

Blessing of the Animals
Feast of St. Francis Service
October 3, 2009

Good morning. I am Carol Lazott and I will be leading this service.

All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all

God's creatures are each unique in their personality, whether they be human, animal or plant. This morning we will thank God for our pets and for the other wonderful creatures he made.

Opening Prayers

Lord, thank you for blessing our lives with animals.
Tender of heart and pure in soul,
They touch us in so many ways.
Commitment, unconditional love, faith, and forgiveness,
Inherent traits never questioned nor compromised,
Yet shared and bequeathed freely
Upon any and all who offer them the same.
It is with animals that we are taught tolerance and diversity,
For their uniqueness serves to brighten our existence.
They are an incomparable gift from God,
One that we open and rediscover daily,
Showing us how to make the world a little better,
And our society a bit more humane.
Lord, thank you for blessing our lives with animals.
For it is within these divine creatures that we rediscover
The true meanings of your teachings and infinite wisdom.

Heather Berry

Responsive Prayer

For the wool of sheep that keeps us warm
For the cow that gives us milk
For the sow, the horse, and the pony

Response: Lord, we give you thanks

For animals that are herders or beast of burdens
For the courage of a lion, height of a giraffe,

Response: Lord, we give you thanks

For the birds that sing and the fish that swim
For the gentleness of the rabbit
For the turtle, the gerbil, the hamster, the mouse
For creatures that walk, crawl and slither

Response: Lord, we give you thanks

For the voice of the grasshopper
For the buzz of the bee
For the artistry of the spider

Response: Lord, we give you thanks

Lord, we know that you have a purpose for every creature you created. They are all essential for the circle of life to continue to thrive. We are grateful for the companionship of our cats, the loyalty and devotion of our dogs, the enjoyment of watching birds eat. Help us, God, to awaken to and learn from their wisdom, their sweetness, their loyalty and particularly their seeming inability to judge human beings unkindly. We remember your servant Francis who loved all creatures and we promise that we, too, will seek to honor and love all your creatures. Amen

A Reading from Genesis

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Some thoughts:

This is the first "Blessing of the Animals" service that I have attended. So, I decided to do some research into the origins of the service.

As most of you probably know, today we celebrate the love and devotion St. Francis of Assisi showed for all creatures. St Francis came from a very wealthy family and gave up his worldly goods to minister to the poor. He served in war and spent a year as a captive. In 1204 he became ill and this triggered a spiritual crisis. He nursed lepers, and had a mystical vision of Christ. Three times Christ said, "Francis, Francis, go and repair My house which, as you can see, is falling into ruins". He thought this to mean the ruined church in which he was presently praying, and so sold his horse and some cloth from his father's store, to assist the priest there for this purpose. Francis heard the story from Matthew, Chapter 10 where Christ tells his followers that "they should go forth and proclaim that the [Kingdom of Heaven](#) was upon them, that they should take no money with them, nor even a walking stick or shoes for the road. Francis was inspired to devote himself to a life of poverty.

This is one of the myths associated with Francis.

In the city of [Gubbio](#), where Francis lived for some time, was a [wolf](#) "terrifying and ferocious, who devoured men as well as animals". Francis had compassion upon the townsfolk, and went up into the hills to find the wolf. Soon, fear of the animal had caused all his companions to flee, though the saint pressed on. When he found the wolf, he made the sign of the cross and commanded the wolf to come to him and hurt no one. Miraculously the wolf closed his jaws and lay down at the feet of St. Francis. "Brother Wolf, you do much harm in these parts and you have done great evil...", said Francis. "All these people accuse you and curse you... But brother wolf, I would like to make peace between you and the people". Then Francis led the wolf into the town, and surrounded by startled citizens made a pact between them and the wolf. Because the wolf had "done evil out of hunger", the townsfolk were to feed the wolf regularly, and in return, the wolf would no longer prey upon them or their flocks. In this manner Gubbio was freed from the menace of the predator. Francis, ever the lover of animals, even made a pact on behalf of the town dogs, that they would not bother the wolf again. It is also said that Francis, to show the townspeople that they would not be harmed, baptised the wolf.

Although nativity drawings and paintings existed earlier, St Francis of Assisi celebrated Christmas by setting up the first known three-dimensional Nativity scene in the town of Greccio near Assisi, around 1220. He used real animals to create a living scene so that the worshipers could contemplate the birth of the child Jesus in a direct way, making use of the senses, especially sight. Francis only used a straw-filled manger or feeding trough set between a real ox and donkey. According to Thomas, it was beautiful in its simplicity with the manger acting as the altar for the Christmas Mass.

Another legend surrounds Francis and some birds. One day, while Francis was traveling with some companions, they happened upon a place in the road where birds filled the trees on either

side. Francis told his companions to “wait for me while I go to preach to my sisters the birds”. The birds surrounded him, drawn by the power of his voice, and not one of them flew away. Francis spoke to them:

My sister birds, you owe much to God, and you must always and in everyplace give praise to Him; for He has given you freedom to wing through the sky and He has clothed you... you neither sow nor reap, and God feeds you and gives you rivers and fountains for your thirst, and mountains and valleys for shelter, and tall trees for your nests. And although you neither know how to spin or weave, God dresses you and your children, for the Creator loves you greatly and He blesses you abundantly. Therefore... always seek to praise God.

From these legends, I have drawn a picture of St. Francis as a humble servant who loved animals of all kinds.

I can relate to his talking to animals – I certainly talk to my dogs. They listen and seem to care about everything I say, unless I’m holding the tooth brush or nail clippers. I’m not ever alone, they watch over me and care when I’m upset. They help me get the physical exercise I need by bringing me their leashes, they remind me when it is meal time and bed time. They love unconditionally.

I’d like to share this prayer of St. Francis for Animals:

God Our Heavenly Father, you created the world to serve humanity's needs and to lead them to You.

By our own fault we have lost the beautiful relationship which we once had with all your creation.

Help us to see that by restoring our relationship with You we will also restore it with all Your creation.

Give us the grace to see all animals as gifts from You and to treat them with respect for they are Your creation.

We pray for all animals who are suffering as a result of our neglect.

May the order You originally established be once again restored to the whole world through the prayers of Saint Francis and the merits of Your Son,

Our Lord Jesus Christ Who lives and reigns with You now and forever. Amen.

Procession of Animals to the Altar

Officiant

Animals to be blessed should come forward.

Reverend Peggy

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and

sisters. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures!

The Blessing of the Pets

“Bless O God, your creature [PET’S NAME]. By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May you and [Owner’s Name] enjoy life together and find joy with the God who created you.”

Closing

May we all live without fear knowing that our God and Creator loves us all and will protect us. Go in peace and may the grace of God’s blessing be with you always.

People respond: Amen