

Palm Sunday Pet Blessing

A Service of Thanksgiving for all animals.

Bring your pet, or a picture of your pet, for a blessing. All well-behaved creatures, great and small, are welcome! However, please contact us in advance if you would like to bring a pet with special needs or larger than a family dog. This service is suitable for all ages.

Welcome and Introduction

Hymn - All Things Bright and Beautiful

Litany of Thanks for Animals

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of animals in our lives. We thank you for animals that comfort us, delight us and give us companionship. We thank you for dogs and cats, birds and hamsters, guinea pigs and fish.

All **We thank you, Lord, for the gift of animals.**

We also thank you, Lord, for animals that give us wool and feathers to keep us warm. We thank you for animals that give us milk, cheese and eggs to help us grow and to keep us healthy. We thank you for horses, donkeys and oxen that work hard on farms around the world.

All **We thank you, Lord, for the gift of animals.**

We thank you, Lord, for animals that eat plants and fertilize the soil, making it richer and more fertile for new growth and new life. We thank you, Lord, for the gift of insects, to pollinate fruit and vegetable plants for us to eat and flowers to give us joy.

All **We thank you, Lord, for the gift of animals.**

We thank you, Lord, for being our Good Shepherd, for seeking us when we are lost, for showing us water to quench our thirst, and for leading us to green pastures. Help us to share our blessings with others and to help others have clean water and green pastures to feed and nourish their families, too.

All **In Christ's name, Amen.**

The Palm Sunday Gospel

The Gospel of St Matthew chapter 21 verses 1-11:

When Jesus and his disciples came near Jerusalem, he went to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives and sent two of them on ahead. ² He told them, “Go into the next village, where you will at once find a donkey and her colt. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone asks why you are doing this, just say, ‘The Lord needs them.’ He will at once let you have the donkeys.”

⁴ So God's promise came true, just as the prophet had said, ⁵ “Announce to the people of Jerusalem: ‘Your king is coming to you! He is humble and rides on a donkey. He comes on the colt of a donkey.’”

⁶ The disciples left and did what Jesus had told them to do. ⁷ They brought the donkey and its colt and laid some clothes on their backs. Then Jesus got on. ⁸ Many people spread clothes in the road, while others put down branches which they had cut from trees. ⁹ Some people walked ahead of Jesus and others followed behind. They were all shouting,

“Hosanna for the Son of David! God bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰ When Jesus came to Jerusalem, everyone in the city was excited and asked, “Who can this be?” ¹¹ The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

The Blessing of the Palms

God our Saviour, whose Son Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem as Messiah to suffer and to die, let these palms be for us signs of his victory; and grant that we who bear them in his name may ever hail him as our King, and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, now and forever.

All **True and humble king,
hailed by the crowd as Messiah:
grant us the faith to know you and love you,
that we may be found beside you
on the way of the cross,
which is the path of glory. Amen.**

Hymn – Ride on, ride on in majesty!

The Scripture Reading

The Book of Numbers chapter 22, verses 21-39:

²¹ Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite officials. ²² But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him. ²³ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with a drawn sword in his hand, it turned off the road into a field. Balaam beat it to get it back on the road.

²⁴ Then the angel of the Lord stood in a narrow path through the vineyards, with walls on both sides. ²⁵ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it pressed close to the wall, crushing Balaam's foot against it. So he beat the donkey again.

²⁶ Then the angel of the Lord moved on ahead and stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn, either to the right or to the left. ²⁷ When the donkey saw the angel of the Lord, it lay down under Balaam, and he was angry and beat it with his staff. ²⁸ Then the Lord opened the donkey's mouth, and it said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?'

²⁹ Balaam answered the donkey, 'You have made a fool of me! If only I had a sword in my hand, I would kill you here and now.'

³⁰ The donkey said to Balaam, 'Am I not your own donkey, which you have always ridden, to this day? Have I been in the habit of doing this to you?'

'No,' he said.

³¹ Then the Lord opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the Lord standing in the road with his sword drawn. So he bowed low and fell face down.

³² The angel of the Lord asked him, 'Why have you beaten your donkey these three times? I have come here to oppose you because your path is a reckless one before me. ³³ The donkey saw me and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away, I would certainly have killed you by now, but I would have spared it.'

Reflection and Conversation

Have you ever noticed your pet's sense of 'something greater'?

Do animals relate to God?

In our relationships with other creatures, let's be less like proud Balaam and more like humble Jesus.

Hymn – This is my Father's World

This is my Father's world,
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, and round me rings
The music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world:
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas--
His hand the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world:
The birds their carols raise,
The morning light, the lily white,
Declare their Maker's praise.
This is my Father's world:
He shines in all that's fair;
In rustling grass I hear Him pass,
Speak to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world:
O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.
This is my Father's world:
Why should my heart be sad?
The Lord is King: let heaven ring!
God reigns; let earth be glad!

Words: Maltbie D. Babcock (1901). This version adapted to be sung to the tune of 'Crown him with many crowns'.

The Prayers of the People

We use paper prayer strips to create a prayer chain with our personal prayers, followed by these prayers for animals:

With confidence and trust let us pray to the Lord:

For all animals and creatures,
their habitats and environment,
their health and well-being,
that they may continue to teach us of Your wisdom and grace

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For the care and respect of all animals,
especially those used for food and for experimentation

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For those who support and care for bird and animal sanctuaries

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For veterinarians and for all who work with farm animals

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For growing awareness of our own responsibility

for the care and nurture of all animal life

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For animal companions everywhere,

that we may see reflected in them the goodness and love of God

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

For our animal friends whom we love but see no longer,

we give you thanks and praise

All **O Lord, our Creator, hear us.**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,

let us pray as our Saviour taught us:

All **Our Father, who art in heaven,**

hallowed be thy name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,

forever and ever.

Amen.

The Blessing of the Animals

Almighty and everlasting God,
Creator of all things and giver of all life,
let your blessing be upon these animals.
May our relationships with them mirror your love,
and our care for them be an example of your bountiful mercy.
Grant the animals health and peace.
Strengthen us to love and care for them as we strive to
imitate the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

The minister asks the name of the animal, and blesses the animal:

[insert name], you were created by God,
and you are loved by God.
May you and your human family
experience joy and companionship together,
and continue to be a blessing to each other.

Amen.

St Ignatius and the Donkey

Shortly after his conversion, the ex-soldier St Ignatius was riding down a dusty road in Spain in the company of a Muslim Moor. They were discussing religion, and, not surprisingly, they disagreed on a few points. The Moor angrily ended the discussion and rode off. As a parting shot, he made some insulting remarks about the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Ignatius was outraged. He thought it might be his knightly duty to defend the honour of Mary by killing the Moor, but he wasn't sure that would be consistent with his new faith.

“He had a long struggle over this desire, and at the end remained in doubt. [...] At last, tired of examining what would be best to do and unable to reach a fixed conclusion, he decided to drop the reins and let his mule go uncontrolled to the point where the roads divided. If the animal took the road to the town, he would seek out the Moor and kill him; if it kept to the high road, avoiding the town, he would let the man be...

Though the town stood little more than thirty or forty paces away, and the road to it was very broad and good, the mule kept to the *Camino Real* and avoided the road to the town.”

A Prayer by St Ignatius:

Teach us, good Lord,
to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labour and not to ask for any reward,
save that of knowing that we do your will.

All **Amen.**

Hymn - Make me a channel of your peace

The Blessing of the People

May God
who clothes the lilies of the field and feeds the birds of the air,
who leads the lambs to pasture and the deer to water,
who multiplied loaves and fishes, and changed water into wine,
lead us and feed us,
and change us to reflect the glory of our Creator
now and through all eternity;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
be with us and all whom we love
this day and forever more.

All **Amen**

The Dismissal

Go in peace.

Be good stewards of Creation.

Live in harmony with all things living.

All **Thanks be to God.**

Please stay for refreshments and a friendly chat!

Why do we bless animals?

Christians believe that God the Creator made everything. All living things reflect God's glory. The Bible explains that God made us, humans, in a special way: he created us 'in his own image'. This means that we have a special responsibility: to be God's representatives on earth. We are called to love and care for this world like God loves and cares for it. Sadly, we are not very good at this...

But God loves this world too much to give up on it! His vision is for everything to be restored and for all creatures to live in peace and harmony with each other. 'Fullness of life', Jesus calls it. (John 10)

To make this happen, God the Creator became part of his creation. On Christmas day God did the impossible: He became one of us, in the person of Jesus. Christians believe that Jesus is the perfect Image of God. He shows us exactly what God is like. God's love is unstoppable.

Inspired by this love, Christians believe that everyone – Christian or not – is called by God to be a steward of creation: protecting it, preserving it, and helping it flourish. This is why we bless animals. To us, blessing animals is a message of Love. Love for all creatures, animals and humans alike. Love from God.

Yes, God loves our pets. And yet, God seems to reserve an even deeper love for you and me. Jesus says: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. [...] So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.'

Want to find out more? Just visit your local church. 'Come and see', Jesus said. (John 1:39)