

Catholic Women Preach

Raising Voices, Renewing the Church

CYCLE A

Elizabeth Donnelly and Russ Petrus, Editors

ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

Introduction

Elizabeth Donnelly and Russ Petrus

The Holy Spirit is at work in wondrous ways. And sometimes we are blessed to be awake and receptive to the Spirit's direction. Such is the story of *Catholic Women Preach*, which came to life when the Spirit led faith-filled travelers on similar journeys.

One night in 2013, Betty Anne Donnelly found herself unable to sleep, energized by her reflection upon an experience she had in 2011 while serving on the Women's Advisory Committee of the Woodstock Theological Center in Washington, DC. The distinguished fellows—lay women and men, vowed religious and priests—were committed to communal theological reflection on pressing issues. They felt strongly that women's voices were not being heard in the Catholic Church, a fact that served to impoverish the whole church. They determined to film Betty Anne and three other women on the advisory committee preaching on the readings for the four Sundays of Advent that year.

It was daunting and thrilling to be filmed by the talented documentarians Mary and Frank Frost in the gorgeous Copley Crypt Chapel on Georgetown University's campus. Each woman wore a purple—or in Kerry Robinson's case, pink—stole to mark the solemnity and joy of the liturgical season. The Woodstock team posted the preaching videos on their website, publicized them in their newsletter, and received ample positive feedback from their supporters.

INTRODUCTION

Lying awake one night, Betty Anne was inspired by a bold idea: to scale up this series and develop a website featuring gifted Catholic women from around the world, diverse in age and ethnicity, preaching on the readings for each Sunday and certain feast days throughout the year.

Meanwhile, FutureChurch board members Jocelyn Collen, Diana Culbertson, OP, and Rita Houlihan had set out with executive director Deborah Rose to expand upon the organization's "Unheard Homilies" project. Introduced as a part of FutureChurch's Annual Mary of Magdala Celebrations in 2001, "Unheard Homilies" created a space for women preachers to publicly reflect on the Word of God at a time when lay preaching (while permitted under canon law) was being stifled in many parts of the Church. FutureChurch began posting these "unheard homilies" from Mary of Magdala Celebrations on its website. Encouraged by abundant positive feedback, the board of FutureChurch decided to expand the work by creating an online platform for Catholic women to preach.

In 2015, Deborah Rose and Betty Anne met and shared their common pursuit of raising the voices of Catholic women through preaching. Russ Petrus, then program director for FutureChurch, brought his web development skills into the mix and designed what would become the platform for Catholic Women Preach. After a year of planning and development, the Catholic Women Preach website (<https://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/>) officially launched in November of 2016 with preaching for Advent.

Since the launching of the website, well over three hundred extraordinary Catholic women have blessed us with challenging and inspiring reflections. All of their contributions remain fully accessible on the website, representing a rich trove of wisdom to browse and search.

This project could not have been successful without the help of our distinguished advisory board members: M. Shawn

INTRODUCTION

Copeland; Richard Gaillardetz; Thomas Groome; Nontando Hadebe; Mary Catherine Hilbert, OP; James Keenan, SJ; Raymond Kemp; Paul Lakeland; Astrid Lobo Gajiwala; James Martin, SJ; Rhonda Miska; Carolyn Osiek, RSCJ; Brian Pierce, OP; Nancy Pineda-Madrid; Barbara Reid, OP; Kerry Robinson; Christine Schenk, CSJ; and June Siciliano, OP.

We are also grateful for those who offered editorial assistance: Diana Culbertson, OP; Marianne Race, CSJ; Janet Schlichting, OP; and Mary Ann Wiesemann-Mills, OP.

We are extremely grateful to Robert Ellsberg for encouraging us to edit this collection of Year A homilies. We could not have done it without the assistance of the extraordinarily talented and tenacious Kelly Sankowski, who corresponded with our contributors, proposed homily titles, and edited and updated biographies. Our warmest thanks to Kelly.

We dedicate this volume to the many prophetic, Spirit-led women who have inspired and helped to clear and illuminate a path forward for us. Three contributors to this volume—Louise Akers, SC; Francine Cardman, PhD; and Jeannie Masterson, CSJ—completed their earthly journeys before they could see their work published. May they be among the cloud of witnesses who continue to guide us and help us discern the stirrings of the Spirit.