



A Liturgy in Thanksgiving for Creation
and in Honor of the Feast of St. Francis,
with the Blessing of the Animals

October 4, 2020 4:00 pm
Durham Parish Churchyard

Welcome to our celebration of St Francis' Day!



Together we will honor God's good creation and bless the creatures dear to us.

Please be mindful of the other humans around you by wearing a mask and maintaining at least 6 feet of social distance from those who are not in your household.

This is naturally an informal service, and if you and/or your companion feel compelled to get up and move around, please do. Remembering that we are seated here among the graves of past parishioners, please encourage your dogs to go all the way out the edges of the woods to do their business.

For humans with similar needs, please ask, and someone will unlock the side door to the Parish Hall. Please use only the marked pathway to access the upstairs restroom, and spray with Lysol everything you touch there.

OPENING ACCLAMATION

Officiant Blessed be the God of all creation.

People **And blessed be God's holy name for ever and ever.**

PSALM 104

The Officiant and people read responsively. The people read the bold text.

¹⁰ You send the springs into the valleys; *
they flow between the mountains.

¹¹ **All the beasts of the field drink their fill from them, *
and the wild asses quench their thirst.**

¹² Beside them the birds of the air make their nests *
and sing among the branches.

¹³ **You water the mountains from your dwelling on high; *
the earth is fully satisfied by the fruit of your works.**

¹⁴ You make grass grow for flocks and herds *
and plants to serve mankind;

¹⁵ **That they may bring forth food from the earth, *
and wine to gladden our hearts,**

¹⁶ Oil to make a cheerful countenance, *
and bread to strengthen the heart.

¹⁷ **The trees of the LORD are full of sap, *
the cedars of Lebanon which he planted,**

¹⁸ In which the birds build their nests, *
and in whose tops the stork makes his dwelling.

¹⁹ **The high hills are a refuge for the mountain goats, *
and the stony cliffs for the rock badgers.**

²⁰ You appointed the moon to mark the seasons, *
and the sun knows the time of its setting.

²¹ **You make darkness that it may be night, *
in which all the beasts of the forest prowl.**

²² The lions roar after their prey *
and seek their food from God.

²³ **The sun rises, and they slip away *
and lay themselves down in their dens.**

²⁴ Man goes forth to his work *
and to his labor until the evening.

²⁵ **O LORD, how manifold are your works! *
in wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures.**

FIRST READING: Genesis 9:8-16

A reading from the Book of Genesis

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my

covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.”

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

People Thanks be to God.

Psalm 36:5-10

adapted from *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* by Nan Merrill

The leader and people read responsively. The people read the bold text.

Your steadfast love, O Holy One, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to all the world.

Your saving justice is like the mountains, firm and sure,
your judgments are like the mighty deep;

Your love supports all of creation;
Your love is everlasting.

How precious is your steadfast love, O Companioning Presence.
We, your children, take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

We feast on the abundance of Earth;
You invite us to drink from living streams.

For in You is the very source of life;
and in your Light do we see light.

May your steadfast love endure to those who know You,
your saving grace to those who love truth and justice!

SECOND READING

A reading from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky

Love all God's creation, the whole of it and every grain of sand, love every leaf, every ray of God's light; love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in all things. And once you have perceived it, you will begin to comprehend it ceaselessly, more and more every day. And you will at last come to love the whole world with an abiding, universal love. Love the animals: God has given them the rudiments of thought and untroubled joy. Do not, therefore, trouble it, do not torture them, do not deprive them of their joy, do not go against God's intent.

Reader Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

People Thanks be to God.

CANTICLE OF BROTHER SUN AND SISTER MOON

By St. Francis of Assisi

The Officiant and people read responsively. The people read the bold text.

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord! All praise is Yours, all glory, all honor and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures, especially through my lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; You give light through him. And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor! Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars in the heavens. You have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and clouds and storms, and all the weather, through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water; she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You brighten the night. He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth, who feeds us and rules us, and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of You; through those who endure sickness and trial.

Happy are those who endure in peace by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death, from whose embrace no living person can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing Your most holy will. The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve Him with great humility.

THIRD READING: JOHN 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word
and the Word was with God
and the Word was God.

The Word was with God in the beginning.
Everything came into being through the Word,
and without the Word
nothing came into being.

What came into being
through the Word was life,
and the life was the light for all people.

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness doesn't extinguish the light.

Deacon Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

People **Thanks be to God.**



St. Francis, pray for us

PRAYERS FOR GOD'S CREATION AND GOD'S CREATURES

Leader God the Creator of all: that all your creatures may thank you and serve you,

***People* We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.**

That it may please you to grant favorable weather, temperate rain, and fruitful seasons, providing food and drink for all your creatures,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to open our eyes to the joy and beauty of your creation, and to see your presence in all your works,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to look with favor upon all who care for the earth, the water, and the air so the riches of your creation may abound for all your creatures, from age to age,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to make us faithful stewards of your creation, caring for the earth, air, seas, and all the creatures who live in them,
People We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to make us aware of our responsibility to all your creatures and to be faithful in caring for them,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to forgive our waste and pollution of your creation and to strengthen us to heal its wounds,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to remember all animals in captivity and those who are deserted, abused, or exploited, so that by our actions they may find safety and homes of loving care,
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

That it may please you to remember those animals who have died yet remain special or dear to us, that they may rejoice in the new creation of your kingdom.
We beseech you to hear us, good Lord.

Let us name with thanksgiving those animals for whom we now care, who are at waiting for us at home (*Pause*).
Let us name with thanksgiving those animals who have been our companions over the years, and who have died: (*Pause*).
And let us remember in silence the unnamed, unknown animals whose lives have benefited our own.

Officiant

Holy God: No sparrow falls without your attention; nothing dies that is lost to your remembrance; nothing exists that comes into being without your love. Give us just and compassionate hearts, that we may serve your will for creation, holding the vision of your peaceable reign in which all shall live with you eternally, through the Risen One, Christ our Savior. **Amen.**

THE CONFESSION

God of compassion, have mercy upon us. Bring healing to our relationship with all your creation. Forgive us for our mistreatment and neglect of the creatures with whom we share your earth: for what we have done to harm them, and for what we have not done to help them. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. We ask you to fill us with your Spirit, that we may care for one another and for all your creatures, according to your will and in the fullness of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

ABSOLUTION

COLLECT FOR THE FEAST OF SAINT FRANCIS

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 your whole creation with perfect joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

COLLECT FOR THE KINSHIP AND UNITY OF ALL CREATION IN CHRIST

God, maker of marvels, you weave the planet and all its creatures together in kinship; your unifying love is revealed in the interdependence of relationships in the complex world that you have made. Save us from the illusion that humankind is separate and alone, and join us in communion with all inhabitants of the universe; through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, who topples the dividing walls by the power of your Holy Spirit, and who loves and reigns with you, for ever and ever. Amen.

THE BLESSING OF THE ANIMALS

Officiant

It is the priestly work of all God's people to give thanks for God's blessings to us, to ask for and lend assistance for all in need, and to stretch out our hands to heal and to cherish the creatures of God; this is our work of blessing. Recognizing the blessing that these creatures are to us, I invite you to lay your hands upon the animals that are alongside you, and call to mind those that are elsewhere as you join me a prayer of blessing.



The animals are blessed by their companions as we all say together:

Fellow creature, friend, and companion: May God your creator and preserver bless, defend, heal, and keep you, this day and always. Amen.

The Officiant continues

Almighty and everlasting God, Creator of all things and giver of all life: Let your blessing be upon these and all animals. May our relationships with them mirror your love, and may our care for them follow the example of your bountiful mercy. Grant these animals health and peace. Strengthen us to love and care for them as we strive, like God's servant Francis of Assisi, to imitate Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

A PRAYER ATTRIBUTED TO ST. FRANCIS

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.

BLESSING

DISMISSAL

Deacon Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

People Thanks be to God.

Please maintain social distance as you depart

ST. FRANCIS

On October 4, the Church celebrates the life and witness of St. Francis of Assisi, founder of the Franciscan and Clarissine Orders, advocate for the poor, and friend of the animals.

Born in the late 12th century, Francis was the son of a wealthy merchant and his high-born wife. Despite living a life of general comfort and ease, he found himself called toward a life in pursuit of “Lady Poverty”. After a series of humbling interactions with the poor, Francis devoted himself to the care of the sick and poor, giving up his business interests and material possessions (much to his father’s chagrin). It could not have been easy, but Francis’ faith demanded that he trade in his fine clothes for

and financial security for scarcity. In the words of the prayer attributed to the saint, he found that “it is in giving that we receive.”

Francis founded the Order of Friars Minor, which demanded a strict vow of poverty, in the belief that worldly goods too often proved distractions from a sanctified life. With Clare of Assisi, he would form the Poor Clares, a religious order for women similarly dedicated to service. A Third Order would follow close behind, for those men and women who would live out Franciscan values in the context of everyday life. In Francis’ thought, to fully embrace one’s poverty was to embrace reliance on God alone; to physically suffer was to identify with Christ’s own suffering. According to A Great Cloud of Witnesses, this made Francis, “the most popular and admired [saint], but probably the least imitated.”

We may perhaps remember St. Francis best for his devotion to nature and animals; in several hagiographies, or stories of the saints, Francis is depicted as preaching to and otherwise communicating with fish, birds, and even a wolf. He believed that the Creator is praised through all his creatures and, indeed, creation itself. It is in this spirit that many Episcopal churches offer blessings of pets and other animals each year on Francis’ feast day. *From the Episcopal Church’s Bulletin Insert for September 30, 2018*



SOME THOUGHTS ON THE HONORING OF GOD IN CREATION

By the Episcopal Church's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, 2012

When we see the great abundance, diversity, and intricacy of God's creatures, we are awestruck by life on our planet. We are amazed by the God who has created all that is, and who is the engineer or crafter of the cosmos, designing and assembling all the details. But we also know from science that the details of organisms change through time according to their situations, that is, that they evolve through adaptation and natural selection.

Some people take this to mean that there is no role for God in the evolution of life on our planet, but they miss the point that it is through God's love and humility that the processes of nature operate, bringing growth and adaptive change. God's love grants creation the freedom to make and remake. Scripture is clear that the divine mercy is over all God's works. The material world is not something to be simply disregarded and destroyed as unimportant to God, whose love is unwavering.

Just as we do not read scripture literally, so we must resist reading nature literally, but instead search for the big themes and the evolving stories, exploring a deeper and more sweeping narrative. It is in Jesus Christ that we see God's humility most particularly, and gain insight into what theologian John Haught has called the "extravagant generosity" of God. In the ancient hymn of Philippians 2 we gaze at Christ, who did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself to take the form of a servant, not simply on behalf of humankind, but on behalf of the whole cosmos which is redeemed in him.

Just as we are called to consider the lost and the least among our human brothers and sisters, so we may say that we are called to consider the dignity of all God's creatures. Science currently is working on several fronts to discover more about kinship. There are both genetic/hereditary and ecological relationships among earth's creatures. We share much of our DNA with plants and animals we do not usually consider as having much in common with us, and the air we breathe requires the healthy function of organisms far less complex than we are. For many people honoring the dignity of every creature involves thinking about threatened species of birds and mammals and large fish, environmentalism's poster children, but for those who study life on earth, whether professional biologists or backyard naturalists, it means considering the insects and the plankton, the mushrooms and molds, the plants that bring us joy and the ones we call weeds, the algae and the bacteria. It means considering the dignity of even those species which bring humans disease, such as mosquitoes and viruses. It means pondering the relationships among creatures which are not always pretty: predation, parasitism, scavenging.

Each creature's uniqueness is neither individual nor fixed. Living things develop their characteristics in their contexts in relationship to other creatures, other members of their population, and other species in their community. As the resources in their habitats change, and pressures from their fellow creatures shift, they change. Death and even extinction of populations and species are a natural part of this process of change. But that reality does not mean that humans should accelerate extinction through our activities.

Our understanding of God as One, yet three persons, is a divine picture of diversity in community. Each person of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, gives to and receives from the others, in a community of exchange we call love. What is true of God may then be seen to be true of the community of life which God has loved into being and sustains through love. While each creature has its dignity, in life and death, in struggle and in beauty, all creatures in their diversity, including human beings, are held in community with one another.

There is no doubt that human beings have changed the earth's cycles, surface, and creatures by our activities. We have managed and bred for our use and enjoyment some plants and animals, and destroyed the habitats of others. We have extracted minerals, fossil fuels, and soils, and have been careless with our use of extracted water. We have preserved some biomes for their scenic beauty, but ignored the ecological services provided by others. We have trawled the bottom of the seas and used them as a trash repository. A growing and increasingly urban population's hunger for food, clothing, shelter, and fuel is taking its toll, despite ongoing efforts to slow the loss of traditional rural wisdom about conservation and creation care. Human migration has fostered the spread of invasive species that displace native species, just as human migrants have often displaced indigenous peoples.

Scientists and activists may disagree about what is the greatest threat to human survival on the planet. Should the scarcity of water for drinking and sanitation be our biggest concern, or the challenge to feed a hungry world in an ecologically sustainable way? And which of our excesses put the whole planet in the greatest peril? Is it climate change or the loss of biodiversity that poses the greatest threat to the resilience of life on earth?

Ecologists understand that while entry points for concern and action vary, all these issues are interrelated. In agriculture, to take an example from our managed environment, resilience in the face of climate change will depend on better stewardship of water and increased preservation of the diversity of seed stock available for developing improved crops, while those engaged in agriculture continue to assess their contribution to greenhouse gases, polluted waste water, and soil erosion, and how all these negative impacts on the environment can be decreased.

There have been and will continue to be unintended consequences for our environment due to our choices and behaviors, but study and prayer can help us to become more conscious of the human impact on our planet. As we consider the risen and ascended Christ drawing all things to their perfection in himself, indeed drawing the cosmos into the heart of God in that process the Eastern Church calls “deification,” we find reason for hope and an impetus for the renewing and reconciling of our relationships within the creation of which we are a part.

REMARKS ON ST. FRANCIS BY POPE FRANCIS, in *Laudato Si*

I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for, his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature, and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon, or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them “to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason.”

His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, “from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’.” Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behavior.

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of

Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. “Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker” (Wisdom 13:5); indeed, “his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world” (Rom 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

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