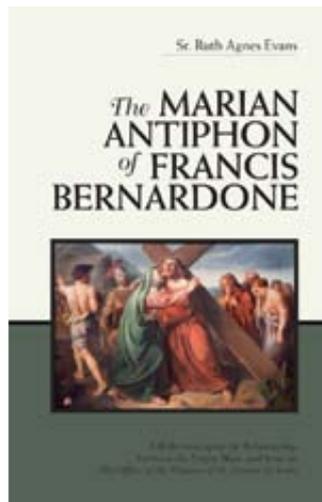


REVIEW



The Marian Antiphon of Francis Bernardone

Paul Gateshill reviews a new book by Sr Ruth Agnes Evans.

The Marian Antiphon of Francis Bernardone is a remarkable book introducing readers to a range of literature with which they will be largely unfamiliar. It is a very personal and reflective journey by Sr Ruth, who was a Poor Clare sister at Woodchester, until it closed in 2011.

First of all we are introduced to Francis Bernardone, or St Francis as he is better known. Sr Ruth's understanding and love of this great saint, together with St Clare is evident from the first pages. As a Poor Clare sister, Franciscan spirituality is the air she breathes and she cannot help but share her love of these two popular saints.

Next she introduces us to St Francis' Office of the Passion which is a reworking by Francis of the Psalms together with the Passion of Christ. She writes: 'The creative mind of Francis is evident chiefly in the way that he rearranges these psalm fragments... to create a series of fifteen new psalms forming a new narrative.' This narrative is a meditation on the Passion of Christ from Gethsemane to the Resurrection and invites the reader 'to engage with the mind of Jesus' as he goes through his Passion in complete abandonment to the Father.

Mary is present too, at each stage of Christ's Passion and this is explored through the beautiful Marian Antiphon which is recited at the beginning and end of each of these Psalms.

If this is not already a rich and scholarly resource, Sr Ruth brings in a new and extraordinary element: Case studies of condemned criminals on death row in the USA. When she was working on the Office of the Passion, she realised that the first six psalms were 'the inner narrative of a condemned man'. This in turn led her to deepening her research into the death penalty, particularly in the USA and joining the movement for its abolition. Various case

studies are interwoven within the Office of the Passion. They do not distract but help to reinforce the dreadful suffering of the condemned Jesus and of his mother, who accompanies him throughout his arrest, trial and crucifixion.

I recommend this book particularly for meditation during the Easter period. 🍀

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What we do to the least of our brothers and sisters reverberates far beyond the execution chambers in which they die. This book has been written on behalf of all of the condemned prisoners of the United States...

Sr Ruth Agnes Evans

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