

"The Mystical Way in Everyday Life: Sermons, Prayers, and Essays by Karl Rahner, S.J."

Translated, edited, and with an Introduction by Annemarie S. Kidder. Maryknoll, Orbis Books, 2010. 199 pp. paper \$20.00

The word most frequently used in this limited collection of Rahner's writings is *incomprehensible*: the incomprehensible God, the incomprehensible Mystery. And this One immune to our grasping is the Word become flesh, who does not lack "the courage to live in the smallness of our ordinary moments." (p.159) Surely this is a message worthy of a preacher's proclamation.

Kidder has organized these short reflections around the liturgical year; thus, the book could be a reference on the preacher's shelf. An Advent reflection on John the Baptist, for example, recalls that the One John announced did not prevent John's horrific murder. John is the messenger of "the God who seems to be arriving only when it is already too late." (p.4) What richness is here in developing and relating to everyday life the Advent theme of "waiting in joyful hope for the coming of the Lord."

Rahner writes of Lent as the experience of distance from God, as in the nights of mystical tradition. Preachers, I believe, need to feed this strong meat to the faithful in the pews, letting them know the value of this experience that "seduces us into a vast longing that we ourselves cannot satisfy and that God seemingly cannot either." We probably would not use Kidder's translation verbatim, but, having read the chapter on Lent and assimilated it, we can paraphrase the substance in the language of all who know well the experience of God's absence.

In a piece originally published in 1963, entitled in this volume "On Not Avoiding Decisions," Rahner addresses preachers directly, taking us to task for avoiding imperatives. It is fine to preach doctrine, he says, but the faithful need to be encouraged to make the doctrine concrete, and it is the job of the preacher to provide guidance in naming and living the imperatives inherent in doctrine for our time and place.

I am told that Rahner's theological writing is dense and difficult to understand. I don't read German and cannot comment on Kidder's translation. I suspect that it must be good, however, because some of the dense quality of the writing remains in this translation. You would probably not want to read much in one sitting, and the short chapters and sub-chapters facilitate your using this book appropriately.

With few exceptions, these sermons, essays, and prayers were written before

Vatican II, and occasionally dated references occur, such as that we hear words of forgiveness "in a wooden box, called a confessional." (p. 7). Their substance, however, justifies the title. In almost all of them, Rahner demonstrates that everyone among us can open to experience the incomprehensible Mystery.

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