

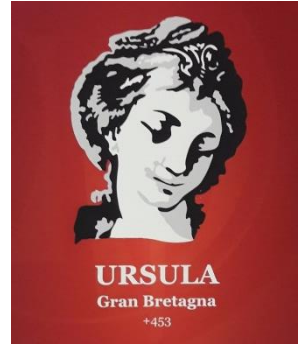


Diocese of Westminster

AGENCY FOR EVANGELISATION  
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

## 'Learn From Me'

### Reflecting on the Lives of Saints and Blesseds of Catechesis



*"No one can stifle God's plan for me."*

## St Ursula: Memorial 21<sup>st</sup> October

### Opening Prayer

Lord, fill us with the spirit of courage  
which gave your martyr, St Ursula,  
strength to offer her life  
in faithful witness to you.  
May we be as loyal to the faith  
which she professed.  
This we ask through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.



### Scripture Reflection 2 Timothy 2:8-13; 3:10-12

Remember Christ Jesus, risen from the dead, Jesus, son of David, as preached in my Gospel. For this Gospel I labour and even wear chains like an evildoer, but the word of God is not chained. And so I bear everything for the sake of the chosen people, that they, too, may obtain the salvation given to us

in Christ Jesus and share eternal glory. This statement is true:

*If we have died with him, we shall also live with him;*

*If we endure with him, we shall reign with him;*

*If we deny him, he will also deny us;*

*If we are unfaithful, he remains faithful  
for he cannot deny himself.*

You, instead, have closely followed my teaching, my way of life, my projects, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions and sufferings.

You know what happened to me at Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. How many trials I had to bear! Yet the Lord rescued me from them all.

- Is there a word or phrase that stands out or remains with you after reading the passage from Timothy?

## **Biography**

### ***Popularity in the Middle Ages***

The life of St Ursula is one lost in the mists of time. She was extremely popular in the Middle Ages but 'dropped' from the Roman calendar in C20th. An indication of her popularity is attested by a set of illustrations by the artist Vittore Carpaccio, commissioned by the Confraternity of St Ursula in Venice in 1488. Carpaccio drew his inspiration for the cycle of paintings from the Lives of the saints (the *Legenda Aurea*, or *Golden Legend*) published in Venice in an Italian translation in 1475. He completed the cycle in 1496.



### ***Early Life: dedicated to God***

According to legend, Ursula was the daughter of a C5th Christian king in Britain. She was a beautiful, intelligent, outgoing and friendly girl. Ursula was deeply spiritual and at an early age had dedicated herself to God, deciding to remain a virgin because of her love for Christ.

### ***Marriage Proposal***

A powerful pagan king requested of Ursula's father that she would marry his son Ethereus. The pagan king sent ambassadors to Ursula's father, offering large sums of money and other promises if the marriage took place. Ursula's father was very afraid for three reasons: the violent reaction of the king; he didn't think Ursula would agree to marry; and both he and Ursula would prefer a Christian marriage.

### ***Conditions for Marriage***

Inspired by God in a dream, Ursula agreed to the marriage but only on certain conditions:

- Each king should put at her disposal ten girls
  - Each girl was to be accompanied by another thousand girls
  - The kings were to provide ships for the journey
  - Ursula was to be granted three years to dedicate herself to God
  - The young prince was to receive Christian instruction for baptism
- Ursula thought the proposal would be withdrawn on these condition – but no, the king agreed and Ursula's demands were carried out immediately!

## ***Voyage to Rome***

Young people began arriving from all directions to join the voyage. During the journey, Ursula converted all the girls to Christianity and soon they arrived in Cologne, Germany. (Here an angel appeared to Ursula and told her that she and all her companions would return to this place and suffer martyrdom.)

They moved on to Rome to venerate the shrine of St Peter, and received a blessing from Pope Cyriacus.

## ***Return Voyage to Britain and Martyrdom***

They set out to return to Britain. However, in Cologne they encountered the aggressive Huns who were interested in women for pleasure only. Ursula and her young girls resisted this violation. Julius, the leader of the Huns, instructed his army to kill them all. Julius decided not to kill Ursula as he thought she was so beautiful he wanted to marry her. Ursula firmly refused his proposal because she wanted to keep the promise she had made to God to remain a virgin. Julius was so enraged he threw an arrow towards her, which pierced her heart and killed her. And so legend tells us, Ursula and her companions were martyred in Cologne, where their relics are still venerated.

## **Role Model**

In time, Ursula became a very popular medieval saint, widely regarded as the patron of education, and a great influence and role model for the 16th saint, Angela Merici, the founder of the Ursuline Order.

## **Significance for Catechists**

For reflection: What does the life of St Ursula say to us as catechists? What can we learn from her?

## **'Take Away' : Going Deeper**

- Hymn to St Ursula, Hildegard von Bingen, ('Cum Vox Sanguinis'): <https://youtu.be/OrxuEYp86ak> (In Latin with English subtitles)
- St Angela Merici and the Ursulines
- 'The Golden Legend' of 1440
- Vittore Carpaccio, paintings outlining the life of St Ursula (<https://www.wga.hu/>)

## **Closing Prayer**

O God, Trusting in You,  
we have begun a journey of Faith and Hope.  
We, Your people, are setting out on a great and wonderful task:  
we wish to renew and enhance our faith, our worship,  
our teaching and learning, and our supporting each other.  
We need Your gift of wisdom to guide us;

the gift of trust in the generous spirit of our brothers and sisters;  
the gift of persevering hope  
that makes us rely not on our own strength,  
but on Your Grace at work in our lives.  
We ask You to bless our efforts so that the results  
will bring honour to You and will truly serve all of your people.  
Inspired by St. Ursula's gift of her own life,  
we pray this through Christ Our Lord. Amen.



Altarpiece of Saint Ursula  
and the Eleven Thousand Virgins,

## Acknowledgements

Illustration of St Ursula: from 'Saints of Catechesis' exhibition, II International Catechetical Congress, September 2018, Rome.

Scripture quotes: *Christian Community Bible*, (online version) <https://www.bibleclaret.org/bible-english>

Biographical information based on website contents of Sisters of the Irish Ursuline Union ([www.ursulines.ie](http://www.ursulines.ie)), and <https://CatholicSaints.Info>

Image of Vittore Carpaccio <https://www.wikiart.org/en/vittore-carpaccio>

Altarpiece Joan Reixach, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya Barcelona,

image <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JoanReixach-StaUrsula-6682.jpg>

Commentary <https://youtu.be/qPQ46KMFyU>