

**All creatures of our God and King
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam!**

Refrain

**O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Thou rushing wind that art so strong
Ye clouds that sail in Heaven along,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou rising moon, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice!**

Refrain

**Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
Make music for thy Lord to hear,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That givest man both warmth and light.**

Refrain

Dear mother earth, who day by day

**Unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
Let them His glory also show.**

Refrain

**And all ye men of tender heart,
Forgiving others, take your part,
O sing ye! Alleluia!
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and on Him cast your care!**

Refrain

**And thou most kind and gentle Death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Thou leadest home the child of God,
And Christ our Lord the way hath trod.**

Refrain

**Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
O praise Him! Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
And praise the Spirit, Three in One!**

Today's Blessing of Pets is a custom conducted in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi's love for all creatures. St. Francis, whose feast day is October 4th, believed that the bond between people and animals is like no other relationship, because the communication between fellow creatures is at its most basic. Eye to eye, we and they, are two creatures of love. No wonder we enjoy taking our animal companions to church for a blessing. Church is the place where the bond of creation is celebrated.

A few years ago I was in a class sitting next to a Franciscan monk. I just had to ask, "Will we see our pets and other creatures in Heaven?" To paraphrase, this is what he said: Only God can answer that question. But, St. Francis, because of his preaching to the birds and his respect for all creatures, developed an insight that God's plan of salvation is perhaps larger than most of us have imagined. Near the end of his life, Francis composed his Canticle of the Creatures in which he invites all creatures to praise God. That's the song we sang today, All Creatures of Our God and King. You see St. Francis saw clearly that all creatures make up one family of creation.

Now this leads to a question for you: If we, like Francis, are expected to invite all creatures to praise God with us during our life here on earth, shouldn't they also be invited to praise God with us in Heaven as well?

Blessing of animals:

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures.
On the fifth and sixth days of creation, you called forth
fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land.
You inspired St. Francis to call all animals his brothers and sisters.
We ask you to bless these animals.
By the power of your love, enable them to live according to your plan.
May they always join us as we praise you for all your beauty in creation.
Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures!
AMEN

St. Francis' Canticle of Creation

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through all that you have made.
And first my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day....

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and Stars;
In the heavens you have made them,
bright and precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through Brothers Wind and Air....

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through Sister Water,
so useful, lowly, precious and fair.

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through Brother Fire, through whom
you brighten up the night....

All praise be yours, my Lord,
through Sister Earth, our mother,
who feeds us...and produces
various fruits with colored flowers
and herbs...

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

Why We Bless Animals

By: Jack Wintz, Kevin Mackin, John Feister

As autumn arrives, people in various places may notice a procession of animals—from dogs and cats to hamsters and even horses—being led to churches for a special ceremony called the Blessing of Pets. This custom is conducted in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi's love for all creatures.

Francis, whose feast day is October 4th, loved the larks flying about his hilltop town. He and his early brothers, staying in a small hovel, allowed themselves to be displaced by a donkey.

Francis wrote an ode to God's living things. "All praise to you, Oh Lord, for all these brother and sister creatures." And there was testimony in the cause for St. Clare of Assisi's canonization that referred to her cat!

The bond between person and pet is like no other relationship, because the communication between fellow creatures is at its most basic. Eye to eye are two creatures of love. No wonder people enjoy taking their animal companions to church for a blessing. Church is the place where the bond of creation is celebrated.

At Franciscan churches, a friar with brown robe and white cord often welcomes each animal with a special prayer. As the prayer is offered, the pet is gently sprinkled with holy water. Believe it or not, most pets receive this sacramental spritz with dignity, though I must admit I have seen some cats flatten their ears a bit.

Usually the Blessing of Pets is held outdoors. But I remember it rained one year, and all were invited inside St. Stephen's Church in Manhattan. It was quite a sight to see pairs of creatures—one human, one animal—sitting in the pews. The pastor joined right in with his beagle. Noah's Ark was never like this!

Some people criticize the amount and cost of care given to pets. And certainly our needy fellow humans should not be neglected. However, I believe every creature is important. The love we give to a pet, and receive from a pet, can draw us more deeply into the larger circle of life, into the wonder of our common relationship to our Creator.

St. Francis and the Wolf

by John Feister

Perhaps the most famous story of St. Francis is when he tamed the wolf that was terrorizing the people of Gubbio. While Francis was staying in that town, he learned of a wolf so ravenous that it was killing and eating not only animals, but people, too. The people took up arms and went after it, but those who encountered the wolf perished. Villagers were afraid to leave the city walls.

Francis had pity on the people and decided to go out and meet the wolf. He was warned by the people, but he insisted that God would take care of him. A brave friar and several peasants accompanied Francis outside the city gate. But soon the peasants lost heart and said they would go no farther. Francis and his companion began to walk on. Suddenly the wolf, jaws agape, charged out of the woods. Francis made the Sign of the Cross toward it. The power of God caused the wolf to slow down and close its mouth.

Then Francis called out to the creature: "Come to me, Brother Wolf. In the name of Christ, I order you not to hurt anyone." At that moment, the wolf lowered its head and lay down at St. Francis' feet, meek as a lamb.

St. Francis explained to the wolf that he had been terrorizing the people, killing not only animals, but humans who are made in the image of God. "Brother Wolf," said Francis, "I want to make peace between you and the people of Gubbio. They will harm you no more and you must no longer harm them. All past crimes are to be forgiven."

The wolf showed its assent by moving its body and nodding its head. Then to the absolute surprise of the gathering crowd, Francis asked the wolf to make a pledge. As St. Francis extended his hand to receive the pledge, so the wolf extended its front paw and placed it into the saint's hand. Then Francis commanded the wolf to follow him into town to make a peace pact with the townspeople. The wolf meekly followed St. Francis. By the time they got to the town square, everyone was there to witness the miracle. With the wolf at his side, Francis gave the town a sermon on the wondrous and fearful love of God, calling them to repent from all their sins.

Then he offered the townspeople peace, on behalf of the wolf. The townspeople promised in a loud voice to feed the wolf. Then Francis asked the wolf if he would live in peace under those terms. He bowed his head and twisted his body in a way that convinced everyone he accepted the pact. Then once again the wolf placed its paw in Francis' hand as a sign of the pact.

From that day on, the people kept the pact they had made. The wolf lived for two years among the townspeople, going from door to door for food. It hurt no one and no one hurt it. Even the dogs did not bark at it. When the wolf finally died of old age, the people of Gubbio were sad. The wolf's peaceful ways had been a living reminder to them of the wonders, patience, virtues and holiness of St. Francis. It had been a living symbol of the power and providence of the living God.

St. Francis and the Birds

by Friar Jack Wintz, O.F.M.

We often associate St. Francis of Assisi with birds. There are 13th-century stories of Francis preaching to birds in trees. A famous painting by Giotto portrays Francis humbly admiring birds on the ground, his hand raised in blessing.

In popular images of Francis today, we see birds circling his head or perched on his shoulders. And let's not forget the countless admirers of St. Francis who are happy to place him on their birdbaths!

In reading St. Bonaventure's *Life of St. Francis* recently, I was surprised that he places the story of St. Francis preaching to the birds at the point in Francis' life where he is struggling with a deep personal dilemma: Should he retire from the world and devote himself entirely to prayer or should he continue traveling about as a preacher of the gospel? To answer this question, St. Francis sends brothers to seek the advice of two of his most trusted colleagues: Brother Sylvester and the holy virgin Clare and her sisters. The word comes back quickly that it is their clear judgment that God wants Francis to keep proclaiming the good news of God's saving love. No sooner does Francis hear their response than he immediately stands up, and, in the words of St. Bonaventure, "without the slightest delay he takes to the roads, to carry out the divine command with great fervor."

The typical reader at this juncture, I believe, would expect St. Bonaventure to portray St. Francis as rushing off to the nearest village or marketplace to begin preaching the gospel to the people gathered there. But where does Francis actually go? Bonaventure writes: "He came to a spot where a large flock of birds of various kinds had come together. When God's saint saw them, he quickly ran to the spot and greeted them as if they were endowed with reason....

"He went right up to them and solicitously urged them to listen to the word of God, saying, 'Oh birds, my brothers and sisters, you have a great obligation to praise your Creator, who clothed you in feathers and gave you wings to fly with, provided you with pure air and cares for you without any worry on your part.' ... The birds showed their joy in a remarkable fashion: They began to stretch their necks, extend their wings, open their beaks and gaze at him attentively. "He went through their midst with amazing fervor of spirit, brushing against them with his tunic. Yet none of them moved from the spot until the man of God made the sign of the cross and gave them permission to leave; then they all flew away together. His companions waiting on the road saw all these things.

When he returned to them, that pure and simple man began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to the birds before." I believe that Bonaventure is trying to shock us into widening our horizons and into learning with St. Francis that the whole family of creation deserves more respect and ought to be invited to praise God along with us human beings. Maybe just as Francis accused himself of negligence for not inviting the birds—and other animals, reptiles, and so forth—to praise God with him, so we need to admit the same kind of negligence, too.

The more St. Francis grew in wisdom and in his understanding that God's saving love goes out to all creatures, the more he began to see that all creatures make up one family. The most important key to Francis' understanding that all creatures form one family is the Incarnation. Francis had a great fascination with the feast of Christmas. He was deeply aware of that one moment in history in which God entered creation and the Word became flesh. In his mind, this awesome event sent shockwaves through the whole fabric of creation.

The Divine Word not only became human. The Word of God became flesh, entering, not only the family of humanity, but the whole family of creation, becoming one in a sense with the very dust out of which all things were made.

Francis had a keen sense that all creatures—not just humans—must be included in the celebration of Christmas. Francis' biographers tell us that he wanted the emperor to ask all citizens to scatter grain along the roads on Christmas Day so that the birds and other animals would have plenty to eat. Walls, too, should be rubbed with food, Francis said, and the beasts in the stable should receive a bounteous meal on Christmas Day. He believed that all creatures had a right to participate in the celebration of Christmas.

More and more, Francis harbored within himself a profound instinct that the saving plan of God, as revealed by the child-Savior born in Bethlehem, was to touch every part of the created world. Given this vision, it was natural for Francis to take literally Jesus' command in Mark's Gospel to "proclaim the gospel to every creature"—to birds and fish, rabbits and wolves, as well as to humans. St. Francis refused to be a human chauvinist—presuming that he was to be saved apart from the rest of creation.

Will we see our pets and other creatures in the next life? Only God can answer a question like this. But because of his preaching to the birds and his growing respect for other creatures, St. Francis seemed to be developing the insight that God's plan of salvation is perhaps larger than most of us have imagined. Near the end of his life, Francis composed his Canticle of the Creatures in which he invites all creatures to praise God—Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water, and our Sister Mother Earth and so forth. He seems to see more clearly than ever that all creatures make up one family of creation. And this leads to the question: If we, like Francis, are expected to invite all creatures to praise God with us during our life here on earth, shouldn't they also be invited to praise God in heaven as well?

For all animals:

Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures.
On the fifth and sixth days of creation, you called forth
fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land.
You inspired St. Francis to call all animals his brothers and sisters.
We ask you to bless this animal.
By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan.
May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation.
Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures!
AMEN

October 4 is the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, one of the most beloved and, perhaps, least imitated of the saints. Too often Francis is sentimentalized and domesticated. Francis, however, sought identification with Christ through the poverty and suffering of Christ, his fellow human beings, and his own. He received the stigmata, the marks of Christ's wounds, on the Feast of the Holy Cross, September 14, shortly before his death. His final years were spent in great suffering and sickness. During this time he composed what was originally entitled The Canticle of the Creatures and is more commonly known as The Canticle of Brother Sun.

Do Our Pets Go To Heaven? by Friar Jack Wintz, O.F.M.

No doubt many of you would love to know the answer to the question asked at the top of this E-spiration. I'm pleased to inform you that I have just written a new book on this subject. The book (published in late April 2009 by Paraclete Press) is entitled *Will I See My Dog in Heaven?*

The whole project began more than five years ago when I wrote an article for *St. Anthony Messenger* magazine (July 2003) with a similar title: "Will I See My Little Doggy in Heaven?" In that article, I set forth 10 reasons why I believed the whole family of creation is somehow included in God's plan of salvation. I believed already at that time that I had presented a good bit of evidence from Scripture, from Christian teaching and tradition and from the example of St. Francis of Assisi that "God wishes other creatures besides humans to be included in the plan of salvation."

The article stirred up a larger than usual number of letters to the editor. In a later issue of *St. Anthony Messenger* (September 2003), we printed six letters "From Our Readers." Here are two of these letters, presented in slightly condensed form:

[Dear editors:] Happy days are here again for this 69-year-old who happens to be a lifelong lover of cats! After reading Father Jack Wintz's article, "Will I See My Little Doggy in Heaven?" I feel for the first time real hope for all those cats I've lost to incurable illness and old age over the years, and for countless numbers of abused, abandoned and suffering animals the world over. That article made my day! [From Doris in Hyattsville, MD]

[Dear editors:] I was thoroughly shocked that the editors of a supposed Catholic magazine would publish "Will I See My Little Doggy in Heaven?" I was taught that only human beings had immortal souls and free will, and, therefore, were able to earn either heaven or hell. When did that change? How do dogs and other animals know what is right or wrong? Will pit bull dogs trained to kill go to hell for doing what they were trained to do? [From Clayton in Santa Clarita, CA]

In time, the *St. Anthony Messenger* article caught the notice of the editors of Paraclete Press, who asked me to write a book for them on this subject.

Why I Wrote the Book

Many people have pets. And most of them have come to love their pets. It is a great concern for many of them whether they will see these pets again after they die. This is true, of course, for adults as well as for children. I pray that this book will bring a measure of comfort and understanding to those grieving their pets.

Much of my motivation for writing the book also flows from my being a Franciscan friar for more than 50 years. I have a great admiration for St. Francis of Assisi, especially for his great love and respect for animals—as well as for trees, rivers, wild flowers and creation as a whole. St Francis wrote a famous poem known as the *Canticle of the Creatures*, in which he invites "Brother Sun" and "Sister Moon," "Brother Wind" and "Sister Water," "Brother Fire" and "Sister Mother Earth" to join him in praising God for all the beautiful creatures God has made.

One Family of Creation

For years, I pondered the question, “Why did Francis do all of this?” What special intuition caused Francis to address creatures as “brother” or “sister?” At some point I arrived at the conviction, which I’ve never abandoned, that somewhere along the way it dawned on St. Francis that all creatures (whether human or nonhuman) belong to one family of creation. “Brother” and “sister” are familiar terms, after all, which suggests that all creatures are part of one family. *Will I See My Dog in Heaven?* grew out of that conviction. I believe the book’s subtitle, *God’s Saving Love for the Whole Family of Creation*, summarizes well the central theme of the book.

What Do Christians Believe?

It is my experience that Christians are not always of one mind when it comes to animals in heaven. Some Christians believe that nonhuman creatures have no place in heaven. Their reasoning goes something like this: Life with God after death is only possible for human beings who have received baptism in one form or another. Moreover, only humans have intelligence and free will and thus the capacity to enjoy fullness of life in heaven.

My short response to this line of thinking is this: Consider the story of Adam and Eve before their disobedience as well as the story of the animals, the birds, the trees and plants in the Garden of Eden. Not only Adam and Eve, but the other creatures as well seemed to find peace and happiness in that first paradise. Why then would God—or anyone else—want to exclude them from the paradise that is yet to come? Thus, I would have no argument with Christians who believe that the animals and other creatures are with God in heaven, just as they were in God’s presence in the story of the original paradise.

In fact, the more I studied the Bible, our Judeo-Christian tradition and the life of St. Francis, the more hints and evidence I found that other creatures besides humans are called to participate in God’s plan of salvation. It’s true that we know very little in detail about the kind of life we are destined to spend with God in heaven or how animals and other creatures will be included in the picture. In the 10 chapters of my book, however, I think you will find much good evidence from Scripture, Catholic teaching and other sources showing that God desires the whole family of creation—both humans and animals—to be saved and to live happily with God in the life to come.

To provide you with just one sample of such evidence from sacred Scripture, think of the story of Noah and the Ark. There we discover that God wishes to save not only Noah’s family from the great flood but all the animals as well. And after the floodwaters dried up, God made a solemn covenant not only with Noah and his clan but with all the animals and other creatures that “Never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood” (Gn 9:10-11). The story strongly hints that it is not God’s plan to save humankind apart from the other creatures. He wants to save the other creatures as well. We are all in the same boat, so to speak. Isn’t it curious that God’s saving perspective is often much broader than our own?