

Blessing of the Animals 2020
June 28, 2020

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Texts: Reading - Genesis 1 and 2 (excerpted)

I begin with a poem from John O'Donohue:

To Learn From Animal Being

Nearer to the earth's heart,
Deeper within its silence:
Animals know this world
In a way we never will.

We who are ever
Distanced and distracted
By the parade of bright
Windows thought opens:
Their seamless presence
Is not fractured thus.

Stranded between time
Gone and time emerging,
We manage seldom
To be where we are:
Whereas they are always
Looking out from
The here and now.

May we learn to return
And rest in the beauty
Of animal being,
Learn to lean low,
Leave our locked minds,
And with freed senses

Feel the earth
Breathing with us.

May we enter
Into lightness of spirit,
And slip frequently into
The feel of the wild.

Let the clear silence
Of our animal being
Cleanse our hearts
Of corrosive words.

May we learn to walk
Upon the earth
With all their confidence
And clear-eyed stillness
So that our minds
Might be baptized
In the name of the wind
And light and the rain.

— John O'Donohue

From *To Bless the Space Between Us:*

A Book of Blessings

Perhaps like you, I awoke this morning to the sound of birdsong, and then to the pitter-patter of four feet on the floor. Or maybe you were coaxed or tickled awake by a cat's paw resting on your cheek or startled by some unique-to-your-pet sound that says, "I'm hungry." For those with proximity to animals in our household or outside our windows, we share the first moments of the day with animals. O'Donohue beautifully captures the gifts that animals of all shapes and sizes can bring not only to our daily awakening but to our daily awareness. Animals, and with them trees and flowers, rivers, ponds oceans, forest and mountain are surely some of God's greatest teachers. Especially in these moments when our hearts are anxious or angry, exhausted or perhaps even made hopeful by a different kind awakening on our streets, animals and creation writ large offer profound lessons in how to live. Distanced and distracted as we are, animals show us another way of being, whether by holding solitude or by curling up together in small spaces. They model for us what it means to be undivided, to be fully

present, looking out, as O Donohue says from the here and now. They show us that we all need to move, even the sloths among us, that we all need to self-care, and rest and sleep. Even those energetic puppies conk out, eventually.

Today, we give God praise, and let the vast array of creatures magnify God's name! Today, we follow the lead of St Frances and consider ourselves animals, too, all siblings together in creation's holy family. We may think we know better! In our house, we have fun-loving arguments over which one of our two dogs is dumber, but the truth is both possess the wisdom of their maker in far purer form than we ever could. Nellie, whose email is nellielovesanimals@gmail.com and who is excited to study animal science in college next year, takes her lessons from her beloved dog Juno more seriously. I've joked with Nellie that has got to be world's worst dog trainer! Juno comes by her own willfulness honestly, it's part of her Pitbull breed. And yet today I'm mindful of the way that Juno has trained Nellie and the rest of us, in the way of her wiggly butt greetings and joyful abandon and the ways she stands at attention on our deck, scouting our backyard nature, whether for prey or play. Dogs, cat, gerbils, elephants, zebras, blowfish and whales - if only we too, in O'Donohue's words could learn to lean low, leave our locked minds, and with freed senses feel the earth breathing with us. What an invitation animal offers us, to enter lightness of spirit, and slip frequently into the feel of the wild, to know the clear silence of our own animal beings, enough to cleanse our hearts of corrosive words.

Today, we may lay hands upon our furry friends or give thanks for all manner of fish and fowl, all mammals and wild insects too. Today we bless our animals as if we and God are giving them some deep and long overdue salute of well-deserved recognition. Yes, there's that. But as we do so, let us open our hearts too, to stand humbly, in awe and wonder, to receive the blessings they bestow upon us, to bow before them, and make ourselves not a little greater but a little less than them, or at least equals. Today we bless, yes, and today, too, we receive their blessings anew as gifts of God- their steadfast presence, their unconditional love, their instincts to survive and thrive and rest. Indeed, may they continue to bless and baptize and awakening us in and to that incarnate and enfleshed Spirit of beauty and love in God's creation. May they and we let our connections and companionship ever give praise and magnify the name of God our creator. Amen.