



Blessing of the Animals

Remembering and Honoring St. Francis



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Blessing of the Animals Liturgy

Call to Worship

Animals and people gather around a small table in an appropriate place. An icon or statue of St. Francis might be placed on the table.

Opening Hymn **1982 Hymnal # 405**
All things bright and beautiful

Officiant: Let us pray.

Most high, omnipotent, good Lord, grant your people grace to renounce gladly the vanities of this world; that, following the way of blessed Francis, we may for love of you delight in Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.* (**Lesser Feasts and Fasts**)

First Reading **Genesis 1:20-25**

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and morning, the fifth day. And God said,

Other Activities for the Day

- Participants might want to look up passages from the Bible that deal with animals. List the animals you can find.
- Read the story of Noah and his ark. Participants could make the animals for the ark and attach them to a drawing of an ark.
- Make origami animals.
- Provide St. Francis pet medals for those being blessed in the service.
- Invite service animals to your blessing and have the handlers talk about the importance of these animals.
- Learn St. Francis' *Canticle to the Sun* and use it in your family devotions today.

Tips for an uneventful day

- Friendly and well-behaved animals will be welcomed. For those who become nervous, aggressive or who simply cannot make it, they can be represented by photos, etc.
- Animals must be under control and suitably restrained.
- Animals must have identification in the event of an escape.
- Designate a pet toilet area with appropriate clean-up products. Remind pet owners that it is their responsibility to clean up after their pet.
- A small memento of the event for each creature is a nice touch.
- Conduct the blessings in shaded areas if possible.
- You might consider keeping species separate.
- Provide alternative activities for attendees while they wait.
- Pets play a very important role in the lives of our older parishioners and neighbors. Do ask if they need assistance in getting their pet to and from the blessing.
- Take photos, publicize the event in the local media and on your church sign. Pet Blessings are good evangelism tools.
- You might like to make an offering to the SPCA or other animal protection agencies, to your local zoo, or to Project Heifer in honor of all animals today.
- If you serve refreshments, include pet refreshments as well. Be sure to include lots of water bowls. Nervous pets are thirsty pets.
- This is a good time to use your St. Francis icon or statue.
- It is optional to use the hymns. You may choose only one reading. Many pets will be nervous.

St. Francis

Why do we bless pets on this day?

St. Francis of Assisi lived in Italy in the 12th century. Francis grew up in a wealthy family, but as a young man, he renounced his wealth and worldly possessions and lived very simply.

When Francis spoke, everyone listened, including the animals. He told the animals that Jesus loved them too.

There was a wolf who lived in the town of Gubbio. The wolf came into the town each evening, frightening the inhabitants or eating them. Francis went to speak to "Brother Wolf" and discovered that the wolf was hungry. Francis explained that being hungry was not reason enough to eat people and their pets, or to terrorize them. The wolf became very gentle, the people fed him and he gave the children in the town rides on his back.

In the town of Gubbio, Francis built a small outdoor stable and put people in the stable to portray Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the angels. Then he added the animals - cow, donkey, sheep, etc. When asked, Francis said, "Surely the animals praised the new Messiah just as the shepherds and angels did." And so today, we have Christmas creches with people and animals praising the newborn Messiah.

In honor of this blessed saint of the church we gather today with our animals - our pets, our service animals, police dogs and horses, zoo animals and all God's creatures and give thanks for what they do for us and for what they mean to us.

"Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind; cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good."

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A Song of Creation Part II

Let the earth glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.
Glorify the Lord, O mountains and hills,
and all that grows upon the earth, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.
Glorify the Lord, O springs of water, seas and
streams, *
O whales and all that move in the waters.
All birds of the air, glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.
Glorify the Lord, O beasts of the wild, *
and all you flocks and herds.
O men and women everywhere, glorify the Lord, *
praise him and highly exalt him for ever.

The Homily (Optional)

Hymn

1982 Hymnal # 400

*During the singing of the hymn,
pets and people line up for the blessing.*

The Blessing of the Animals

The priest blesses each animal. Owner may pray with priest.
Merciful Lord, we ask You to bless _____ with Your divine care, health and safety. May she/he experience love and joy even as she/he brings love and joy to her/his family; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayers

Blessed are you Lord God of the universe. In your infinite wisdom you created the universe and blessed us with all living creatures. We especially thank you for entrusting us with our pets, our friends, who bring us so much happiness and whose presence very often helps us get through trying times. *Amen.*

Please bless our pets and make us responsible stewards of your creation. May we continue to give each other joy and be reminded of your power. *Amen.*

As our pets trusts us to take care of them, help us remember to trust you to take care of us, for in so doing we share in your love for all your creatures. And especially, we remember all endangered species and ask your help in taking care of them so that we may continue to appreciate all of your creation. Grant this through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The Dismissal & Blessing

Go as instruments of God's peace.
Let us go forth into the world, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

The People

Thanks be to God. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!

You may wish to use this prayer at home for your pet

Blessed are you Lord God of the universe. In your infinite wisdom you created the universe and blessed us with all living creatures. I especially thank you for entrusting me with my pet, my friend, who brings me so much happiness and whose presence very often helps me get through trying times.

Please bless my pet and make me a responsible steward of your creature. May we continue to give each other joy and be reminded of your power.

As my pet trusts me to take care of it, help me remember to trust you to take care of me, for in so doing we share in your love for all your creatures. And especially, we remember all endangered species and ask your help in taking care of them so that we may continue to appreciate all of your creation. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.