



# THE FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS

Saint Francis was born in 1182, the son of a wealthy merchant of Assisi, Italy. His early youth was a life of ease. As he grew, his encounters with beggars and lepers touched Francis' heart. Despite his father's intense opposition, Francis decided to give up all material goods and devote himself to serving people living in poverty. Today we remember Francis for his compassion for people who were sick, his generosity to those in need, and for his love for animals and nature. Francis is celebrated every year on October 4. In the few writings he left, the wonder and joy he found in his faith shines most brightly in the "Canticle of the Creatures" (also known as "Canticle of the Sun"). The hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King," still sung today\*, was inspired by Francis' canticle. One reason we honor his life and ministry with pet blessings and creation care is because his love of animals and the natural world was expressed so deeply in this canticle.

\* Number 400, *The Hymnal 1982*, Church Publishing.

## READ

**Job 12:7-10** But ask the animals, and they will teach you; the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of God has done this? In God's hand is the life of every living thing and the breath of every human being.

### For more on St. Francis:

- *The Song of Francis and The Animals* by Pat Mora and David Frampton, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2005. (Picture book)
- *A Wolf at the Gate* by Mark Van Steenwyk and Joel Hedstrom, PM Press/Reach And Teach, 2016. (Middle School and up)
- *The Complete Writings of St. Francis of Assisi* by St. Francis of Assisi and Z El Bey, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009. (Adult)





# BLESS

The animals in our lives, whether pets or those we see in our neighborhoods, remind us that God's creation is big and beautiful. We can ask God's blessing on our pets or animals at any time, but the Feast of St. Francis is a special opportunity to do so. You can simply say the words of blessing provided below or create a longer ritual. If outside, you might invite other neighborhood pets to join you. Consider beginning with a prayer of thanksgiving for the animals who have been in your life. You may choose to lay your hands upon or near your animal, depending on the animal's comfort. Words of blessing: *"[Pet's Name], we give thanks for your life and for your companionship in our life. We ask the God who created you to bless you. May we continue to enjoy life together in God's beautiful world."*



# PRAY

## Prayers for Our Animals

Thank you, God, for all of the significant animals in our lives, past and present, and for the wonderful lessons we learn from all of your wondrous creatures. Give us, God, the gentleness of the rabbit, the working ability of the beaver, the courage of the lion, the cunning of the fox, the bravery of the tiger and the fortitude and resiliency of the coyote. May we always have the lovely family life of the wolf, whose members care for one another with sincere devotion. Grant us the common sense of the horse, the strength of the ox and especially, God, we ask for the humor, comedy and playfulness of the sea otters and the squirrels. Inspire us each with the mastery of good grooming and relaxation of our cats and with the loyalty and devotion of our dogs. Best of all, God, fill us with the sheer joy of the songbirds at dawn, heralding a new day and forgetting the past. Help us to awaken to and learn from all animals: their wisdom and their sweetness, their loyalty and particularly their seeming inability to judge human beings unkindly. *Amen.*

*Blessing the Animals: Prayers and Ceremonies to Celebrate God's Creatures, Wild and Tame edited by Lynn L. Caruso.*



## Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. *Amen.*