

Morning Prayer Reflection

October 3, 2021

The Feast of Saint Francis — Blessing of the Animals

My reflection will begin with a prayer that is attributed to St. Francis, the patron saint of Animals and Ecology.

Please turn to page 833 in the Prayer Book. Mary will lead all of us to recite in unison.

Prayer

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let us sow love;

where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

*Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. **Amen.***

What a beautiful prayer — One of my favorites.

My reflection, thanks to Saint Francis, is very simple and direct.

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And let me set the stage...can you imagine a heaven without pets? Without animals? And be honest...how many of you talk to your animals — I mean seriously talk to them?

I won't spend any time on Saint Francis' extensive bio and all that he accomplished. There are volumes written about him and you can check out his very interesting life in Wikipedia.

Instead, I want to focus on one thought —ministry — one of the most important ministries in which many of you participate 24/7.

Of the numerous ministries in which we are engaged at Saint James, we tend to overlook one that is only celebrated once a year — at least publicly. It's the ministry of caring for God's children, the animals. Or using Saint Francis's term — your brothers and sisters. Those who purr, growl, meow, moos, bray, bark, pant, howl, hiss, swish and so forth.

Francis challenged us to focus on this major premise — God created animals. They are our brothers, sisters or our children who require our care and our love.

Of the two great commandments, the first is Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second is Love your neighbor as yourself. Well, animals are included in that commandment.

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Humans are entrusted by God to be stewards of His creation — just refer to Genesis as our official mandate. . The animals are looking to us for love, care, and guidance. In return, they'll reciprocate.

We are the so-called rational beings and stewards of God's creation and yet, how many times do humans ignore animals or the total environment for that matter. I won't broach climate change in this reflection.

Consider this: How many times do we ignore the hungry, the homeless, the penniless, the lame the weak, and the downtrodden. Yes, the two-legged animals that God created.

Now, consider this parallel. How many times do we ignore, abuse, and cast animals aside — God's creatures.

George Bernard Shaw stated that Man's inhumanity to man is only surpassed by his cruelty to animals.

Today we will witness just two examples of outreach ministries at Saint James...the food bags for the Red Cross Food bank and the Healing Blanket ministry.

However, today we celebrate another ministry, one considered as both inreach and outreach. Perhaps we need to move our 24/7 Inreach ministry of caring for our beloved animals and extending

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it outward. Making it a practice to visit or support the SPCA, the Humane Society, Best Friends, or the other countless facilities that are caring for God's creatures that need love, care, food, and shelter. They are looking to us, the stewards of God's creation, to be kind and loving. They are looking to us to protect our environment so we can keep the cycle of life balanced as God had planned.

And please, do not let us be insulted by those who say "Well. They're just animals. Just animals." Well, guess what. Who did God create before Adam and Eve. Yep. Need I say more?

Paul Irwin, a minister, and former president of the American Bible Society and the Humane Society of the United States is quoted as saying: The real platform for religion is based on the concepts of compassion, respect and consideration, not just for human beings, but also for all forms of life.

I may be preaching to the choir today since many of you are animal lovers and care for your brothers and sisters. And like any other ministry, it has to be carried forth in the name of Jesus, on a regular basis, and with conviction.

We are stewards. That is something we cannot treat lightly, nor ignore. God gave us that responsibility. We must care for all that exists on this planet because we are all one — we are all creatures

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of God. Yes, we all have souls and we're sharing and living in this environment together.

On this very important day as we bless your most precious pets, your brothers and sisters, give pause and pray for those animals who don't have the love, safety, and caring that you are providing.

Pray for the caregivers, vets, technicians, and countless volunteers who care for God's creatures.

Love needs to be shared and spread among all of God's creatures and I believe you possess that ability to make this ministry a powerful one here at Saint James and beyond the four walls of our historic church..

I would like to invite our Deacon, Mary Abrams to bless the animals.