Culture
Book Reviews



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by Patty Breen McNeil

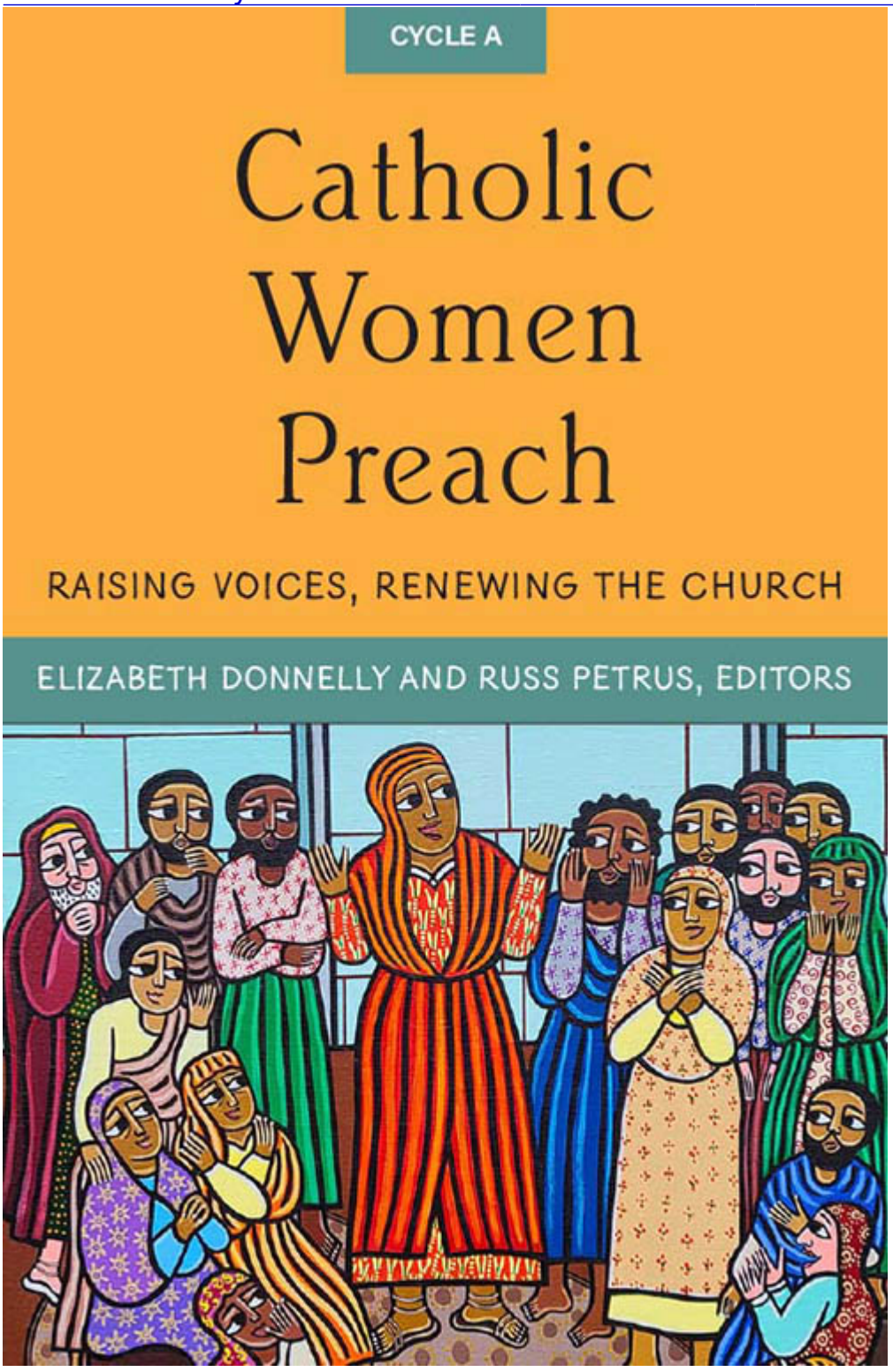
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Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Church — Cycle A
Elizabeth A. Donnelly and Russ Petrus, editors
320 pages; Orbis Books
$20.00

It is a standing date that I look forward to every other Sunday afternoon with great excitement.

My dear friend MC and I meet at a cozy cafe in Detroit and splurge for a delicious drink (and, OK, maybe a sweet treat too). We begin our time by unpacking our lives, sharing our hearts about current joys, sorrows and everything in between. We talk about dating and marriage, work and careers, things we are reading that are inviting us to grow, our struggles with the church — and where we find hope anew.

This holy time blesses me in more ways than I can describe.

Part of the reason MC and I meet with such frequency is that we have created an intimate little book club to discuss *Catholic Women Preach: Raising Voices, Renewing the Church* by Elizabeth Donnelly and a wide assortment of incredible female voices. It is both life-giving and challenging, bearing fruitful conversations for us as friends but also as two laywomen willing to ask deep questions of what we believe, what we struggle with and where we find our place in the church.

Catholic Women Preach meets a sacred yearning to have and hear the voices of women in the church through the unique perspective of their own preaching. This book was born out of the good work of organizations like FutureChurch and Catholic Women Preach that answer a call to lift up the voices of women in the church — one of the primary themes emerging from the synod on synodality called forth by Pope Francis. The timing of this is not a coincidence.



Elizabeth Donnelly speaks on Oct. 25, 2022, during a virtual book launch for *Catholic Women Preach*, which she co-edited. (NCR screenshot/YouTube/Future Church)

The book is based on the Lectionary of the Sunday readings in Cycle A, the current cycle of the liturgical year. Every week a different female writer, theologian or teacher breaks open the Scripture readings, sharing her own wisdom and perspective, while making connections to the current world in which we live.

No topic is taboo for these women; they face it all head-on with a grace and honesty that invites the reader to make connections to their own lives.

I look forward to reading it each Sunday morning with my cup of coffee as I reflect on the Scriptures before going to Mass. My own copy is dog-eared and marked up. These voices have become companions to me in my own spiritual walk, and I feel grateful for them.

Each woman featured in this volume is in many ways a "spiritual midwife," birthing something new and necessary into the world. Midwives support women in the middle of the birthing process — encouraging and supportive, they help bring about a new reality: a baby. In the same way, these women are bringing about a new reality through their teaching words.

> How can we be the living, breathing church if we do not hear from the voices of women?
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In hope, we trust that these spiritual mothers, midwives and teachers are those who will help bring about change and reform when it comes to the roles of women in the Catholic Church.

The words offered by St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk for the Nativity of the Lord are a beautiful taste of the wisdom found in this book:

> My midwife's question for each of us tonight is to ask in what way are we laboring, like Mary, to birth God's abiding love into a world so much in need of it? In what way are we, like Joseph, supporting the efforts of all who labor on behalf of the marginalized? In what way are we, like the midwives, supporting our powerful birthing God, who longs for right relationship and protection of a Mother Earth that, in fact, gave birth to us all?

Scripture is teeming with the prophetic voices of women, both in the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament. Women were preachers, teachers, prophets, evangelizers and, yes, even deacons (looking at you, St. Phoebe!). Many have come before us — Miriam, Anna, Mary and Elizabeth, the nameless Samaritan woman, Mary of Magdala, Junia, Thecla — and many more will go after us. How can we be the living, breathing church if we do not hear from the voices of women?

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In fact, the church cannot fully breathe with both lungs until we invite women to breathe their words into spaces and places where their presence is sorely lacking.

Catholic Women Preach is a resource to accompany the reader in the liturgical year through the voices of women. Many backgrounds, professions and stages in life are represented, and yet a single thread weaves through each story. They each have something important to teach us, and it would behoove us to listen. Just as Mary sat

at the feet of Jesus, captured by his words and teaching, we too should sit at the feet of these women teachers.

This book gives me hope for the future of women in the church. I have been inspired to grow my unique talents and see where I can offer them for the good of others and the good of the church, all while supporting the contributions of other women as well.

For women have been some of the greatest reformers and truth-tellers in the history of Christianity, and this book affirms that the legacy is still going strong.

Related: Pope Francis wants better homilies. Find them at Catholic Women Preach.