

Heartbeats

The Company of St. Angela in the 21st Century

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St. Angela Merici, Woman of Unity and Harmony

“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. Be bound to one another by the bond of charity, esteeming each other, helping each other, bearing with each other in Jesus Christ.

For if you strive to be like this, without any doubt, God will be in your midst...

See then how important is this union and concord. So, long for it, pursue it, embrace it, hold on to it with all your strength; for I tell you, living all together thus united in heart, you will be like a mighty fortress, or a tower impregnable.”

(From Angela’s Last Counsel)



It is hard not to be touched by the intensity of these words from St. Angela’s *Last Counsel*, described by her as her “last word” and imploring us with all her heart’s passion to live lives of unity and harmony, “all of one heart and one will.” At a time when so much division and discord surround us, the words of Angela offer us a place for deep prayer and reflection. In her *Tenth Legacy*, she reflects further: “There will be no other sign that you are in the grace of God than that you love one another and are united together...And thus loving each other and living in harmony together are a sure sign that you are walking the path right and pleasing to God.” Clearly and boldly, she points the way.

In our time, words of Pope Francis point the way as well. “To understand one another, and to grow in charity and truth,” reflects Francis, “we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another. In this way we already begin to experience unity. Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together.” And he continues, “Unity does not imply uniformity; it does not necessarily mean doing everything together or thinking in the same way. Nor does it signify a loss of identity. Unity in diversity is actually the opposite: it involves the joyful recognition and acceptance of the various gifts which the Holy Spirit gives to each one and the placing of these gifts at the service of all...It means knowing how to listen, to accept differences, and having the freedom to think differently and express oneself with complete respect towards the other who is my brother or sister.”

**What do I do with my life?
Do I create unity around me?
Or do I cause division by gossip,
criticism, or envy?**

POPE FRANCIS, *THE CHURCH OF MERCY*

Another word used today to express this reality of unity, and one that is very much in the spirit of St. Angela, is the word *kinship*. Fr. Gregory Boyle is a Jesuit priest who for the last 30+ years has been ministering to and among gang members in the Los Angeles area. He speaks of *kinship* as “seeing — and acting on the belief — that there is no ‘us and them’ because we are all one.” He explains that *kinship* is not about serving the other, but rather being one with the other. “Jesus,” he reflects, “was not ‘a man for others’; he was one with them. There is a world of difference in that.”

Fr. Boyle frequently quotes Mother Teresa who diagnosed the world’s ills in this way: we’ve just “forgotten that we belong to each other.” Fr. Boyle reflects: “*Kinship* is what happens to us when we refuse to let that happen. With *kinship* as the goal, other essential things fall into place; without it, no justice, no peace. I suspect that were *kinship* our goal, we would no longer be promoting justice—we would be celebrating it.”

Coming full circle back to St. Angela brings us to one of her favorite words – *Insieme – Together!* Together in the oneness of true kinship – this is what she would urge us to long for, pursue, embrace, and hold on to with all our strength. As those who carry St. Angela’s spirit today, how am I personally and how are we together being called to do just that?



“We build on foundations we did not lay.
We warm ourselves by fires we did not light.
We sit in the shade of trees we did not plant.
We drink from wells we did not dig.
We profit from persons we did not know.

This is as it should be.
Together we are more than any one person could be.
Together we can build across the generations.
Together we can renew our hope and faith in the life that is yet to unfold.
Together we can heed the call to a ministry of care and justice.

We are ever bound in community [kinship...unity].
May it always be so.”

(Rev. Peter Raible: A Variation on Deut. 6:11)

