

## ST PIUS X WEEKLY REFLECTION

### Sinning Saints (5)

#### Saint Angela of Foligno (1248-1309)

Foligno is a pretty Umbrian town some 20 minutes by train from Assisi. It was the home of our penultimate sinning saint whose remains still rest in the town's Church of St Francis. St Angela came from a wealthy family. Her father died when she was young and her mother gave her little teaching or upbringing in the Catholic faith. She married a local man and had several children.

St Angela herself later described the first 30 plus years of her life as "mortally sinful" and "scandalous". She was vain, dominated by worldly pleasures, such as fashionable clothes, and was neglectful of her religion and her family duties, both as mother and wife. She was also unfaithful to her husband. In a Wednesday audience Pope Benedict XVI said: *"The first part of Angela's life was certainly not that of a fervent disciple of the Lord.....Her life was so carefree that she was even contemptuous of the so-called "penitents", who abounded in that period; they were people who, in order to follow Christ, sold their possessions and lived in prayer, fasting, in service to the Church and in charity."*

In her late thirties Angela began to appreciate the spiritual emptiness of her existence and in 1285 she decided to go to confession. Out of shame for her sins, she made what she later described as a sacrilegious confession, since she did not confess her worst sins. This she followed by receiving communion sacrilegiously. Angela remained racked by guilt. She prayed and experienced a vision of St Francis. Some 3 years later, in relatively quick succession, her mother, husband and children died as a result of plague.

Angela decided to sell all her goods, distributing the proceeds to the poor. She went on a pilgrimage to Assisi and in 1291 entered the Third Order of St. Francis and dedicated herself to helping the sick and lepers. Angela had extraordinary mystical experiences. She relayed these to her confessor, Blessed Arnaldo of Foligno. He required her to recount to him the details of these experiences. This led to the *Book of Blessed Angela*, begun in 1292. In the book the saint recounts the 30 stages of her vocation, her ecstasies and other mystical experiences which culminated in the dwelling in the soul of the Holy Trinity. Angela, who had been plagued by a fear of damnation, came to realise that she could not save herself by prayer but that salvation was only possible, through repentance, by the infinite merciful love of God.

Over time, a number of Franciscan Tertiaries - men and women, who strove under Angela's direction to advance in holiness – gathered round her. Later she established a community of sisters at Foligno. It was not an enclosed order since the sisters devoted themselves to works of charity. Angela died in 1309. She was beatified in 1693 and canonised by Pope Francis in 2013.

The saint's legacy of spiritual writings and her reputation as spiritual teacher led to her being described by Maximilian Sandaeus, of the Society of Jesus, as the "Mistress of

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Theologians", whose whole doctrine has been drawn out of the Book of Life, Jesus Christ, Our Lord.

St Angela seems to be fittingly revered as the patron saint against temptation, of widows, and of those who are ridiculed for their piety. She reminds us that any sinful soul can return to God through repentance, prayer, and devotion.

In her own words: *"And immediately upon presenting himself to the soul, God likewise discloses himself and expands the soul and gives it gifts and consolations which the soul has never before experienced, and which are far more profound than earlier ones. In this state, the soul is drawn out of all darkness and granted a greater awareness of God than I would ever have thought possible"*

