

What's New in the Chapel Collection?

Spirited Readings Series Review

From the Adoration Chapel Librarian



Pope Francis by Matthew E. Bunson, D. Min.

Our Sunday Visitor Press

ISBN 978-1-61278-713-8

So much has been published regarding the Holy Father that an Italian literary agency has rushed to press with a monthly magazine so “fans” of the Pope can rabidly follow his every waking moment. When informed of this publication, Pope Francis expressed sadness that his pontificate had so quickly exploded to obsessive status. Bunson’s biographical look at Jorge Mario Bergoglio is respectful, insightful and refreshingly explanatory as it accurately presents the sequence of events leading to the Holy Father’s election and then steps back to explore his family and spiritual roots in Argentina.

Bunson’s introduction, which most readers typically skip, is a worthy summary of the book’s premise and intention, providing the first of many reminders of the now clear themes of the Pope’s ministry: mercy, humility, service and authenticity. Also, the Holy Father’s own words to the sea of reporters clamoring for newsbytes or sound bites remind us of the real force at work behind events, the power of the third person in the Holy Trinity. “In everything that has occurred, the principal agent has been, in the final analysis, the Holy Spirit. He prompted the decision of Benedict XVI for the good of the Church; he guided the cardinals in prayer and in the election.”

Bunson takes the reader to the Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo, the Pope’s traditional summer retreat, where Pope Benedict awaited the dictates of the College of Cardinals during the *sede vacante*, and then swiftly, upon Bergoglio’s election, the scene advances to the modest and tiny monastery tucked away in the Vatican gardens, Mater Ecclesiae, where

now Pope Emeritus, Benedict, would find a permanent home of peace and rest. Yet, there would be little rest for the successor to Peter.

The energetic new Pope quipped with his ecclesiastical brothers just moments after his election, “You know it was the duty of the conclave to give Rome a bishop. It seems my brother cardinals have gone to the ends of the earth to get one.” This statement introduces a series of chapters deftly balancing facts and intimacy regarding Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s life and ministry in Argentina, a nation geographically at *el fin del mundo*, nearly the last place on earth. Most North Americans are unacquainted with Argentina’s history and series of political upheavals, unless gleaned from the sordid details of the Broadway blockbuster “Evita” or recalled from pictorial newsbytes of the Falkland Islands War. In these chapters, Fr. Jorge and later Bishop Bergoglio are revealed as the eldest son of an immigrant railway worker fleeing Mussolini’s Italy. As Bunson makes straight the thoroughly tangled details of Fr. Jorge’s early life and Jesuit priesthood so readily knotted by the press, what becomes clear is the loving, patient endurance of a man who so identified with the poor and toiled so tirelessly to bring them relief and comfort that when he left Buenos Aires to travel to Rome for the conclave, his well-wishers hastily provided him with a new pair of shoes for his own were badly battered and scuffed.

Reading about the events that eventually filled the shoes of the fisherman Peter demands more than average knowledge of church history, and handily, Bunson provides a series of short historical treatises to guide the reader, offering explanations on the resignations of popes, conclave balloting, a bishop’s coat of arms and the formulation of episcopal mottoes. In 1992, when first ordained a bishop, Fr. Bergoglio selected “*miserando atque eligendo*” which is yet another indicator of the Holy Father’s consistent themes, “with mercy chosen.” Mercy is a watchword for all Christians, and with the passing of the Pope first anniversary, he offers a model not just for Catholics but all people of faith.

The Pope delivers a special blessing at Christmas and Easter entitled *Urbi et Orbi*. The translation reveals the extent of the Pope's mission to set our battered shoes on the path of mercy, humility, service and authenticity. The pontiff addresses the blessing "to the City and to the World."

The biography of Pope Francis is available from Our Sunday Visitor, www.osv.com and at Christian bookstores.