

Karla J. Bellinger and Michael E. Connors, CSC. *Remembering Why We Preach: A Retreat to Renew Your Spirit and Skill*. Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2022. \$21.95

Remembering Why We Preach, the most recent from Notre Dame's Marten Program in Homiletics and Liturgics, presents itself as a workbook that guides the reader on a renewal retreat. The authors rightly argue that a preacher can only preach as deeply as they have plumbed their relationship with God. This, then, is the central theme of the book—helping those who preach develop an ever-deepening relationship with God in order to lead God's people into similar relationships. This is understood and articulated through the lens of the sermon-crafting process as an "encounter" with God through the Holy Spirit (ix). The "retreat" experience offered is not only in the teaching of homiletical theory (of which there is relatively little) but by encouraging the practice of preaching. In seeking God through the homiletic encounter, the authors argue, preachers open themselves up to change, creativity, and community—all which are needed for effective preaching and evangelization.

The remaining eight chapters are divided evenly into two units. The first unit (chapters 1-4) focus on the person of the preacher. Chapter 1 lays the foundation for the book's idea of preaching as an encounter that leads to deeper spiritual connection to God, giving special attention to discerning the work of the Spirit in this process. Chapter 2 presents the content of preaching as "encounter"—the nature and work of Jesus Christ, the great paschal mystery. The more clearly that Jesus can be articulated, the more confidence those who listen can have in Jesus as their savior and redeemer. Chapter 3 focuses on preaching as a spiritual practice, drawing heavily on the final writings of Dag Hammarskjöld and his understanding of faith as a journey and the journeyer as a witness. Special attention is given here to the disciplines of scripture reading, prayer, meditation, and solitude. Chapter 4 reminds the reader of the pastoral nature of preaching by drawing on the 1982 document on preaching entitled *Fulfilled in Your Hearing* to remind the preacher that we will only be heard as we hear those in the congregation.

The second unit (chapters 5-8) focuses on preaching as a form of spiritual leadership. Chapter 5 introduces this theme, focusing again on the need to practice discernment within the context of community. Chapter 6 centers on the role that congregational feedback can play both in maturing the preacher's abilities as well as shaping the congregation's faith formation. Chapter 7 returns to the idea of preaching as "encounter" to emphasize that the goal of preaching is to promote spiritual formation and evangelization. Preaching provides us with the space to address the complexities of faith while offering the vocabulary to articulate the good news outward. Chapter 8 expands on the previous chapter with an emphasis on fostering missional activity by the congregation. Each chapter ends with a discussion page, application exercises, and a list of additional readings. The book concludes with four appendices that provide further documentation and guidance for engaging in peer and congregational feedback.

Bombarded by the constant news of clergy leaving the ministry due to burnout and waning faith, this workbook comes as a breath of fresh air. While it does include some homiletical theory (mainly in chapter 5), it remains comfortably in reflection and application. The only critique (a term that I hesitate to use) would be that the consistent references to the writings of the Catholic Church may be distracting for those not familiar with Catholic polity or the thoughtful writings of Pope Francis. However, there is also encouragement here as Protestants can see how their Catholic brothers and sisters are wrestling with similar ecclesial concerns. The material on feedback alone (mainly in chapter 6), including the provided

evaluation forms, earns the book a hearty recommendation. If you are involved in preaching in any way, this book will be a valuable resource.

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