

Women Witnesses - Mary Magdalene Series

"Feast of St. Mary Magdalene"

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by Cindy Novello

This week we celebrate women witnesses in the Church. I was honored and excited to be asked to speak today. But, at the same time, I was a little uncertain because I had not specifically reflected on women witnesses before this invitation. And I am hesitant to label myself as one. It seems like such a tall order to fill. And at times I struggle with my spirituality. But I think I have started down the right path, and some day I would like to be able to say that I have fully become a woman witness.

I'm glad I was given this opportunity to reflect on what it means to be a witness. To many, Mary Magdalene is known as the "Apostle to the Apostles." An apostle is a person who spreads the gospel. One of the best ways to do this is through our daily lives, but how do we put this into everyday practice?

I have spent some time reflecting on the significant women in my life. They range from teachers, grandmothers, friends, co-workers to mother, sister and youth minister. I have been blessed to have so many women touch my life. These are not all women of the Church, but it is important to find God in the secular world, especially since the secular world is where I spend a lot of time at work and at play.

I'd like to give a few specific examples of time spent with these women that tie into a model for being a witness. My first example comes from my grandmother. At a young age, I realized the generation gap between us, and I embraced her old fashioned ways. She taught me to slow down in order to take walks where we could really appreciate the flowers around us. My other grandmother used to start my morning off with a prayer and she would take me with her to the hospital when she volunteered to help the sick. My mom would kneel down at night to pray with my sister and me. My final example is the administrator at the school where I work who would not only help me with questions and problems that I had, but would have me leave her office feeling better about myself than when I went in.

What is significant about these women that I have mentioned is that, first and foremost, they have believed in me. They have seen potential when I have been blind to it. They have been encouraging. They have listened, truly listened without distraction. They have taken problems and hardships and shown me how to make them better. They have taken time for me, time to call to see how I am doing, time to meet to discuss thoughts, ideas, or problems, time to just visit. They have led by example, doing what they believe in. They have shown me how to be friendly, kind, caring and how to help those in need, challenging me to think about what Jesus would do. They have taught me to take time to appreciate the beauty in this world and to look at things through a new way, through others' eyes and from God's perspective. When you put this all

together, in one form or another, these women have shown me love, love like Mary Magdalene showed for Jesus and love like Jesus showed for Mary Magdalene, a love that is compassionate and understanding. That is what I think it means to live the gospel.

These women have given me a template for how to share God's love. That template alone is not enough though. I am being called to be an apostolic witness in today's world, a world where violence and injustice are ever present, a world that technology has made bigger, allowing us to correspond almost instantaneously with people around the world, yet, ironically at the same time, replacing human contact with computers. In confronting this new generation of challenges in our world, not only do I need to draw on the wisdom of those who have gone before me and the wisdom of women witnessing today, I also have to use my own knowledge and spirituality to adapt this template to today's needs.

I hope that, just as I have learned from past generations of women witnesses, my generation will be able to leave behind a model of how to live God's love and promise in our everyday lives for future generations of witnesses.