

# THE SPIRITUALITY OF OLDER WOMEN

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I find this quite a challenging topic! Perhaps it's because I became a senior in March, so I officially qualify as an older woman. Did I say that? I certainly haven't thought of myself as an older woman. Why, I'm not sure I acknowledged middle age! Maybe the challenge is because I've proceeded through life trying to adapt to changes without taking stock of exactly who I was as a spiritual being. I know I am spiritual. I just hadn't considered how I am as a spiritual being now as compared to many years ago.

There's a term some people use, which I happen to like, and which fits into this discussion. It is the word "crone." Our society has applied negative connotations to this word, but many people are reclaiming the title for what it really is. One source I read recently describes a crone as an old woman; a woman past her childbearing years; a post-menopausal woman; a wise old woman; a woman who is adapting constructively, often gracefully, to the process of aging; a woman who is comfortable with her spiritual self, her intuition, and her creative power.

I think I am a crone or becoming one. I fit many of the descriptions and I want to fit them all. It's not customary for us to think about ourselves in such categories. In fact, it's only because someone has named a gift in us that we might have this personal insight. It's not for me to say I'm wise, but trust in God and in my life experience probably qualifies me on occasion as someone who is wise. So, if life has brought me to this crone stage, I'm comfortable with that.

I've been reading an inspiring book, *The Story of Ruth*, by Joan D. Chittister. It's a reference to the Book of Ruth in scripture where we are summoned beyond stereotypes and social barriers to fullness, indeed to wholeness. It's a fascinating look at the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. In particular, the author suggests Naomi and Ruth as role models for women of today. Naomi and Ruth have something to say to each of us as we face loss, change, risk, and as we greet the unfamiliar in our own lives. "The Book of Ruth is a treatise on the spirituality of womanhood." It is your story and it is mine.

Ms. Chittister writes of the journey of these women in 12 categories: loss, change, transformation, aging, independence, respect, recognition, insight, empowerment, self-definition, invisibility and fulfilment. And so we might think of our spiritual journeys similarly – moments after which we are never quite the same.

Loss is an inevitable part of life. When we experience loss we draw from deep within us untapped sources of God. New strength and courage well up with a calmness that can only be of the Spirit. There is a resurrection of self that surprises us and an awareness that life has changed.

Every stage of life teaches us something about ourselves. Our faith and our personality, sometimes a latent part of our being that surfaces, create in us a shift, a new beginning that could only happen as a result of experience and openness to these graced times. We are brought to a closer relationship with God. In the *Book of Ruth*, Ruth becomes a spiritual adult. She makes choices for herself and accepts the consequences of her decisions. "When we learn from life what is about God and what isn't, what's important and what isn't – as a society, as women, Naomi will have done her part to bring God to humanity, humanity to humankind and the spiritual gifts of women to the world."

I remember introducing myself as the daughter of Joe and Kay or as the wife of Al. Gradually, because of the graced moments, there is a shift and we discover our possibilities. We start to refer to our own lived experience. When this happens, our self-confidence grows and we begin to contribute more to society. I love how Ms. Chittister says this. "Until we take life into our own hands, we are at best, candidates for piety, not pursuers of sanctity. The pious participate in rituals designed to protect them from the world. The holy go beyond the rituals to wrestle with the angels of life."

As a woman grows older, becomes a "crone," she develops an independence that is a gift to the society that surrounds her. Ruth not only models this independence, she takes the cue from Naomi who is so wise in her relationship to Ruth. Reading and listening to the Word of God through this book, we see how social tradition is defied. God is calling us to join with these scriptural women to be role models for the younger women of today.

And so I invite those of you who are crones to take on the challenges and responsibilities that accompany such a title. Don't be afraid to honour the life that God is calling you to through your life experience and through your personal gifts.

**With love from Crone Claire**