

In these several accounts of widowhood we pass from prayer to activity to prayer again in a ceaseless manner. Each widow has a character formed by prayer and this character forms and informs whatever they do. Each is true, not only to their particular vocation, but to themselves. Paul's letter to Timothy is an attempt to get a grip on this, to put some order in to the process but the process is not ultimately in our control. It's like inventing rules of poetry only for them to be overturned by the next, best poet. Judith and Anna and St Frances of Rome are seen through the lens of certain stereotypes but their reality will be quite unique and unaddressed by any rule book. They are, in short, themselves, which is our calling also . . .

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