

# 'Top Model' Leah Darrow finds true beauty with God at the centre of all things

It's not surprising Catholic speaker Leah Darrow – a former top fashion model – wants women to focus more on beauty.

But these days, it's not the flawless make-up and runway-ready look.

"If we truly want to be beautiful, which we should, our relationship with God must be at the centre of all things," said Darrow, [an internationally known Catholic author and podcaster](#).



Leah Darrow shared her own story of faith renewal. Thandiwe Konguavi, Grandin Media

Darrow has her own podcast called [Do Something Beautiful](#) and wrote her personal story in her book, *The Other Side of Beauty: Embracing God's Vision for Love and True Worth*.

She shared that faith journey, teachings from the Bible and the saints, and sisterly advice with more than 300 Catholic women and girls at the Women of Dignity conference Nov. 16-17, at [Holy Trinity Parish](#) in Spruce Grove. The conference is organized by [Catholic Family Ministries](#).

"Some women fear the fire, and some women become it," Darrow said, paraphrasing a quote from secular poet R.H. Sin.

"We need to dream a little bit bigger to be the kind of women we want to be."

"Pray for the Holy Spirit to bring us His gifts so we may become a light in the world," Darrow said. "I think more than ever we need that now, where it feels dark, and sounds dark."

Also at the conference, Sister Marie Therese Langer, a member of the Congregation of Sisters of Merciful Jesus, spoke of how the light of Christ brought her out of darkness in her own life. She struggled with deep depression before becoming a sister.

"I experienced a lot of darkness. Deep, deep, deep darkness," she said.

"I see what matters because of my experience with darkness. And that's what mercy does. Mercy causes our enemy to lose every time.

"Mercy is God's beauty," said Langer.

Darrow grew up on a farm in Oklahoma. She was raised in a Catholic home with five younger brothers and sisters. She moved to St. Louis, Missouri, in high school, where her own struggle to find love and to be seen as beautiful led to low self-esteem, a distorted body image, anxiety and depression.

"I believed what the world was selling," said Darrow. "As a woman that I was what I looked like. That my worth and my value was really tied up into how I looked."

That belief led her far away from her faith and the Church, and to the reality television show *America's Next Top Model*.

In 2004, Darrow made it to the top 20 for the third season of *Top Model*. Soon after her time on the show ended, Darrow continued to pursue her life as a successful model, living with a boyfriend in New York.

Then a spiritual encounter in the middle of a fashion photo-shoot changed her life.

"I made you for more," she heard Christ say in a vision.

In that moment, Darrow said, she realized she didn't need to be famous or put on the cover of a magazine to be beautiful or to be known and loved by God.

"As a little girl I was scared of monsters. My parents told me they didn't exist. How I wish they would have told me the whole truth. Monsters do exist; they're just not hiding in closets. They're standing in the light of day. They are found within us, in lies, doubt, fear, and unreachable expectations of beauty that we think will earn us love. Make no mistake, monsters are real. And we must fight them. We must go to battle and bravely face what seeks to destroy us."

– Excerpt from *The Other Side of Beauty: Embracing God’s Vision for Love and True Worth* by Leah Darrow.

Darrow credits her mother, who prayed for her for 10 years when she was between the ages of 15 and 25, for her return to confession and eventually back to the Church.

“My mom is a prayer warrior,” she said.

Darrow’s testimony at the conference moved several women to tears.

“What I realized from her talk is no matter how broken you are, you can always turn away from it and turn to God. You’re never too far away,” said Natasha Miller, who drove from Bonnyville in northeast Alberta to attend her first Women of Dignity Conference.



**Natasha Miller**

“In life you’re so busy, and this weekend just helps you take time for yourself and your relationship with God,” Miller added. “It’s like you come so broken and carrying your crosses, challenges, and as the weekend unfolds with the talks, confession, and Mass, the Holy Eucharist, you just feel like you’re getting renewed and reformed.”

“It’s amazing to come to a place where every woman here is worshiping the same God and we’re all one as sisters in Christ and it doesn’t matter how much you make or what you wear or how beautiful you look, we’re all loved the same.”



**Maria Poulin**

Maria Poulin, who travelled from St. Paul, about two hours' drive northeast of Edmonton, said she was edified by the testimonies.

"We don't all experience the same things in our life. We all experience different things, but there's a reason for that: To help others," said Poulin. "People grow from peoples' testimonies. The more you grow in faith, the more you try to become a better person, and the more you become like Christ."

Darrow dismantled what she calls the "lie" that women should compete with each other in society.

Life is not about competition, it's about contribution, she said. And our contributions to the world are dependent on how much we build up our relationship with God.

"Ultimately ladies, that is the relationship that will bring the most beauty into your life," said Darrow. "You want more beauty in your life? My first question is, do you have a relationship with God? Do you pray? Build up your life with God, your relationship with God. It's consistent and persistent prayer that brings out that beauty that you're called to."

Darrow's book, *The Other Side of Beauty*, refutes the belief that worth is tied to appearance.

"The beauty of the face never gets to the soul but the beauty of the soul will reflect itself on the face," said Darrow, paraphrasing a quote from [Venerable Fulton Sheen](#), the American bishop and TV preacher whose cause for sainthood was opened in 2002.

"I really believe as women we have more that we can give to the world, that – just the way she said – beauty's not what we see outside, beauty's inside. And we are all beautiful because we are all made in the image of the Lord," said conference participant Noelle Nyakadekere.

Attendees, including many young mothers swaddling babies, braved icy roads and cold to attend the conference and deepen their faith.

Nyakadekere, who attended the conference for the first time after seeing Darrow on Catholic television network EWTN, said she was surprised to find the church full.

"People tend to discourage us so that we think that the Catholic Church, nobody goes there," she said.



**Amanda LeBlanc**

"I'm really, really happy to see all these people coming for the conference. I'm proud of being Catholic in Canada again."

Conference volunteer Amanda LeBlanc said she looks forward to the event every year.

"I love the fellowship," she said. "I don't feel that a lot of women can find it elsewhere and that's why they come here."