

The Intimate Subject

By Judith Freeman and Anthony Hernandez

A book of photographs can make a fine gift, especially if it's one that can be looked at again and again for the way in which it illuminates aspects of the human condition. We discovered three such books in this year's offerings: **Come Sunday**, **The Tunnel** and **Hospice**. Here's why we liked them:

Judith Freeman: **Come Sunday** is unlike any book I've ever seen. A few years ago, a pastor invited Thomas Roma to photograph inside an African American church in Brooklyn. Over the next three years, Roma ended up photographing more than 150 services in different churches. The result is "Come Sunday," an amazing selection of photographs of working-class people praying together, singing, sharing their faith.

Anthony Hernandez: You can't get any better than this book. Roma's done something almost perfect. They're so complex, these photographs. There's a sense of something you don't often see portrayed in America and that's the real physical beauty of black people, from children to teens to the elderly. The photographer is almost transparent. He's so close to these people, and yet they're not aware of his presence.

J.F.: Henry Louis Gates Jr. has written a fine introduction too. He talks about the role of the church in black culture.

A. H.: But he uses the word "frozen"—like Roma has "frozen" these scenes in black and white. To me they're not frozen. The pictures are so alive. When you finish looking at this book, it's as if you've been inside that church—you can still hear the singing, feel the movement and energy. Roma has captured the spirit of those people. That's a very rare thing.

J.F.: **The Tunnel** is a very different kind of book. Margaret Morton photographed homeless people who are living in abandoned subway tunnels beneath New York City. She uses the words of the homeless themselves as text. Their stories, combined with the black and white pictures of the homeless and their "houses" in the tunnels, are together very powerful.

A.H.: Again, like Roma, Morton was an outsider who was invited in. If Roma is transparent as a photographer, Morton is semi-transparent. You know she's there. You always feel her presence, but it's a very sensitive presence. She's looking at what most people want to forget—that there are people living this

way. You have to give her credit for going into these tunnels. It wasn't an easy thing to do. But the result is a powerful book.

J.F.: The same could be said about the last book we chose—**Hospice**. Five photographers and a group of filmmakers were commissioned to make photographs in hospices. The subject is death and dying. That makes it a most difficult book to look at. But what is so remarkable about the hospice movement—which started in England in the 1970s—is that it's brought death out of the closet. And here in this book we see what compassion means.

A.H.: Of all the photographs in the book, I found Jim Goldberg's the most powerful because he dealt with his own father's death. He used text as well as image, like a diary. A lot of his pictures deal with the ordinary aspects of sickness. They convey the need people have to be helped. For someone to buy this book and look at it is a way of dealing with his own personal feelings for the sick, the dying, the terminally



From "Come Sunday," photographs by Thomas Roma

ill. The photographers here are artists, not photojournalists. All three books we've picked are not only about the art of photography, but about intimacy of subject. They're all unique.

J.F.: And they all express larger concerns.

A.H.: But they do so in a very understated way, with re-

straint and sophistication. That's their success.

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Judith Freeman's most recent novel is "A Desert of Pure Feeling" (Pantheon Books). Anthony Hernandez's book of photographs, "Landscapes for the Homeless," was published last year by the Sprengel Museum in Hanover, Germany.