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## Evening Prayer (Feast of St. Francis)

Rachel Wheeler

*College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University*

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# Evening Prayer

## Feast of St. Francis

Rachel Wheeler

Tonight as the psalms end,  
we settle down for the reading  
on our hard, black pews,  
each separated from the other  
by a slab of hard, black wood,  
against which I lean as I warm  
to the reading from Sirach.

It's almost as if a fire's been lit,  
the monk at the lectern its screen,  
the book the hearth and we sit  
in a quiet crescent around it,  
the Abbey Church a cavern before us,  
its stained glass now muted  
dark, and Christ on the cross  
suspended between us and it.

Little by little, the day's frost  
vanishes from my toes,  
my fingers, the tip of my nose.  
It's almost cozy and I'd like  
to fold my legs up under me,  
pull my sweater closer  
about my shoulders and neck.  
(If only a cat were asleep in my lap,  
my bag of knitting at hand!)

The night's canticle, open  
on the rack before me, awaits  
the end of the last silence.  
Soon we will sing the *Magnificat*  
and go out into the October night,  
the sky aflame with stars,  
as the book was with words,  
as will be my heart, by and by.

Rachel is a Master of Arts in Theology student concentrating in Monastic Studies. Before her current degree program, she pursued the study of English and Music earning Bachelor's degrees in both areas and a Masters in English from Humboldt State. She hails from California where she spent many years working in a bookstore and at a public library. Her poem "Evening Prayer" was the first poem she wrote after arriving at Saint John's. Her poetic style has been influenced and inspired by such poets as T.S. Eliot, Mary Oliver, Rilke, and Jane Kenyon. Rachel plans to continue her education by pursuing a Doctorate in literature.