
Blessings to You, and to the Animals, and to the World!

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A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler
Observing the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi
Genesis 2:18-24
Matthew 11:25-30

*"The LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone;
I will make him a helper as his partner." - Genesis 2:18-24*

"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." - Matthew 11:30

Blessings to you!

That's one of the best things I can say to anyone: Blessings to you! And it's one of the best things you can say to anyone, too.

We are here to bless today. In particular, we are here to bless animals today, as we have done now at the Cathedral for over twenty years. And what fun it is!

Usually, every Sunday, I see you arrive here at the Cathedral dressed in your finest clothes and carrying yourself so properly, with everything seemingly under control. But on this day, you look a little different. You are being dragged by happy animals, all over the place! You look out of blessedly out of control today.

You call these animals your pets, and you say you own them: but "in actuality" they own a large part of you. They own a large part of your attention, your time, even your money! And you take care of them, and pay attention to them, voluntarily! You love it!

You love being dependent today, tied to these animals. I love seeing all of you in this spirit-filled day. You are living examples of what it means to be yoked together, yoked together with an animal you love and are dependent upon.

Jesus said, "Take my yoke upon you; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Well, the way we yoke ourselves to our pet companions is an example of what Christ means by taking his yoke upon us. Be yoked together with someone you love, and the burden is wonderfully light!

We are here to give thanks for these animals, and to bless them. And we bless their yokes, too!

But we are also here this morning to celebrate something else. From Genesis 2:18, we have read, "It is not good that we should be alone." When God created humanity, so long ago, and whenever it was, one major truth emerged almost immediately. It is not good that we should be alone.

God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make for him a helper as his counterpart."

I know there are times, for every single one of us, times that we want to be alone. Even the most outgoing and extroverted among us need some "alone" time every now and then. There are always times we want to be alone. And some of us probably need more time in solitude than others.

But even when we need solitude, let us remember that solitude is not the same as being alone. There is something built into the fabric and character of humanity that needs companionship.

We look for companionship all our lives. We look for friends, for partners. We look for lovers. We look for families. We look for something we can share our soul with. The great events of our lives are those events where we have shared our soul.

The story of St. Francis, whom we remember today, can be understood as a story of a search for companionship. You all know the basic elements of his story by now, how he grew up well-off, wealthy, and comfortable; but he realized that he was looking for something else. He renounced his family's worldly goods and turned to God's creation. He found true companionship not in the material things of human ambition, but in God's creation. He learned to call the animals his sisters and his brothers. He even called the sun his brother; he called the moon his sister.

He was able to share his soul with God's creation, and he found companionship.

We are here this morning in that same spirit of companionship. We need to share our soul today! When we bless these animals this morning, even if we don't have an animal personally, we are learning to share our soul again.

After we bless these animals this morning, I want us to try something else. I want us to go out into the world with the same spirit of blessing. I urge us this morning, and this afternoon, and all this week, to go out into the world and bless it.

We can learn from one of the great prayers, one of the great poems of St. Francis—"The Song of Creation. In this prayer, Francis recites praise and blessing to individual creations of God—the sun and the moon, the wolf and the lamb, even death itself. The prayer has been translated in many different ways, including our great hymn, "All Creatures of Our God and King." But listen to the way the jazz musician, Paul Winter, translated those great words, very simply, directly, and powerfully:

"All praise to you through Brother Sun
All praise to you through Sister Moon,
By Mother Earth my Lord be praised,
By Brother Mountain, Sister Sea,

Through Brother Wind and Brother Air,
Through Sister Water, Brother Fire,
The Stars above give thanks to thee,
All praise to those who live in peace.

All praise be yours through Brother Wolf,
All praise be yours through Sister Whale,
By Nature's song my Lord be praised,
By Brother Eagle, Sister Loon,

Through Brother Tiger, Sister Seal,
Through Sister Flower, Brother Tree,
Let creatures all give thanks to thee,
All praise to those who live in peace.

, Brother Sun, Sister Moon
Brother Sun, Sister Moon" (Paul Winter, from *Missa Gaia*)

Our blessing of the animals this morning is not complete until we go out into the world and bless it. Our blessing is not complete until we go out and bless the various individual pieces of God's creation that we encounter. When you see a bird, or a tree this afternoon, bless it. Bless the sun and the moon. Bless the day and the night. Bless even sleep, and bless even death.

That is the spirit of St. Francis: to make the sun and the moon our brother and our sister, and to bless them. To bless God through them. To bless all of God's creation. To bless.

Blessings to you! And to the animals! And to the world!

Amen.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
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