

# Blessing of Animals

By Julie Filby



Many denominations traditionally bless animals on or around the feast day of Saint Francis of Assisi, October 4. Saint Francis is known as the patron saint, or special protector, of all animals. Families can have a simple service at home to bless their pet(s); or if you don't have pets, simply bless the animals that live or pass near your home (birds, fish, squirrels, rabbits, armadillo, etc.)

## For

Young Family

## Season

Fall (do this activity on or near Oct. 4, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi)

## Needed

Text for Blessing of Animals (see last page), pet(s), text "About Saint Francis" (see next page), optional: pet treats or other goodies for animals (e.g. birdseed, bread crumbs, corn, nuts, seeds), optional: computer or smartphone to view "A Day in the Life of Saint Francis."

## Prepare in Advance

- Print "About Saint Francis."
- Make copies of the "Blessing of Animals" (see last page or write your own).
- Consider the best place to gather pets, or otherwise be near animals, to bless them.
- Optional: special treats or toys for pets, or other animals.

## Activity Plan

1. Read "About Saint Francis" to the group (use attached text or do your own research). Also consider watching "A Day in the Life of Saint Francis" on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtSvwOOOTBI&feature=related>.
2. Gather your pets wherever appropriate (in your home or backyard) or otherwise congregate where you generally view animals near your home (backyard, patio or deck, outside your building, courtyard, nearby park).
3. Designate one person in the group to serve as prayer leader.
4. Distribute copies of the Blessing of Animals.
5. Perform blessing.
6. The blessing may be concluded with special treats for the animals.

## About Saint Francis of Assisi

### First Advocate for Animals

1182-1226

Feast day: Oct. 4

Saint Francis was a man before his time—about 600 years to be exact. In a time when animals were last in line to be treated with any respect, Francis understood the need that respect begins with the lowliest of all. To understand the genuine holiness of Francis and his great love and respect for all creatures, consider the world in which Francis lived. Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a place of constant war, political scheming, and, often, outright cruelty. And in that world people treated animals with even worse cruelty than they treated their neighbors. In fact, the unnecessary infliction of pain and suffering on animals was a social norm up until the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the legal system began to adopt anti-cruelty laws.

#### **Saint Francis and the birds**

One of Francis's most famous sermons is one he gave to a flock of birds. One day while Francis and some friars were traveling along the road, Francis looked up and saw the trees full of birds. Francis "left his companions in the road and ran eagerly toward the birds" and "humbly begged them to listen to the word of God." One of the friars recorded the sermon, which overflows with Francis's love for creation and its Creator.

#### **Saint Francis and the wolf**

The people of town of Gubbio alerted Francis to the presence of a ferocious wolf in their countryside. All efforts to trap the wolf or drive him away had failed, so they called upon the saint to intervene. He went out with only the message of the Gospel: no weapon, no sanctions, no threatening bravado. Francis met the wolf and called him to repentance for the chaos and harm that he had caused. The wolf and the townspeople agreed to live in peace; the wolf would refrain from attacks and the townspeople would feed the wolf for the rest of his life.

*Source: National Shrine to Saint Francis website*



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**The prayer leader begins:** Wonderful are all God's works. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

**All respond:** Now and forever.

**Prayer leader:** The animals of God's creation inhabit the skies, the earth, and the sea. They share in the ways of human beings. They have a part in our lives. Francis of Assisi recognized this when he called the animals, wild and tame, his brothers and sisters. Remembering Francis' love for these brothers and sisters of ours, we invoke God's blessing on these animals, and we thank God for letting us share the earth with all the creatures.

Listen to the words of the book of Genesis. [In the beginning,] God said, "Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky."

And so it happened: God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of swimming creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw how good it was, and God blessed them, saying, "Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth." Evening came and morning followed-the fifth day. Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth all kinds of living creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of all kinds." And so it happened: God made all kinds of wild animals, all kinds of cattle, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. God saw how good it was. (Genesis 1:20-25)

*{After a time of silence, invite those present to offer prayers of intercession for their animals and for all creatures.}*

**All:** Our Father . . .

*{All are invited to hold or place their hands on their animals in blessing. If this is not possible, simply hold hands up in blessing.}*

**Prayer leader:** O God, you have done all things wisely; in your goodness you have made us in your image and given us care over other living things. Reach out with your right hand and grant that these animals may serve our needs and that your bounty in the resources of this life may move us to seek more confidently the goal of eternal life. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Prayer leader:** May God, who created the animals of this earth as a help to us, continue to protect and sustain us with the grace his blessing brings, now and forever.

**All:** Amen.

*{The blessing may conclude by celebrating your pet(s) with gifts of special treats or toys, filling a bird feeder with bird seed, or otherwise sharing an appropriate treat with the animal(s).}*

*Adapted from Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers by Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops*

