Animal Blessing Sunday

10/16/2016

Genesis 1:23-28 *God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."*

To some, the word ‘dominion’ in this verse means to rule and manipulate, to be superior, and to subjugate for self-serving purposes. Various translations of the Bible render that word as ‘rule over’, have ‘dominion over’, ‘be sovereign to’, and have ‘power over’. A couple translations say to “take charge of”, and one translation renders what I believe: be responsible for.

I fall into the group that interprets the word ‘dominion’ as meaning to have authority over the creatures of the earth in terms of stewardship. When God gives us dominion over every living thing that moves upon the earth, it means that we are to act as God’s stewards in the caring for, the guarding of, and the controlling of what happens to them on earth.

Human beings, then, have the unique responsibility to work creatively at maintaining an order that allows each thing to be and do all of what it is and does. And that is what is declared as good in the first chapter of Genesis.

It is common for churches to have animal blessing ceremonies around October 4th, which is the feast of St. Francis. St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most revered religious figures in history. He roamed the earth from 1181-1226 and is the founder of the Franciscan Order.

St. Francis became legendary for his love of all creatures and referred to the birds and animals as his brothers and sisters. Francis taught that the world was deemed good and beautiful by God. He taught that people and creatures had the ability and duty to praise God, and that humankind had the responsibility to protect and enjoy nature as both stewards of God’s creatures and as creatures themselves.

Like St. Francis, pet owners know the peace, joy and love of connecting with God’s creatures. We become attuned to the subtle and sometimes overt communication between us.

There are many benefits of pet ownership. They can be excellent listeners. Pets can increase our opportunities for socialization and exercise. They build self esteem in children. Some reduce the incidence of eczema in children, can help during seizures, steer you away from eating foods you are allergic to, aid in recovering from illness, and some can even detect cancer.

Science also confirms the benefits of having a pet, especially those that we can pet and stroke and that respond to us: they can decrease our blood pressure, cholesterol levels, triglycerides, thus reducing our risk of heart attack. They improve our mood, reduce our stress levels and feelings of loneliness, and ease the sense of loss of a loved one. They reduce the number of visits to a doctor in the elderly.

Technology has developed robotic pets that cuddle and react to touch. They can provide ‘petable’ comfort to those who do not want the responsibilities of feeding and cleaning up after a pet, yet desire the companionship and the enjoyment of stroking an animal and having it respond to their loving attention.

In short, pets can extend our lives, unless of course, you are one of those who keep alligators and pythons roaming freely in your house; then they can have quite the opposite effect on your life.

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.

So from earth worms and ant farms to reptiles, fish, fowls, and an array of mammals -- we are one family, all part of God’s glorious creation. They are part of our lives: significant and valuable.

Let us bless these marvelous beings.

If you have a pet who could not attend the service, or a pet that has passed on, please hold them in your heart and mind.

Let us pray: In the words of St Francis of Assisi, “All praise to You, O Lord, for all these brothers and sisters.” O God, you have made us and these pets and all living things. Let your blessing be upon all these animals. We thank you for every creature and the love and joy it has brought. As you sustain and maintain us, so also we ask that you help us to take care of our pets with food, shelter, companionships, healing, and comfort. As you always keep us in the palms of your hands, keep also the souls of our beloved pets, those living and those who have passed into pure spirit. We acknowledge that we share in your love for all creation, and we reconfirm our covenant to act responsibly as stewards of all living creatures. Amen.

I would like to take the next few minutes to give a personal blessing on your pet.

[Personal blessings; Bless the Beasts and the Children, The Rooster Song]

‘Fido, the blessings of Christ bind you to your human partners, fill you with life, and lead you to praise your Creator. Amen.

Live without fear: your Creator has made you holy, has always protected you, and loves you as a mother. Go in peace to follow the good road and may God’s blessing be with you always. Amen