



Mary Jo Leddy: Canadian Witness to Faith



PRESENT WORKS: Founder, Romero House Community for Refugees, senior Fellow, Massey College, and University of Toronto. Active member of the Ontario Sanctuary Coalition. PEN Canada. Action of Christians Against Torture, Journalist and writer.

Was founding editor of Catholic New Times, an independent national Catholic newspaper. Active in several human rights and peace groups. Frequent radio and TV commentator. Has lectured on various topics nationally/ internationally. Campaign Chair, Gerard Kennedy M.P., Board Member, Massey College Corporation.

WRITINGS: **The Other Face of God: When the Stranger Calls Us Home** (Fall 2011), **Our Friendly Local Terrorist** (Spring 2010) **Radical Gratitude** (Orbis, 2003). **At the Border Called Hope: Where Refugees Are Neighbours** (Finalist, Trillium Award 1997) **Reweaving Religious Life** (Best Book of 1996, Catholic Press Association of America) **Say to the Darkness We Beg to Differ** (Finalist, City of Toronto Book Award 1988), **Memories of War, Promises of Peace**. Co-editor of two books

AWARDS: numerous academic awards and scholarships including: The Governor General's Bronze Medal, the Canada Council Doctoral Fellowship, the Canadian University Presidents' Award "Outstanding Young Woman of 1978", the Ida Nudel Human Rights Award (1983), the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews Human Relations Award (1987), Award for Distinguished Contribution, Roman Catholic Communicators of Canada (1990), Best Publication Award, College Theology Society (Canada and USA), The Ontario Citizenship Award (1993), several press awards including best editorial, best news story, best theological reflection, best investigative journalism, best national newspaper, best

campaign in the public interest. Order of Canada, 1996. Canada Council Creative Non-Fiction Grant (Leighton Studios, Banff Centre), Gunther Plaut Humanitarian Award (2011)

If you had to create a Catholic Resume which highlighted ways you are a WITNESS to the Catholic faith, what would be on it?

I am sure that my Catholic faith as shaped my vision of life and my way of being in the world. I was fortunate to grow up in a culture of faith in which the seasons of life reflected the deep mysteries of our faith. I grew up imagining the world as a great creation of God. This faith formed the basis for believing that each human being was of infinite value and worth. It made me believe that my one life was also worthy and full of meaning. It moved me to listen to the voice of God's call. It made me want to give my life generously and recklessly. My faith assured me that I would be happy loving God and loving my neighbour. As I reflect back, I can see that my faith shaped my imagination of my place in the world and my relationship with others. We were all held in the hands of God. We are fortunate, as Catholics, to see the world in a sacramental way. We see signs of God in the most ordinary things, in daily life and small events. "The world," as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote, "is charged with the grandeur of God." There is something grand about the Catholic vision. We are wrapped around with mystery. We do not live on a flat earth but in a world that shimmers with spirit. I think it is this grand vision of goodness that has made me even more aware of suffering in the world, the suffering of the poor of refugees and many others. As we learn to walk with the suffering Christ, we also learn what it means to accompany others in their real pain. Our faith is not abstract but as real as flesh and bone and bricks and mortar and institutions and structures.

One of the blessings of being in the Catholic church is that we share in a community of faith. Alone and isolated, we too easily become overwhelmed by the problems in our own life and in the world about us. We are part of a universal church and this always helps me to "see through" some of the illusions of our culture. We have a long tradition that helps us to put the present moment in perspective. As I go about my daily work, I don't "think" about being Catholic too much. I just know that is what I am and I am grateful that this is so.

What kind of difference do you hope to make in living a life based on Jesus' teachings?

I do believe that each one of us makes a difference with our lives -- sometimes for better but, at other times, for the worse. Our lives are profoundly interconnected in some mysterious way. I don't always know exactly how I am making a difference in the world but I believe that I will know this in the life to come. I would like to help make the world a happier place, a more joyful and just place. In the end, I trust that the grace of God is always moving through the world, making a divine difference.

What advice do you have for a young Catholic finding ways to express their faith?

You have one great chance to live. You have one life that is given to you and to no other. There is something you are meant to do with your life. I pray that you will know this. Don't hang around waiting for something to happen -- like the apostles, jump out of the boat, walk on water and run towards Jesus and towards life. Live with open hands and an open heart and you will be happy.

