

# Saint Angela Merici

## COUNSELS

### ADDRESSED TO THE LEADERS



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### COUNSELS ADDRESSED TO THE LEADERS [Colonelli\*]

#### [Prologue]

1. Sister Angela, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ,
2. to her beloved daughters and sisters, the leaders of the Company of Saint Ursula.
3. May the strength and true consolation of the Holy Spirit be in you all,
4. so that you can sustain and carry out vigorously and faithfully the charge laid upon you,
5. and at the same time look forward to the great reward which God has prepared for you if you strive, each one for her part, to be faithful and full of concern for his spouses
6. who have been entrusted to you, to guard them and watch over them as most vigilant shepherds and good servants.
7. How much, therefore, must you pray God to enlighten you, and direct you, and teach you what you have to do for love of him in this task –
8. and there cannot be another more worthy than to be guardians of the spouses of the Most High.
9. So also, you must consider in what manner you must esteem them,
10. for the more you esteem them, the more you will love them; the more you love them, the more you will care for and watch over them.
11. And it will be impossible for you not to cherish them day and night, and to have them all engraved in your heart, one by one, for this is how real love acts and works.
12. And this charge must not be a burden for you; on the contrary, you have to thank God most greatly that he has deigned to see to it that you are among those he wants to spend themselves in governing and safeguarding such a treasure, his own.
13. Grace certainly great and destiny inestimable, if you are willing to recognize it.
14. Do not be afraid of not knowing and not being able to do what is rightly required in such a singular government.
15. Have hope and firm faith in God, for he will help you in everything.
16. Pray to him, humble yourselves under his great power, because, without doubt, as he has given you this charge, so he will give you also the strength to be able to carry it out, provided you do not fail for your part.

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\* "Colonelli": leaders responsible for the Company members living in a section (*colonello*) of the town. See MARIANI, TAROLLI, SEYNAEVE, Angela Merici, *Contribution towards a biography*, page 81, n. 17.

17. Act, move, believe, strive, hope, cry out to him with all your heart,
18. for without doubt you will see marvellous things, if you direct everything to the praise and glory of his Majesty and the good of souls.
19. And among the other things which, with the grace of God, you have to do,
20. I ask you all, or rather I beg you for love of the Passion of Jesus Christ and of our Lady, that you strive to put into practice these few counsels
21. which I am leaving you now to carry out after my death; they will be for you a reminder of at least a part of my will and desire.
22. And by this I shall know whether you are really eager to please me.
23. For understand that now I am more alive than I was when I lived on earth,
24. and I see better and hold more dear and pleasing the good things which I see you constantly doing,
25. and now, even more, I want and am able to help you and do you good in every way.

### **First Counsel**

1. In the first place then, my daughters and sisters most dear in the Blood of Jesus Christ,
2. I remind you to strive, with the help of God, to take hold of and plant within you this right conviction and humble sentiment: do not consider yourselves worthy to be superiors and leaders.
3. Rather, regard yourselves as ministers and servants, reflecting that you have more need to serve them than they have to be served by you, or governed,
4. and that God could very well provide for them by other means even better than you.
5. But in his mercy he has wanted to use you as his means for your greater good, so that you could merit more from his infinite goodness, and that he would have reason for rewarding you.
6. Learn from Our Lord who, while he was in this world, was as a servant, obeying the Eternal Father even unto death.
7. And this is why he says: "Ego fui in vobis non tamquam qui recumbit, sed ut qui ministrat"; that is, I have been among you not as the one who is served, but as the one who serves.
8. And St Gregory, even though he was Pope, still called himself servant of the servants of God.
9. Thus he fulfilled the office of superior and Pope, but in his heart he regarded himself as less than the others, and servant of the servants of God, mindful of the evangelical saying: "Qui maior est inter vos, fiat sicut minor".
10. In like manner, you also be superiors in the same way, that is, know and consider yourselves less than they.
11. Because if you do this, then God himself will exalt you as much as you have humbled yourselves.
12. For not in vain, and not without reason, a true and prudent servant of God humbles himself in his heart, and annihilates in himself his own feelings, and delight in his own reputation,
13. because he hopes and expects from God another delight and truer glory and honour.
14. For he firmly believes what the Gospel says: "Qui se humiliat exaltabitur"; that is, he who humbles himself shall be exalted.

### **Second Precept**

1. Be gentle and compassionate towards your dear daughters.
2. And strive to act solely out of the sole love of God and out of the sole zeal for souls when you admonish and advise them, or exhort them to some good and dissuade them from some evil.

3. For you will achieve more with kindness and gentleness than with harshness and sharp rebukes,
4. which should be reserved only for cases of necessity,
5. and even then, at the right place and time, and according to the persons.
6. But charity, which directs everything to the honour of God and the good of souls, charity indeed teaches such discretion,
7. and moves the heart to be, according to place and time, now gentle and now severe, and little or much as there is need.
8. If you see one faint-hearted and timid and inclined to despondency, comfort her, encourage her, promise her the blessing of the mercy of God, lift her heart with every consolation.
9. And on the contrary, if you see another presumptuous, and who has a lax conscience and little fear of anything, into this one instill some fear;
10. remind her of the rigour of the justice of God,
11. and how sin is an insidious thing, and how we are in the midst of snares, and how we always have reason to stand in fear, as Scripture says: "Beatus qui semper est pavidus"; that is, blessed is he who always stands in fear.

### **Third Precept**

1. Remain obedient to the principal mothers whom I leave in my place, since this is just.
2. And what you do, do it as obeying them, and not as following your own judgment.
3. For obeying them, you will be obeying me; obeying me, you will be obeying Jesus Christ,
4. Who, in his immense goodness, has chosen me to be mother, both alive and dead, of such a noble Company, even though, for my part, I am most unworthy of it;
5. and having chosen me, he has also given me the grace to be able to govern it according to his will.
6. Now, if it should happen that you have some just reason to contradict or reproach them, do it with discretion and respect.
7. And if they do not want to pay you heed, have patience.
8. And know that it is right to love the mothers if they are good, and bear with them if they are eccentric.
9. And be very careful never to complain, or grumble, or speak ill of them, whether with others or with your daughters.
10. But always and everywhere preserve the honour and respect due to your mothers, seeing that if God commands us to honour our natural fathers and mothers, how much more our spiritual [mothers] should be esteemed.
11. And so, make sure that they are always held in esteem and respect, especially among your daughters.
12. And remember, if they are good you do not deserve them, and if they are bad you deserve even worse.
13. Still, if you have something in your heart that disturbs you in them, you may rightly and without scruple talk about it in confidence with some person who is good and faithful in many respects and ways.
14. Know, however, that where you see clearly that the salvation and honour of your daughters are in danger, you must on no account consent to it, nor tolerate it, nor have any hesitation.
15. Yet, all this always with discernment and maturity of judgment.

## Fourth Counsel

1. You will be careful and vigilant to know and understand the behaviour of your daughters, and to be aware of their spiritual and temporal needs.
2. And then, as far as possible, you yourselves provide for them if you can, because you must give the matrons\* as little trouble and bother as possible.
3. But if you cannot provide for them yourselves, go to the principal mothers, and quickly, and without any hesitation explain to them the needs of your lambs.
4. And if you see them slow to provide, be insistent;
5. and in that case, in my name even be importunate and troublesome.
6. For if ever, through your fault and negligence, one of them were lost, God would demand from you a strict account of it on the day of judgment.
7. For you must know this and hold it for certain: that he will never fail to provide for their needs, material as well as spiritual, so long as nothing is lacking on your part.
8. For if God has planted this Company, he will never abandon it,
9. because as Scripture says: "Nunquam vidi iustum derelictum nec semen eius quaerens panem"; that is, never have I seen the just abandoned, nor his children go begging.

## Fifth Counsel

1. Please go often, as you have time and opportunity, especially on feast days, and visit your dear daughters and sisters,
2. and greet them; see how they are, comfort them; encourage them to stand firm in the life begun;
3. invite them to desire the celestial joys and treasures, to long for those joyful and new feasts of heaven, those blessed and everlasting triumphs,
4. and henceforward to abandon totally all love for this miserable and treacherous world, where there is never either rest or any true contentment,
5. but only empty dreams, or bitter hardships, and every kind of misery and wretchedness.
6. Remind them to behave well in homes [they go to], with good judgment, with prudence and modesty,
7. and to be reserved and moderate in all things.
8. Let them eat and drink, not for pleasure and to satisfy their appetite, but only out of the need to sustain nature in order to serve God better.
9. Let them be moderate also in sleep, sleeping only as much as necessity requires.
10. Similarly in laughing, let them be reserved and moderate.
11. In listening, not taking pleasure except in hearing modest, and licit, and necessary things.
12. In speaking, that their words be wise and reserved, not harsh, not rude, but compassionate and leading to concord and charity.
13. Tell them that, wherever they are, they should give good example.
14. And be to all a good odour of virtue.
15. And be obedient and submissive to their superiors.
16. And seek to spread peace and concord where they are.
17. Above all let them be humble and gentle.
18. And let all their behaviour, their actions and their words be with charity; and let them bear everything with patience, for with these two virtues especially, one crushes the head of the devil.

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\* "Matrons": the same as "principal mothers", also called "lady-governors".

19. And when you visit them, I give you this charge, to greet them, and shake hands with them, also on my behalf.
20. And tell them that they should want to be united and in concord together, all being of one will, remaining under obedience to the Rule, for in this is everything.
21. That they should do honour to Jesus Christ, to whom they have promised their virginity and their very self.
22. That they should place their hope and love in God alone, and not in any living person.
23. Comfort them, encourage them, let them go forward willingly.
24. And tell them this good news which I announce to them on behalf of Jesus Christ and of our Lady:
25. how much they have to exult and rejoice, for in heaven a new crown of glory and joy is prepared for all of them, one by one,
26. provided they stand firm and steady in their resolve,
27. and strive to observe the Rule.
28. And they should never ever doubt this.
29. Although at times they will have troubles or anxieties, nevertheless this will soon pass away and be turned into gladness and joy.
30. And then, the suffering of this world is nothing in comparison with the blessings which are in Paradise.
31. Also, let them hold this as most certain: that they will never be abandoned in their needs. God will provide for them wonderfully.
32. They must not lose hope.
33. How many lords, queens and other great persons there are who, with the many riches and possessions they have, will not be able to find true relief in some extreme need;
34. and yet these little ones, poor as they are, will find consolation and comfort.
35. Also, tell them that now I am more alive than I was when they saw me in the flesh,
36. and that now I see them and know them better.
37. And can and want to help them more.
38. And that I am continually among them with my Lover, or rather ours, the Lover of us all,
39. provided they believe and do not lose heart and hope.
40. And so, especially for those you see disconsolate, doubtful and faint-hearted, enlarge the scope of the promises, which will not go unfulfilled.
41. Tell them that they should long to see me not on earth, but in heaven, where our love is.
42. Let them set their hopes on high and not on earth.
43. Let them have Jesus Christ for their only treasure, for there also will be love,
44. which is to be sought not here in this world, but above, in the high heaven at the right hand of the Father, as the Apostle says: "Si consurrexistis cum Christo, quae sursum sunt quaerite, quae sursum sunt sapite, et non quae super terram".

### **Sixth Precept**

1. As for you, live and behave in such a way that your daughters may see in you a model.
2. And what you want them to do, do it yourselves first.
3. How will you reprove or admonish them for some defect if it is still in you?
4. Or counsel them, and urge them to any virtue which you do not first possess,
5. or at least, do not then begin to practise yourselves, together with them?

6. Act therefore in such a way that, also following your example, they may stir and spur themselves to virtuous living.
7. And willingly do, as they do, every act of integrity and virtue appropriate and possible for you, especially with regard to behaviour, to going frequently to confession and communion, and other similar good works.
8. For it is right and fitting that the mothers be an example and a mirror for their daughters, especially in modesty, and in behaviour, and other actions, ordinary and extraordinary.

### **Seventh Counsel**

1. Know that you have to defend and protect your lambs from wolves and robbers, that is, from two kinds of pestilential people: wordly persons or false religious with their deceits, and heretics.
2. Firstly then, concerning wordly relationships, take care especially that they do not become familiar with young men, and other men too, even if they are spiritual,
3. because too great a spiritual familiarity with men nearly always degenerates into carnal familiarity.
4. Neither let them, as far as you can, associate with idle women who do not like to live chastely,
5. and who willingly enjoy hearing about vanities and wordly pleasures.
6. Be on your guard lest a confessor, or some other religious, turn them away from some good inspiration,
7. or from fasting,
8. or from the firm purpose of virginity,
9. or from esteem for this holy Rule divinely ordained,
10. or other similar good things.
11. Because many, under pretext of good advice, are accustomed to turn the minds of many poor girls from their good intentions and purposes.
12. Now, as for protecting them from the pestilential opinions of heretics, when you hear that some preacher, or other person, has a reputation for heresy,
13. or preaches new things outside the common practice of the Church,
14. and contrary to what you have received from us,
15. then, tactfully, prevent your dear daughters from listening to such a person.
16. For it often happens that certain bad seeds are planted in the mind, which cannot then be uprooted except with great difficulty.
17. Therefore, do not yourselves be on familiar terms with them either.
18. Leave them alone.
19. Consider each one as good,
20. but be prudent for your own good.
21. For it is better to follow what is certain, without danger, than what is uncertain, with danger.
22. Keep to the ancient way and custom of the Church, established and confirmed by so many Saints under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And live a new life.
23. As for the other opinions that are arising now, and will arise, leave them aside as not concerning you.
24. But pray, and get others to pray, that God not abandon his Church, but reform it as he pleases,
25. and as he sees best for us,
26. and more to his honour and glory.

27. For in these perilous and pestilential times, you will find no other recourse than to take refuge at the feet of Jesus Christ.
28. Because if he directs and teaches you, you will be [well] taught, as the Prophet also says: "Beatus quem tu erudieris, Domine"; that is, blessed is the one whom you, Lord, have taught.
29. Therefore humble yourselves under his powerful hand, crying out with the Prophet: "Illumina oculos meos ne unquam obdormiam in morte", and you will be enlightened.

### **Eighth Counsel**

1. Love your dear daughters equally; and do not prefer one more than another,
2. because they are all creatures of God. And you do not know what he wants to make of them.
3. For how do you know, you, that those who seem to you to be the least and lowest are not to become the most generous and most pleasing to his Majesty?
4. And then, who can judge the heart and the innermost secret thoughts of any creature?
5. And so, hold them all in your love and bear with them all equally, for it is not up to you to judge the handmaids of God; he well knows what he wants to make of them,
6. Who (as Scripture says) can turn stones into children of heaven.
7. As for you, do your duty, correcting them with love and charity if you see them fall into some fault through human frailty,
8. and thus you will not cease to prune this vine which has been entrusted to you.
9. And after that, leave it to God; he will do marvellous things in his own time, and when it pleases him.

### **Last Counsel**

1. My last word to you, by which I implore you even with my blood, is that you live in harmony, united together, all of one heart and one will.
2. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ.
3. For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, the Lord God will be in your midst.
4. You will have in your favour our Lady,
5. the apostles,
6. all the saints,
7. the angels,
8. and finally all heaven and all the universe.
9. Because God has so ordained from all eternity, that those who for his honour are united in doing good enjoy every prosperity, and that what they do turns out well, because they have God himself and every one of his creatures in their favour.
10. See then how important is this union and concord.
11. So, long for it,
12. pursue it,
13. embrace it,
14. hold on to it with all your strength;
15. for I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable
16. against all adversities,

17. and persecutions,
18. and deceits of the devil.
19. And moreover I assure you that every grace you ask from God will infallibly be granted to you.
20. And I shall always be in your midst, helping your prayers.
21. Therefore encourage them to continue courageously the task they have begun.
22. And at the same time rejoice, because, without doubt, what I say to you will be so.
23. Not to mention the immense and inestimable grace that my Lover, or rather ours, will grant you at the supreme moment of death,
24. for in times of great need, true friendship is recognized.
25. And believe firmly that then, especially, you will recognize me to be your faithful friend.
26. Now I leave you; be consoled, and have a lively faith and hope.
27. But first I want you to be blessed, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.