

Saint Angela Merici

TESTAMENT OF MOTHER SISTER ANGELA BEQUEATHED TO THE LADY-GOVERNORS



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TESTAMENT OF MOTHER SISTER ANGELA BEQUEATHED TO THE LADY-GOVERNORS

[Prologue]

1. Sister Angela, unworthy servant of Jesus Christ,
2. to Countess Lady Lucrecia, principal mother of the Company of Saint Ursula, and to the other lady-governors and mothers, the noble matrons, Lady Genepra di Luciagi, Lady Maria di Avogadri, Lady Veronica di Bucci, Lady Orsolina di Gavardi, Lady Giovanna di Monti, Lady Isabetta da Prato, Lady Lionella di Pedeciocchi, Lady Caterina di Mei.
3. May the eternal benediction be on you all, granted by Almighty God in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.
4. My honourable sisters and mothers most loving in the Blood of Jesus Christ, God willing
5. in his eternal wisdom to call forth from the vanity of the world many women, especially virgins, that is, this our Company,
6. and being pleased in his infinite goodness to use me as his instrument for this great work of his,
7. even though for my part I am a most inadequate and useless servant,
8. he has also, in his usual goodness, given and granted me such grace and gift as to be able to govern them according to his will,
9. and to provide for their needs and wants, especially those concerned with directing them and sustaining them in the life for which they have been chosen.
10. And among the good and necessary means that God has granted me, you are one of the most important,
11. you, who are found worthy to be true and loving mothers of so noble a family,
12. confided to your hands
13. that you may have for them the same care and guard-ianship you would have if they had been born from your own body, and even more.

14. Now, on this point I would, a little, like you to open the eye of your mind to consider your great grace and good fortune,
15. that God has deigned to make you mothers of so many virgins,
16. and confided his own spouses to your hands, and entrusted them to your government.
17. Oh, how much you have to thank him for this,
18. and at the same time to pray to him,
19. that as he has deigned to place you at the head of so noble a flock,
20. so he would deign also to give you such knowledge and capacity that you may be able to do work worthy of praise in his sight,
21. and to put all your zeal and strength into carrying out your duty.
22. Therefore you must make a sound and firm resolution to submit yourselves totally to his will,
23. and with a lively and steadfast faith to receive from him what you have to do for love of him.
24. And in this (whatever may happen) to persevere with constancy to the very end.

25. But above all, I ask and entreat you all, by the Passion and Blood of Jesus Christ shed for love of us,
26. to willingly put into practice with every solicitude these few reminders
27. which, by the grace of God, you will find here, set out below one after the other.
28. Because as I am now about to let go of this life,
29. leaving you in my place as my heirs,
30. these recommendations will be to you like legacies which, as my greatest desire, I leave you to carry out faithfully.

First Legacy

1. First of all then, my most loving mothers and sisters in Jesus Christ,
2. strive, with the help of God, to grasp and keep in yourselves such conviction and good sentiment
3. that you are moved to this care and government solely by the sole love of God and by the sole zeal for the salvation of souls.
4. Because all your works and actions as governors, being thus rooted in this twofold charity, can bear nothing but good and salutary fruits.
5. For, as our Saviour says: "Bona arbor non potest malos fructus facere". The good tree, he says, that is, the heart and spirit imbued with charity, can do nothing but good and holy works.
6. That is why St Augustine also said: "Ama et fac quod vis"; that is, have love and charity, and then do what you please,
7. as if he said clearly: charity cannot sin.

Second Legacy

1. Next I beg you that you willingly hold in consideration and have engraved on your mind and heart all your dear daughters, one by one;
2. not only their names,
3. but also their condition, and character, and their every situation and state.
4. This will not be difficult for you if you embrace them with an ardent charity.
5. For you can see that natural mothers, even if they had a thousand sons and daughters, would have them wholly fixed in their hearts, all and each one separately,
6. because this is how real love works.

7. Indeed it seems that the more children they have, the more their love and care for each one grows.
8. How much more spiritual mothers can and should do this,
9. since spiritual love is beyond comparison much more powerful than natural love.
10. Therefore, my most loving mothers, if you love these dear daughters of ours with a burning and passionate charity,
11. it will be impossible for you not to have them all depicted individually in your memory and in your heart.

Third Legacy

1. Third: please, I beg you, willingly strive to lead them with love and with a mild and kindly hand,
2. and not imperiously, not harshly,
3. but in everything, willingly be gentle.
4. Pay attention to Jesus Christ who says: "Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde"; learn from me, he says, that I am gentle and meek of heart.
5. And about God we read: "Disponit omnia suaviter"; that is, he orders and governs all things with mildness.
6. And again Jesus Christ says: "Jugum meum suave et onus meum leve"; that is, my yoke and service is light and sweet.
7. So you also must strive to do, and use all possible gentleness.
8. And above all, be on your guard not to want to get anything done by force,
9. because God has given free will to everyone,
10. and wants to force no one,
11. but only proposes, invites and counsels,
12. as he does also through the mouth of St John, saying: "Suadeo tibi emere coronam immarcescibilem"; that is, I counsel you to buy the crown which cannot wither. I counsel you, he says, and not, I force you.
13. I do not say, however, that it will not be necessary occasionally to use reproaches and severity,
14. at the place and time, according to the importance, condition and need of the persons,
15. but we must be moved solely by charity and by the sole zeal for souls.

Fourth Legacy

1. Fourth: you must be eager and ardent in putting all your zeal and concern into ensuring that your daughters are adorned with every virtue,
2. and with all regal and refined manners,
3. so that more and more they may please Jesus Christ, their Spouse.
4. And you must be especially solicitous and careful that they keep themselves intact and chaste,
5. and that in every action and gesture they behave with modesty and prudence,
6. and do everything with patience and charity.
7. Now one sees temporal mothers putting a great deal of care and effort into attiring, adorning and embellishing their daughters in many different ways, so that they may please their earthly spouses;
8. and the more important and noble these men are, the more the mothers strive with all diligence to make their daughters more and more attractive, especially in what they understand to be more agreeable to them.

9. And they have and place all their contentment in being the mothers of daughters who are so pleasing to such noble spouses,
10. for in this way they also hope, because and by means of their daughters, to have the love and favour of their sons-in-law.
11. How much more must you do this for these heavenly daughters of yours,
12. who are spouses not of earthly husbands, corruptible and ultimately stinking,
13. but of the immortal Son of the eternal God.
14. Oh, what a new beauty and dignity to be lady- governors and mothers of the spouses of the King of kings and Lord of lords,
15. and to become in a way the mothers-in-law of the Son of God;
16. and thus, by means of the daughters, to win the favour and love of the Most High.
17. Indeed, happy will you be if you are ready and alert
18. to recognize this new and unique destiny of yours.

Fifth Legacy

1. Fifth: you will be [well] advised when you have gently counselled and warned one of them three, or at most four times, about some notable fault,
2. and you see that she does not want to obey,
3. then leave her alone
4. and stop sending her the leaders or other visitors,
5. especially because it might happen that the poor child, seeing herself thus abandoned and dismissed, would be moved to repentance,
6. and would more desire to want to stay
7. and persevere in this Company.
8. For God also dismissed Adam from Paradise so that, thus knowing himself better, he would have to do penance.
9. So, if being sorry for her fault, she wants to return, she must be received,
10. but on condition that she ask pardon of you all, and also of her leader.
11. And as a penance, she should be given to fast one Friday on bread and water.

Sixth Legacy

1. Sixth: you will be forewarned when you see that one of them finds great difficulty in deciding to give up fashionable trifles and other similar frills which in themselves have little importance,
2. do not have too high a hope about her that she will persevere under this Rule.
3. For if she does not want to do what is lesser, much less will she do what is greater.
4. But here, however, you must be prudent, because it can happen that a person has set almost all her desire on a bagatelle, so that, having conquered herself on this point, she will no longer find any other too difficult.

Seventh Legacy

1. Seventh: make sure that you all meet with the leaders twice, or at least once a month,
2. and thus confer together,
3. and make a careful examination of the government.

4. And especially of what the leaders will report to you about the behaviour of your dear daughters,
5. and about their necessities and needs, both spiritual
6. and material.
7. And provide for everything as the Holy Spirit in-spires you.

Eighth Legacy

1. Eighth: you must take care to have your daughters come together from time to time in the place you think best and most convenient.
2. And then (according to whether you have at your disposal a suitable person) have them listen to a short sermon and exhortation,
3. so that, together like this, they might also meet each other as loving sisters,
4. and thus, talking over spiritual matters, rejoice together,
5. and together encourage one another,
6. which will be no small help to them.

Ninth Legacy

1. Ninth: Know that if it were not useful and suitable that this Company have some income, God would not have begun to provide it.
2. I warn you however: be prudent in this matter,
3. and be good and true mothers,
4. and such income as you have, spend it for the good and the development of the Company, according as discretion and motherly love will suggest to you.
5. In this matter I do not want you to seek outside advice;
6. you decide, only among yourselves,
7. according as charity and the Holy Spirit will enlighten and inspire you,
8. directing everything towards the good and spiritual benefit of your dear daughters,
9. as much to urge and move those who are already in [the Company] to greater love and obligation to do good,
10. as to attract still others to it.
11. For this is the real purpose, agreeable to God, of almsgiving and kindness, that by means of them the creature is drawn away from evil and vice,
12. and led to virtue and good behaviour,
13. or at least to greater spiritual benefit.
14. Indeed, in this way people are so to speak won over and obliged and compelled to do the very thing one wants.
15. Because just as for example, if a girl takes and accepts some present and gift from some wordly stranger, she remains obliged to gratify the wishes of that person,
16. and it seems that she is no longer able to say no,
17. so, neither more nor less, by gifts and alms people are drawn and somehow compelled to do good; and thus they remain almost bound to do good.
18. Follow this road and you cannot go wrong.

Tenth Legacy

1. Tenth: I beg you with all my heart, please be watchful and most vigilant, like so many caring shepherdeses, for this heavenly flock
2. entrusted to your hands,
3. that no weeds of discord or other scandal grow up among them,
4. and especially that they not sully themselves with any poisonous and heretical opinion in these pestilential times.
5. And consider that the devil never sleeps, but in a thousand ways seeks our ruin
6. Be on guard, then,
7. and take care especially that they are united and one in will, as we read of the Apostles and other Christians of the early Church: "Erat autem eorum cor unum"; that is, they were all of one heart.
8. In the same way, you also strive to be like this with all your dear daughters,
9. because the more you are united, the more Jesus Christ will be in your midst as a father and good shepherd.
10. And there will be no other sign that you are in the grace of the Lord than that you love one another and are united together,
11. for he himself says: "In hoc cognoscet mundus quod eritis mei discipuli, si diligeretis invicem"; that is, by this the world will know that you are mine, if together, you love one another.
12. And thus, loving each other and living in harmony together are a sure sign that we are walking the path right and pleasing to God.
13. Therefore, my sisters and mothers, be vigilant on this point, for on this point especially the devil will set snares for you under the guise of good.
14. So if you become aware of even the slightest shadow of such a plague, remedy it at once, according as God will enlighten you.
15. And on no account let such a seed grow in the Cormpany,
16. because it would be a plague of bad example also for the city and even beyond.
17. For where there is disparity of wills, inevitably there is discord;
18. where there is discord, without any doubt there is ruin; as the Saviour says: "Omne regnum in seipsum divisum desolabitur"; that is, every government in discord with itself will fall into ruin.

Last Legacy

1. Finally, take the greatest care that the good directives given, especially those in the Rule, be most diligently observed.
2. And if, according to times and circumstances, the need arises to make new rules or do something differently, do it prudently and with good advice.
3. And always let your principal recourse be to gather at the feet of Jesus Christ,
4. and there, all of you, with all your daughters, to offer most fervent prayers.
5. For in this way, without doubt, Jesus Christ will be in your midst, and as a true and good master, he will enlighten and teach you what you have to do.
6. Hold this for certain: that this Rule has been planted directly by his holy hand,
7. and he will never abandon this Company as long as the world lasts.
8. Because, if he has planted it in the first place, who is there who can uproot it?
9. Believe it,

10. do not doubt,
11. have firm faith that it will be so.
12. I know what I am saying.
13. Blessed are those who will take very good care of it.

14. If you faithfully carry out these and other similar things, as the Holy Spirit suggests to you according to the times and circumstances, rejoice, go forward willingly.
15. See, a great reward will be prepared for you.
16. And where the daughters are, there also will be the mothers.
17. Be consoled; do not doubt; we want to see you in our midst in heaven,
18. for the Lover of us all wants this too.
19. And who is there who could resist him,
20. whose light and joyful splendour of truth will surround you at the moment of death,
21. and will deliver you from the hands of the enemy.
22. So, persevere faithfully and joyfully in the work you have begun.
23. And take care, take care I say, not to lose your fervour,
24. for every promise that I make to you will be fulfilled for you beyond measure.
25. Now I am going,
26. and you, in the meantime, do what has to be done.
27. But first I embrace you, and to you all I give the kiss of peace,
28. begging God to bless you. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.