always been seeking.**The Revolutionary Madre**All Ursulines and all Ursuline groups look back to November 25th, 1535 as our beginnings. We are all part of this large spiritual family that was begun by our Madre, our mother Angela Merici. For us, she’s a very particular Madre because out of her life came our life that we experience, in all the centuries of Ursuline experience that have followed. From the vision at Brudazzo, to all the images we are so familiar with todaySometimes, we may not realise how revolutionary she was. On November 25th, what she gave birth to, was unheard of in her world. Let’s think about the opportunities for women in Northern Italy in the 16th century.There was a saying that a woman had to have either a man or a monastery – sometimes this was phrased as a man or a wall- those were the two options of life, marriage or monastic religious life; both wonderful options- but Angela saw a third and embraced it – and that was a way of dedication to God in single, lay life in the world. And why was that so revolutionary? Well, it was assumed that women were the weaker sex, of course, and that it would not be possible for them to maintain their lives, their dedication to Christ on their own in the world without the protection of a man or a wall. So, it was very revolutionary of her, but she had learned through the course of her own living how strong that call of God could be and she knew the capacity of women to experience God and to remain faithful to their commitments in their single lay life.There were no men involved in the organisation of the company; all of the women were elected to govern the company from among the members, or from among women who were supporters, to the matrons, the widowed matrons who were Angela’s friends and who helped with what we today would call trusteeship or administration. It was a women’s group run for and by women- and for the world. Angela was a Madre to men and women in her wider society and so are her daughters and followers today: women and men for other people in our world – in service.I invite you to read the important text on the next four screensAnother revolutionary aspect of her foundation of the company was that she lived the fact that God was present in all the ordinary circumstances of life; that she could experience God, that she could find God’s presence, that she could be present to God in these ordinary ways of life. And isn’t that the call that we all have? To live our way of life, wherever God has put us, to listen for our special call to whatever vocation it may lead, and to make our lives, lives like hers- full of joy and love.Angela died in 1540 in Brescia.How did all this come about? About 20 years after Angela’s death, the company had spread throughout much of Northern Italy. There were many companies in different cities. Soon there were companies in Southern France, and it was in France that what we know today as the Ursuline Order began, with its wonderful mission of education.Ursulines typically lived in their own homes or the places where they worked as live-in servants. However, a few women in France began to live together for convenience, and the authorities got worried………… only click nowOh, they noticed these women who were living on their own in the world! Oh my goodness, women can’t live on their own in the world and soon the heavy hand of both Church and society gave the an ultimatumEither disperse or, if you are going to live together and be in a consecrated life, you must go into a monastery. They didn’t want to be dispersed and so they accepted monastic life.And thus, the Ursuline Order was born in the early 1600s in France and spread from France. But before it did, these women were very strategic. They negotiated the capacity to bring schools for girls into the monastery. This was the beginning of education for women in any kind of formalised or systemic way. No, they could no longer go out, they could no longer be involved in their accustomed role nurturing girls in the world, but they could now bring the girls into the monastery in two forms: boarding schools and day schools for the poorer girls in the neighbourhood.So, both forms of Ursuline Education emerged from the strategic dedication of those women in France who though they accepted monastic life, accepted it with an apostolic vision – and that is the mission of Ursuline Education.It is remarkable how although not intended for the world of education, how applicable Angela’s rules and counsels are to schools, to how we should treat one another, to how we should look after each other And it’s why we are here today- because a remarkable young girl was born in Desenzano in 1474. | 12 3456789101112131415161718192021222324252627282930313233343536373839404142434445464748495051525354555657585960616263646566 6768697071727374757677787980 |