

Animals Are A Blessing

Psalm 148

8/21/2016

Today I want to tell you about St. Francis of Assisi, a saint who listened to God, who took care of creation, and who ministered to animals.

St. Francis grew up in a wealthy household, and as a young man, he decided to give up all his riches – even his nice clothes – to serve God and others. He treated all animals with respect and, it is said, once preached to a flock of birds.

Animals are indeed important in our lives. We live with them. We play with them. They give us comfort and joy. But animals also help to nourish us. On this day, we honor both our pets and those animals who give us food, work on our farms, and are part of the cycle of life on our earth.

We also look today to the example of Francis of Assisi in serving and giving to others. As the son of a wealthy merchant in Assisi, in Italy, Francis could have lived a life of great pleasure. Instead, he lived a life of great service and great sharing.

Eight hundred years later, we are asked to share, just as Francis of Assisi was asked to share and serve. We are all asked to be the hands and feet of Christ whenever we see “the least” of our human family in hunger or in thirst.

In many countries of the world, animals are an important part of people's lives. Animals pull plows, provide eggs and milk, pollinate plants and fertilize soil. Animals are truly a gift and a vital part of creation.

As we honor our own animals this day, we also honor the role of animals in feeding the hungry, all over the world. We pray to seek out people in need, wherever they might be. We pray to serve them with our gifts, our blessings and ourselves.

BLESSING OF ANIMALS

In the Scriptures, the act of blessing means 'the imparting of power or life.' The person performing the blessing is mediating that power from God or Christ to the person or the animal involved. To bless is more than an expression of goodwill and caring. To bless is impart God's power in person! The blessing of each animal, by name, means that health, healing, and life are being mediated from God for the benefit of the animal in its relationship with its human partners. Shalom is one Hebrew expression of blessing.

The minister/ worship leader circulates through the congregation, asks the name of the animal, places his/her hand on the animal's head (if appropriate) and then blesses the animal]:

"[insert name], you were created by God, and you are loved by God. May you and your human family experience joy and companionship together, and continue to be a blessing to each other."

Or

"(name of animal), may you be blessed in the Name of God who created you, and may you and (the owner) enjoy life together with our God."

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This song of David is a call for the entire universe to praise God.

Psalm 148

Common English Bible:

Praise the Lord from heaven!

Praise God on the heights!

Praise God, all of you who are his messengers!

Praise God, all of you who comprise his heavenly forces!

Sun and moon, praise God!

All of you bright stars, praise God!

You highest heaven, praise God!

Do the same, you waters that are above the sky!

Let all of these praise the Lord's name

because God gave the command and they were created!

God set them in place always and forever.

God made a law that will not be broken.

Praise the Lord from the earth,

you sea monsters and all you ocean depths!

Do the same, fire and hail, snow and smoke,

stormy wind that does what God says!

Do the same, you mountains, every single hill,

fruit trees, and every single cedar!

Do the same, you animals—wild or tame—

you creatures that creep along and you birds that fly!

Do the same, you kings of the earth and every single person,

you princes and every single ruler on earth!

Do the same, you young men—young women too!—

you who are old together with you who are young!

Let all of these praise the Lord's name

because only God's name is high over all.

Only God's majesty is over earth and heaven.

God raised the strength[a] of his people,

the praise of all his faithful ones—

that's the Israelites,

the people who are close to him.

Praise the Lord!